

**LAY PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S  
FORGIVENESS OF SINS:  
A HERMENEUTICAL COMPARISON OF  
JOHN 20:19-23 BETWEEN EXEGETES AND  
LAY PEOPLE**

by

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*Thesis*

*Submitted to Flinders University  
for the degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy**

Theology

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

March 8 2019

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## Summary

God's forgiveness of sins—and human participation in it—has always been controversial, theologically, doctrinally, denominationally and personally. Having reviewed the history and Biblical foundation of this topic, this qualitative study seeks to understand God's forgiveness of sins based on John 20:19-23 from a lay perspective in four Christian congregations located in the city of Adelaide, South Australia. Forty-eight (48) respondents from the Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cathedral, St Peter's Anglican Cathedral and Pilgrim Uniting Church were interviewed over a couple of months. The research question was: from your faith perspective, how do you understand God's forgiveness of sins based on John 20:19-23? Face-to-face interviews were conducted, and all respondents freely selected the location for their interview. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, a standard protocol for data collection and data analysis was utilised.

Six themes were evident in the interview data: God, faith, agent of forgiveness, the Eucharistic Church service, confession and absolution, and anointing and blessing. These themes were compared to exegesis of the passage from the Gospel of John guided by the following four Biblical scholars: Rudolf Karl Bultmann, Charles Kingsley Barrett, Edwyn Clement Hoskyns and Raymond Edward Brown.

The study found that Biblical scholars and respondents were situated at different points of the hermeneutic spiral. While respondents answered the research question from their personal experience of God, Biblical scholars answered the same question from a general view and understanding of the text's original meaning. To a degree, lay people and exegetes were found to meet at certain points of the hermeneutical spiral, for example, regarding the identity of God and the importance of faith for the forgiveness of sins. Despite some similarity, a huge gap was evident between the understanding of lay people and Biblical scholars of God's forgiveness of sin based on the text of John: this warrants further study in the area of practical theology. This research would comprise investigation of the specific understanding of those who are pastorally ministering directly to lay people. Research could also be conducted on the training of those involved in the Biblical and pastoral understanding of John 20:19-23. The next logical scholarly step would be to expand an exploration of this gap between scholars and lay people to a wider range of people, congregations or denominations.

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text. The thesis has been edited by Valerie Williams.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. J. G. J.', written over a horizontal line.

Date

28/1/2019



## Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank Sheila and Pieter van Gent for their generous support.

Thanks also to

- ❖ Kristine Gebbie who, with much patience and wisdom, guided me just when I needed specific coaching.
- ❖ Tanya Wittwer for her big heart and great concern for my academic achievements: she has gone beyond the call of duty to play various roles to make this study possible.
- ❖ Peter Balabanski for his encouragement, spiritual support and assistance with the references.
- ❖ Steve Taylor for his rigorous supervisory work and advice.
- ❖ Vicky Balabanski who, as a sign of consolation and significant help, has provided her Biblical expertise, gentleness, love and guidance through all parts of this study, without which this thesis would not have arrived at completion.
- ❖ Valerie Williams for her editing assistance.

Last, but not least, eternal thanks to all who are present or have gone before us to our heavenly home and who have assisted me towards becoming an integrated person and achieving this milestone for the glory of God and our salvation in Jesus Christ.

## Introduction:

### A study of the forgiveness of sins

The Gospel of John 20:19-23 states:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."<sup>1</sup>

In this post-resurrection passage of John's Gospel, a key aspect of the encounter between the Resurrected Christ and the gathered disciples is the commissioning of the disciples to forgive, or to retain, sins.

#### I1 Synopsis

The message of God's forgiveness of sins, and the role in this forgiveness of the disciples, is a controversial theological subject not only for contemporaries of Jesus but also for 21st century believers. For contemporaries of Jesus, the controversy was centred on the role that human beings have in forgiving sins, as this was exclusively the prerogative of God (Mark 2:7). Including 'ordinary' human beings in the forgiveness of sin was an unprecedented doctrine. By commissioning his disciples in this way, Jesus seemed to be attacking the established means within Judaism by which sins were forgiven. Various teachings of Jesus concerning the forgiveness of sin were contrary to the Jewish belief that only God forgives sins and stimulated commotion and debate, particularly among the Jewish authorities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations will be taken from the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition unless otherwise advised.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' (Mark 2:10; Matthew 9:6; Luke 5:24); 'My son, your sins are forgiven' (Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2: 1-12; Luke 5:17-26); the cleansing of the leper: Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16)

Both Christians and Jews agree that forgiveness of sins leads one to salvation. The Jewish religion, which is the foundation of Christian beliefs, reiterates the importance of YHWH (Yahweh)'s forgiveness of sins through regular rituals and, specifically, by the annual celebration of the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur* (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:23-32, Deuteronomy 6:4).<sup>3</sup> Numerous Biblical texts are at the heart of God's mercy both in the Old and New Testaments.

Arendt notes that "the discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth".<sup>4</sup> While forgiveness seems to play a minor role in other traditions, in Jesus' teachings, it occupies the central role of his life.<sup>5</sup> "Arendt presented the teachings of Jesus as unique and unprecedented. In addition, to associate Jesus' uniqueness with forgiveness is obviously a 'theological commonplace'".<sup>6</sup>

The need to forgive and to be forgiven is part of being human. Questions regarding the forgiveness of sins are both relational and religious. They speak to being human, and they relate to power and authority. For the Christian faith, they relate to the person and work of Jesus.

Forgiveness of sins—and human participation in it—is equally controversial in the 21st century due to the various theological backgrounds, Christian doctrinal affiliations, denominational practices and personal beliefs in God's forgiveness of one's sins. This study distinguishes between four different types or 'voices' of theology: normative, espoused,

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<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Jim Appel, *Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement* (New York: Olive Press Publisher, 2016). In this book Appel describes how the *Cohane HaGadol*, High Priest, offers animal sacrificial blood to atone for the sins of Israel. The blood of the goat chosen for the sacrifice was sprinkled on the mercy seat while the other goat was free as a scapegoat. This process was done after the High Priest has cast lot over the two goats. This ritual does no longer take place in the Temple since the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE but in the hearts; the Book of Jonah is a part of the liturgical rite due to its emphasis on divine forgiveness of sins.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second ed., (Chicago Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); 238.

<sup>5</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second ed., (Chicago Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); 238, Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Jesus and Forgiveness", in P.K. Moser ed., *Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 209; Thomas Dürr, *Hannah Arendt's Begriff des Verzeihens* (Freiburg & Muchich: Verlag Karl Albe, 2009) 42-44; M Schoeman, *Generositeit en Lewenskuns: Grondtrekke van 'n post-Nietzscheaanse etiek, Fragmente Uitgewers* (Pretoria, 2004), 174-181; H. E. Scheffler, *Suffering in Luke's Gospel: Theologischer Verlag* (Zurich, 1993), 33-100. For a distinction between secular and religious forgiveness based on Arendt's understanding of Jesus' forgiveness cf. Sigrid Weigel, "Secularization and Sacralization, Normalization and rupture: Kristeva and Arendt on Forgiveness", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 117 (2002): 320-323.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Wittendorff, "A Post-Holocaust Philosopher of Forgiveness: An Exploration of Hannah Arendt's Jesus", *Journal of the Nordic Society for the History of Ideas* Volume 8, number 1 (2014), Abstract.

formal and operative.<sup>7</sup> Normative theology is theological study centred on Scripture and tradition. Espoused theology is the ordinary theology emerging from lay peoples' beliefs. Formal theology is theological perspectives advanced by academic and expert theologians. Operant theology is framed by the liturgical life and practices of a Christian community. These distinct types or voices of theology, particularly in relation to the forgiveness of sins, are brought into dialogue in this study.

## **I2 Problem for the study**

On the first level, a gap is apparent between the normative theology of the churches—the official theological and doctrinal positions of denominations—and the espoused theology of adherents. Lay people do not necessarily believe and practise the official teachings of their respective churches. On the second level, the level of espoused theology and operant theology, the liturgical rites are not always compatible with lay people's individual consciences and personal beliefs in God's forgiveness of sins. The third level is between formal theology and normative theology. The former focuses on the hermeneutical understanding of John 20:19-23, which differs from one exegete to another and from one denomination to another. This is also true of individual believers as the understanding of the passage expands when moving from one point to the next on the hermeneutical spiral or circle.<sup>8</sup> Normative theology, although centred ostensibly on Scripture and tradition, is also shaped by historical context, as it was formulated in a specific period and context for particular theological and practical reasons. As will be demonstrated in this study, sacramental confession is a case in point.

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<sup>7</sup> Clare Watkins and Helen Cameron, "Epiphanic Sacramentality: An Example of Practical Ecclesiology Revisioning theological Understanding," in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian B. Scharen (Grand Rapids: Michigan / Cambridge: U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 73.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander S. Jensen notes that "The hermeneutic circle is not a circle, but an upward spiral of ever better understanding" in other words, the hermeneutical spiral is an interpretation of a Biblical text in which one embarks to understand the original meaning of the text. One enters the hermeneutical spiral with preconceived ideas either informed by cultural environment, social or religious backgrounds. The aim is that the more one travels on the spiral the better one improves the textual understanding from the context and meaning it was written. For a comprehensive understanding of the hermeneutical spiral cf. Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics* (SCM Press, 2007), 4-5, 98-99; Kevin J. Vanhoozer says that "What is in the text is only the potential for meaning. Meaning is actualized not by the author at the point of the text's conception, but by the reader at the point of the text's reception".

In this study, I specifically select the scene of God’s forgiveness of sins in the writing of the Fourth Gospel, namely, John 20:19-23. This biblical pericope of the first appearance of the Risen Jesus to his disciples has been and continues to be a cause of significant theological division from both a scholarly and a ministerial viewpoint. The controversy reveals differing beliefs in God’s forgiveness of sins among lay people and between scholars. Forgiveness of sins, in dialogue with John 20:19-23, proves to be a topic that shows the variety both between Christian denominations and lay people alike. There appears to be significant gaps between churches’ espoused theology (the articulated intentions of practitioners) and the operant theology of lay people (what is believed and lived out).<sup>9</sup> What is thought (doctrine) is different from one Church to another and what is believed and practised by lay people seems to contradict Church teachings. A discrepancy seems to be even more apparent between formal theology (which stems from theological academic research by professionals based on concepts & texts) and normative theology (which draws on texts & traditions that a specific group may recognise as authoritative).<sup>10</sup> In lay people’s practice and understanding of God’s forgiveness of sins, significant divisions appear in these types of theology. The gaps between Churches and laity is even more notable because the dispute over how God forgives sins and other theological issues of the 16<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the Reformation that saw Protestant Churches breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup>

God’s forgiveness of sins is a theological concept that has very wide-ranging ramifications; instead of uniting believers, it becomes a subject of division.<sup>12</sup> This study seeks to

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<sup>9</sup> Clare Watkins and Helen Cameron, “Epiphanic Sacramentality”, 73.

<sup>10</sup> Clare Watkins and Helen Cameron, “Epiphanic Sacramentality”, 74; Jeff Astley cf. Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, ed., *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing* and (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited 2013), 103.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 2008), 135; Cf. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church: The Story of emergent Christianity from the Apostolic age to the Foundation of the Church of Rome* (London: Penguin Group, 1990), 138.

<sup>12</sup> *The Augsburg Confession* (IV, 1-2); Geoffrey J. Paxton, Melancthon’s Apology to the Augsburg Confession (IV, 41): Justification in the Lutheran Confessions and John Calvin“, in *The Justification of Sinners* volume 36, article 3; Markus Wriedt, “Luther’s Theology”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Luther* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 88–94; sometimes, there is no clear cut or borderlines between scholars from differing Christian denominations on the subject of forgiveness of sins. For example, Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas seemed to agree on the topic of salvation cf. Stephan Pfürtner, *Luther and Aquinas on Salvation* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968); John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: B. Eerdmans, 1957), IV, &, 39; CatholicCulture.org, Go to confession, Pope urges faithful in [Catholic World News](#) - August 03, 201; The Anglican Church of Australia, *A Prayer Book of Australia Shorter Edition for use together with The Book of Common Prayer (1662) and An Australian Prayer Book (1978) Liturgical*

investigate these differences, seeking to identify similarities and differences across these different spheres of theology. Such a study has, to my knowledge, not been undertaken.

It should be mentioned from the outset that the comparison between espoused and normative theology of the text of John 20:19-23 will be within the hermeneutic circle.<sup>13</sup> “The hermeneutic circle is not a circle, but an upward spiral of ever better understanding”.<sup>14</sup> The comparison of the various theologies and positions is not a condemnation of one party and the affirmation of another, but seeks to demonstrate that lay people and exegetes reach different interpretations of God’s forgiveness of sin based on John 20:19-23. Because the hermeneutic circle is always moving, *ad infinitum*<sup>15</sup> and information is dynamic, we can anticipate that there will be some overlap and some differences.<sup>16</sup>

God’s forgiveness of sins has various theological components and so touches on various fields of theology. These include sacramental theology, systematic theology, dogmatic theology and Biblical studies. The discipline of practical theology spans these various fields and offers an interconnected space in which a range of components can be studied in a coherent organisational framework. These components include Scripture, church tradition, academic inquiry and the practical outworking of beliefs. Practical theology is also needed in order to examine the gap between lay people’s understanding of God’s forgiveness of sins and the teachings of the church. Through utilising the four voices of theology in this study, I emphasise the pastoral approach in the ministry of the Church.

A critique of the four voices is that the espoused theology, operant theology, and normative theology appear to be far removed from the academic field. Clare Watkins and associates “acknowledge that discerning the different theological voices is complex and

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*Resources authorised by the General Synod* (Netley, South Australia: Griffin Press:1995), 479; Augsburg Confession Article 11; Kenan B. Osborne, *Reconciliation & Justification: The Sacraments and its Theology* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 64. Originally quoted from Emmanuel Bourque, *Histoire de la Pénitence-Sacrement* (Québec: Bibliothèque Théologique de Laval, Les Éditions de la Faculté de Théologie, 1947), 127-128.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics* (SCM Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 98-99.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 99.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 5.

requires dexterity”.<sup>17</sup> There seem to be a tension between formal and normative theology on the one hand and espoused and operant theology on the other. Robert J. Mayer remarks that “popular religion was increasingly being driven, not by intellectual formulations of doctrine and theology, but by the power of raw experience”.<sup>18</sup> Peter Ward argues for a dialogue between the four voices that enhances the collaboration between ‘local theology’<sup>19</sup> and academic theology based on ‘theology, institutions, tradition, identity and practice’.<sup>20</sup> The four voices inform each other, while offering insights into the various aspects of God’s forgiveness of sins from various perspectives. Most significantly, the four voices “help us to search for the theological as a key element in lived religion”.<sup>21</sup> Jeff Astley notes that faith is not separate from theology nor from theology superimposed on faith. By contrast, faith exemplifies the “operant” theology.<sup>22</sup> Bonnie Miller-McLemore sees the four voices in terms of “academic discipline among scholars and an activity of faith with various methods and methodology”.<sup>23</sup>

The dialogue between formal theology and normative theology versus the espoused and operant theology does not go without critics. The tension exists within theological voices. On one hand, the formal theology sets the parameters for the interpretation of the Bible. At the same time, the normative theology formulates rules and principles to be observed by all believers. On the other hand, the espoused and operant theology are not in agreement with the doctrine or formulas of the Church and academic guidelines. For instance, Michael Armstrong notes that “if a doctrine of the church (or indeed a position within academic theology that claims to be normative) says one thing, but ordinary theologians say something quite different, then there is reason to re-examine the former”. The tension is evident between lay people’s perception of faith and the doctrines that are set for them

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<sup>17</sup> Catherine Loy, *Development Beyond the Secular: Theological Approaches to Inequality* (London: SCM Press, 2017), 5; Clare Watkins “Practical Ecclesiology” 177.

<sup>18</sup> Robert J. Mayer, *Adventism Confronts Modernity: An Account of the Advent Christian Controversy over the Bible’s Inspiration* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017), 86.

<sup>19</sup> Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Baker Academic, 2007), 137.

<sup>20</sup> Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 137.

<sup>21</sup> Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 140.

<sup>22</sup> Astley, *Ordinary Theology*. This is a distinct exploration of the four voices by Astley; Clare Watkins, *Talking About God in Practice*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Conundrums in Practical Theology* (Boston: Brill Academic Publisher, 2016), 140-142.

to live their faith. The doctrine cannot be wiped out because lay people are not in support of it. Nor a new doctrine could be put in place because lay people need a change of Biblical interpretation. What is at stake is that several scholars such as David Brown, George Lindbeck, Gerard Loughlin, and Alister McGrath among others<sup>24</sup> have expressed their needs for a profound dialogue between formal and espoused theology. They claim that doctrines often remain unchanged while the lay people who expressed the authoritative principles of the Church varied from time to history and context.<sup>25</sup>

Briefly, while some argue that the four voices of theology are separate and do not merge together, others argue that they do meet, inform, and complete each other.<sup>26</sup> This study suggests that the latter is more accurate.

### **13 Rationale for the choice of John 20:19-23**

John 20:19-23 is a post-resurrection narrative following Jesus' appearance to Mary at the tomb. On the very day of the resurrection in the evening, Jesus appears to his disciples bodily, in a way that calls for faith among his disciples (v.19). It is a unique Johannine recreative life narrative (v.20). While having soteriological and Christological themes (v.21), it is also pneumatological significance (v.22), and all these aspects are connected with salvific ministerial mission (v.23).<sup>27</sup>

Because the passage describes the commissioning of the disciples to remit or retain sins, as a consequence of receiving the Holy Spirit, it is an ideal point of departure to consider the theology of the forgiveness of sins. It raises such questions as: To whom is the authority given to forgive or retain sins given? Who do the disciples represent? Where is this

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<sup>24</sup> David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1-3, 101-108; George A Lindbeck, *The Nature of doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), 79; Gerard Loughlin, "the Basic and Authority of Doctrine", in Colin E. Gunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 52-58 [41-64].

<sup>25</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism: The 1990 Bampton Lectures* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), X, 266, 170.

<sup>26</sup> Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A companion* (London: SCM Press, 2013), xiii, xxx-xxxii.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Rahner, "Salvation, Part IV.A: Redemption," in *Sacramentum mundi*, Vol. V, 430; Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. by William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 286.



authority expressed in the church? What practices have the churches developed around this commission? Are these practices still relevant today?

These questions cross the boundaries between the different voices of theology, and allow interaction between them. Some scholars claim, for instance, that John 20:19-23 is descriptive<sup>28</sup> rather than prescriptive,<sup>29</sup> or hierarchical.<sup>30</sup> These differing understandings are points of comparison between scholarship on John 20:19-23 and the espoused theology of lay people.

John 20:19-23 is of course not the only biblical passage that is relevant to an understanding of God's forgiveness of sins. It is, however, a fruitful focal point for interaction between the voices of theology on the forgiveness of sins.

#### **I4 Description and limits**

Because the pericope is complex with various components, the operant theology and normative theology are stepping stones to understanding the similarity and differences

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<sup>28</sup> André Feuillet, *Le temps de l'église selon saint Jean*, *Études Johanniques* [Bruges: Desclée, 1962] 152–74, 160); John Adney Emerton, "Binding and Loosing – Forgiving and Retaining", *JTS (Journal of Theological Studies)* 13 (1962) 325–31.

<sup>29</sup> John Henry Bernard, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* 1860-1927; Alan Hugh McNeile, 1871-1933. First Impression 1928; Printed 1942; Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John: The New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 326-329. Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*. Volume 2, Commentary on the Gospel of John (Michigan / Cambridge: Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010), 855-861; Rudolf Bultmann's preliminary discussion of the pericope in his commentary Gospel (Meyer's *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das N.T.*, XII, 11th ed.9).

<sup>30</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, Anchor Bible 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 1044; Francis Moloney, *The Resurrection of the Messiah: A Narrative Commentary on the Resurrection Accounts in the Four Gospels* (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2013), 131; Kenan B. Osborne, *Reconciliation & Justification: The Sacrament and its theology* (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 18; Hoskyns and Davey, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), 545; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 21, 382; Cf. Cook James I, John 20:19-23, an Exegesis, *Reformed Review*, 21 no 2 (1967), 2-10; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (London: John Murray, 1896), 1180; Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament* (Nauen: 2007) 304, Udo Schnelle, "Das Johannesevangelium als neue Sinnbildung", in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. G. van Belle et al.; BETL 184; Louvain: Leuven University Press, 2005), 291-313. Schnelle insists that the gift of forgiveness "extends to the whole life of Christian and of the Church" and relates John 20:19-23 to 1 John 1:8-10;3:9; 5:16-18, and thus the seriousness with which the Johannine Church took the practice of the confession of sins and the ongoing repentance from them", 1180; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K ; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011/2), 1180, 1158-1182; Eduard Schweizer, *Church Order in The New Testament: Studies in Biblical theology* no 32 (London: SCM Press, 1959), 124. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, "The other-worldly Kingdom of God in the New Testament", *Theology* 9 (1927), 249-255.

between espoused theology and formal theology. I am aware that the Church of the East after the schism that occurred in 1050, still has the four theological voices in dialogue. However, because this study is limited to the four churches within the Western Church, the Eastern Church will not be a part of this study.

In this study, first, the espoused theology regarding the forgiveness of sins will be articulated with a focus on four selected Christian congregations from four mainline Christian denominations from the city of Adelaide: Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches. From each congregation, 12 respondents took part in an individual face-to-face interview to answer questions about their theological understanding of forgiveness of sins based on John 20:19-23.

Second, the formal theology regarding the forgiveness of sins will be articulated with a focus on the hermeneutical understanding of John 20:19-23 by four Biblical scholars drawn from the same denominational spectrum as the congregations. The specific four Biblical scholars are Edwyn Clement Hoskyns<sup>31</sup> (9 August 1884 - 28 June 1937), Rudolf Karl Bultmann<sup>32</sup> (1884- 1976), Raymond Edward Brown<sup>33</sup> (May 22, 1928, August 8, 1998), and Charles Kingsley Barrett<sup>34</sup> (4 May 1917 – 26 August 2011).

The reason for the selection of the four Biblical scholars is informed by their work with biblical texts and the wide influence they have had in theological education in Australia across this denominational spectrum. I have explored Biblical scholars who have worked with John 20:19-23 over the last 40 years and more. These four exegetes are among the most well- respected and influential New Testament scholars affiliated with this denominational spectrum. Although they do not represent the most recent wave of scholarship, they form a bridge of scholarly trends in Johannine studies that spans the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These four scholars have worked on the pericope of John 20:19-23 from the pre-Gospel writings and paved the way for more recent exegetical and hermeneutical studies. Further, while Barrett was a student of Hoskyns, Bultmann is a contemporary of

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<sup>31</sup> Hoskyns and Davey, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Translated by G. R. Beasley- Murray, R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 382, 689.

<sup>33</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1044

<sup>34</sup> Charles Barrett, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978).

Hoskyns and Brown a contemporary of Barrett. They shared some common ground and differ in their exegetical and hermeneutical approaches to the text under study.

## **15 Distinctive contribution of this study**

Much has been written on the formal theology pertaining to John 20:19-23, namely the scholars' interpretation of John 20:19-23. The churches' doctrinal teaching on the forgiveness of sins in relation to John 20:19-23, its normative theology, is also well known. To a degree, we also understand the operant theology of this passage – the liturgical and practical ministry in the churches derived from this passage. However, the most neglected area of theology is the espoused theology. What we have not adequately heard or studied is lay peoples' contribution to the dialogue in the discipline of practical theology. Why are they doing what they are doing and significantly what are their experiences of God in relation to their respective churches? To answer these questions will lead us to evaluate at what point of the hermeneutical circle lay people and Biblical scholars are situated respectively.

In the light of this gap in research, this study has been designed to answer this research question:

What is lay people's understanding of God's forgiveness of sins based on John 20:19-23 and how does it differ from formal theology derived from this passage?

In order to address this complex problem, I am going to approach this study in the following order. Chapter 1 will outline the scholarly contribution to the historical development of forgiveness of sins. In this way, I will identify the trajectory of the understanding of God's forgiveness of sins. This will bring to light the dogmatic and sacramental/non-sacramental theology and the doctrine of justification. The understanding and misunderstanding of the passage from various times and periods of the Church life will be explored. Chapter 2 will conduct a literary analysis of John 20:19-23 based on the selected Biblical exegetes, namely Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, Rudolf Karl Bultmann, Raymond Edward Brown, and Charles Kingsley Barrett. Chapter 3 will highlight the phenomenological methodology<sup>35</sup> and various

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<sup>35</sup> Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 4, 31; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 79.

methods employed in recruitment of respondents, data collection and the analysis of data. Here I am interested in hermeneutical phenomenology as described by van Manen because this study includes a Biblical text that is interpreted by respondents in the light of their own Christian lived experience of God's forgiveness of sins. Consideration will be given to ethical issues and the philosophy that frames the qualitative study, drawing on phenomenology as a qualitative inquiry that is concerned with people's lived experience and the understanding of the meaning they bring to the world.<sup>36</sup> As John W. Creswell correctly writes, "phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon".<sup>37</sup> Chapter 4 will delve into the findings: a contemporary understanding of espoused theology based on interviews of 48 respondents from four Christian congregations. Chapter 5 will compare and analysis the hermeneutical understanding of the four selected Biblical scholars alongside the respondents' espoused theology. Chapter 6 will conclude the study and give some recommendations for both scholarly research and practical theology.

## **I6 Autobiographical context of this study**

Every researcher has a story to tell as to how and why they came to their research topic. Denzin and Lincoln observe: "Behind all research stands the biography of the gendered researcher, who speaks from a particular class, racial, cultural and ethnic community perspective".<sup>38</sup> I was born in the Congo to a Roman Catholic family, raised with Catholic doctrine, weekly confession and after nine years of formation to priestly ministry was ordained deacon in the Oratorian Community. I completed my degree in philosophy at a Diocesan Seminary in Belgium and in theology at Saint Joseph Theological Institute in South Africa. In the last four years, I completed my Master of Theological Studies at Flinders University, South Australia.

My interest in the topic of divine forgiveness of sins is a central part of my spirituality and deep-seated desire to know the unknown. It has been a search, not for fear of hell, but for a supreme love for God, the value of other human, and the meaning of "internal life" here

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<sup>36</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 76.

<sup>37</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 79.

<sup>38</sup> Norma K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage: California, 2004), 21.

on earth and hereafter.<sup>39</sup> The first alarm that alerted my attention as a student was raised in my philosophical studies by St Augustine who writes: “Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised ... Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”<sup>40</sup> Second, I was intrigued by the words of St Paul who writes: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”<sup>41</sup> This prompted me to ask more questions. How tremendous is God’s love? To love me when I did not know it and even more, to love me when I was still a sinner.

As a student for priesthood (seminarian) in the Roman Catholic Church, four activities were compulsory besides studies, namely, a monthly recollection, a monthly confession of sins, a monthly spiritual direction, and a week of annual retreat. A monthly confession of sins to an external priest was encouraged. This leads me to a third point. It happened that a retired bishop who had a hearing impediment was the confessor for the month. Seminarians and nuns were waiting in the chapel convent in prayer either to come to confession or for holy Mass that followed individual confession. The retired bishop who could not hear properly was seated in the sacristy with the door ajar waiting for seminarians and nuns to come for individual confession. When it was my turn, I went into the sacristy, sat next to him and said: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit amen. Father forgive me, I kissed a girl.” He responded “What?” I repeated “I kissed a girl.” His voice went loud, “What?!” I replied, “A little kiss.” He continued loudly, reprimanding me not to have a woman friend. This continued for a while. I was embarrassed, thinking about his big voice and the people in the chapel who could possibly hear every word he was telling me. He went through the teaching of the catechism and the discipline of celibacy as a priest. I came to a point that I could no longer listen to him. I interrupted him saying, “Please bishop, give

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<sup>39</sup> By internal life, I mean the life in the subconscious, the mysterious being in me that I know and yet do not completely grasp. The border line between God and I in me. The sinner and the holy in humans.

<sup>40</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, Chapter 1 and Confessions, Chapter 10 reads; “Late have I loved you, O beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved you. For behold you were within me, and I outside; and I sought you outside and, in my ugliness, fell upon those lovely things that you have made. You were with me and I was not with you. I was kept from you by those things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called and cried to me and broke upon my deafness; and you sent forth your light and shone upon me, and chased away my blindness; You breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for you: I tasted you and I now hunger and thirst for you; you touched me, and I have burned for your peace. Amen”.

<sup>41</sup> Romans 5:8.

me the absolution!” , but he continued strongly advising me not to go out with girls. Finally, I walked out of the sacristy without absolution.

I was ashamed as I walked into the chapel noticing how my colleagues and nuns were looking at me with suspicion. As I was not given the absolution during my confession of sins, I started wondering if God forgives me? I was on the one hand disturbed by the writing of St Thomas Aquinas who states “*Cum dicit, ‘Ego te absolvo’, ostendit hominum absolutum non solum significatione sed etiam effective*”.<sup>42</sup> Aquinas borrowed Aristotle’s philosophical paradigm to explain God’s forgiveness of sins in his work *Summa Theologica*.<sup>43</sup> For Aquinas, the priest’s words, “I absolve you” (*Ego te absolvo*), were the form of the sacrament, whereas the penitent was the matter of the sacrament.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, the words, “I absolve you” pronounced by the priest in the inductive mood, cause grace to effectively take place. Without the priest, according to Aquinas, forgiveness of sins is incomplete. “For Aquinas forgiveness of sins is “*convenientissima forma huius sacramenti, ego te absolvo*” (“expressed by the priest saying: ‘I absolve thee’”).<sup>45</sup> Thus, a sacrament “makes people holy”.<sup>46</sup> Meaning “only those are called sacraments which signify the perfection of holiness in man”.<sup>47</sup> Aquinas insists on confession and the absolution of the priest, noting that they are “*sacramentum absolutionis*” (the sacrament of absolution)<sup>48</sup> which I paraphrase with my own emphasis: confession and absolution from a priest are necessary for salvation. On the other hand, I was consoled by Karl Rahner’s concept of “sacramental actions”.<sup>49</sup> For Rahner sacramental action is a symbolic causality rather than efficient causality because it makes present what it signifies through the action of the Church and does not “depend on

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, iii, 84, 3; Charlotte Steenbrugge, *Drama and Sermon in Late Medieval England: Performance, Authority, Devotion* (Western Michigan University: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017), 121. For a comprehensive understanding of Aquinas understanding of Sacraments cf. Carl E. Braaten, Robert W. Jenson, *Christian Dogmatic Volume 2* (Philadelphia Fortress Press, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder, O.P. (1941; Rockford, Ill.: Tan, 1978).

<sup>44</sup> Anne T. Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 95.

<sup>45</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pars IIIq.84.a.3 co.;

<sup>46</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Question 69, Article 9, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (reprint, Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948), 4:2409.

<sup>47</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, III, q. 60, a. 2, 4: 2340; cf. III, q. 69, a. 9, 4:2409; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 60, a. 2, 4: 2340.

<sup>48</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pars III q.84a. 3ad 5; Charlotte Steenbrugge, *Drama and Sermon in Late Medieval England*, 121.

<sup>49</sup> William V. Dych, *Karl Rahner: Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 119.

the subjective merit of the minister or the recipient, but is *sola gratia*.”<sup>50</sup> This is the traditional teaching of the Church, which Martin Luther emphasised during the Reformation. God’s offer of grace, love and forgiveness of sins is gracious and free. In fact, “the Catholic Tradition teaches that sacramental actions are ‘infallible’ signs of grace and effect grace *ex opera operato*”.<sup>51</sup> William Dych explains these words in reflecting upon Rahner’s theology that the historical and resurrected Jesus gives voice to the Church and makes God’s love and forgiveness audible, “irrevocable and unambiguous”.<sup>52</sup> It seems that Rahner argues that sacramental actions happened at a highest level in the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>53</sup> The Church in this sense has been charged to utter the word of God both publicly and privately<sup>54</sup>, publicly because sacramental actions are communal, privately because they are historical moments of grace for individuals. Rahner remarks:

When this word of God’s forgiveness is addressed to an individual baptized person upon the confession of his guilt by a representative of the church who has been expressly designated for this, we call this event of God’s word of forgiveness the reception of the sacrament of penance.<sup>55</sup>

I came to wonder whether one can hear the word of God’s forgiveness of sins outside of individual confession or the celebration of the Eucharist. The question remained, and it led me to the fourth point. How is one forgiven by God in the light of John 20:19-23? The fact that the retired bishop did not absolve my sins was a great concern and indeed an historical moment that marked my life as a Roman Catholic Christian who believes in divine forgiveness of sins through the sacrament of confession.

Last, aware of substantial theological books, monographs, articles and documents not only on the nature of sins but in general from forgiveness of sins through covenantal relationships that God made with humanity from Abraham, Noah, Moses, various prophets and finally in Jesus, I wished to explore this course of divine forgiveness of sins in a context which would be of benefit not only for me but importantly for many people who would like to share their experience of God’s forgiveness of sins either academically or pastorally.

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<sup>50</sup> Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 119.

<sup>51</sup> Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 119.

<sup>52</sup> Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 119.

<sup>53</sup> Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 122.

<sup>54</sup> Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 122.

<sup>55</sup> Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 122.

## 17 My beliefs

John Creswell writes: “Researchers bring to their enquiry ... their personal history, views of themselves and others, and ethical and political issues”.<sup>56</sup> Researchers bring also paradigms or perspectives, a “basic set of beliefs that guides actions”.<sup>57</sup> My values and beliefs are heavily informed by the Roman Catholic Church although for the past 4 years I have been involved in ecumenical movements. Like St Paul, I believe in the God of our Lord Jesus Christ; the God who loves humanity and forgives endlessly through Jesus Christ. I might claim to be a progressive Catholic because I believe in the teaching of the Bible and Traditions and argue that God’s forgiveness of sins should be expressed in accordance with the standards of our contemporary society. There are multiple theological voices and school of thoughts that challenge one’s belief. But the value of human life and salvation brought by Christ are unshakable. Those values of the Gospel are the principles of my life.

Study at Flinders has broadened my thinking and acceptance of other Christians from different Churches. My interest in attending other churches’ services increases my ecumenical spirit and openness to other realities. Previously, I used to think that the Roman Catholic Church was the only one that speaks the truth. Now I realise that other Churches speak the truth too. Besides, there are more realities to any problem. I believe that forgiveness of sins in John’s Gospel might have had multiple interpretations, but the core of forgiveness of sins remains a mysterious treasure; no one can exhaust its meaning. To listen to other peoples’ theological perspectives of God’s forgiveness of sins was beneficial to my understanding and I hope it will be for others through this research.

## 18 Limitations

“Unlike quantitative work that can carry its meaning in its tables and summaries, qualitative work carries its meaning in its entire text ... Its meaning is in the reading”.<sup>58</sup> The text of John 20:19-23 was the focus of my interviews with all respondents. It gave the historical context in which divine forgiveness occurred and established a theological link

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<sup>56</sup>John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 17-18.

<sup>57</sup> Egon G. Guba “The Alternative paradigm dialogue”, in Egon. G. Guba (ed) *The Paradigm Dialog* (Newbury Park CA: Sage, 1990), 17.

<sup>58</sup> Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, *Writing a Method of Inquiry* (California: Sage Publication, 2005), 959-60.



between formal theology and espoused theology that framed our conversation. Respondents expressed their beliefs and understanding of the text informed by operant theology and normative theology. At times, some respondents linked the text to other Biblical texts or documents and prayers which were significant to their faith. Their various ways of exploring the text gave me a better understanding of the meaning and context from their view point. This was important for data analysis and interpretation.

I know that I am a member of one of the denominations of these respondents; a person who has studied this subject for many years. Therefore, my hearing can be influenced by what is in my head. I tried to hear all respondents fairly and to keep my own self out of the process.

I used two strategies, namely, reflexivity and the control of my own biases. Sharan Merriam noted that reflexivity is a process whereby one “reflects critically on the self as a researcher, the human as instrument”.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, I understand that reflexivity is a mechanism that prevents interference in the data through critical self-reflection. In reflexivity, Merriam insists that one should explain his/her biases, judgement and concepts regarding the study.<sup>60</sup> I did my best to monitor my own biases, suspend and avoid my personal judgement and expectation of the results. I understand the difficulty of completely suspending and controlling my biases but at the same time, I listened fairly to all respondents and kept my own self out of the process. As Creswell puts it, the task requires “suspending our understandings in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity”.<sup>61</sup> To the best of my knowledge I did listen and explained the meaning of all respondents’ experience of God’s forgiveness of sins as best as I could without deviating from their meaning.

In addition to reflectivity, Merriam recommends observation which is central to the context of the experience and the way of seeing realities.<sup>62</sup> I also kept a journal of reflections about the research which helped me to remain truthful to the meaning of the

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<sup>59</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass 2009), 219.

<sup>60</sup> Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 219.

<sup>61</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 83.

<sup>62</sup> Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 219.

words of respondents. The meaning of the concepts, ideas, and assumption of respondents written in the journal were incorporated in the study as I endeavoured to control biases.

All respondents were over 25 years of age and members of Churches in the city of Adelaide. Their responses were derived from personal experiences, beliefs and the values they attached to divine forgiveness of sins. The responses of all respondents were subjective, and could not be generalised as representative of their denominations or congregations.

## Chapter 1:

### Formal Theology of God's Forgiveness of Sins

In this chapter, I present the historical trajectory of the theology of forgiveness of sins from the Jewish tradition to the present time and review the scholarly literature concerning it. This overview shows the continuity and discontinuity of the concept of divine forgiveness of sins across various contexts and times. By setting out this history, we establish a framework in the theologies of the forgiveness of sins that are found today can be understood. These theologies are designated in this study as 'the four voices of theology', namely normative theology (which refers to texts and traditions that a particular group may recognise as authoritative)<sup>1</sup>, espoused theology (the articulated intentions of practitioners)<sup>2</sup>, operant theology (what is actually believed and lived out)<sup>3</sup>, and formal theology (which stems from theological academic research based on concepts and text of professionals).<sup>4</sup> These streams come from the same source, namely the concept of God forgiving the sins of humanity, but exhibit many differences; at times they inform each other, and at other times they contradict each other.

This study will engage with the books which, cumulatively, give a comprehensive historical account of the ways the early Church dealt with the pastoral needs about forgiveness of sins. Many of these works have a focus on penance. They include *Penance and anointing of the sick*, by Bernhard Poschmann,<sup>5</sup> *De Penitentia: tractatus dogmatico-historiens* by Paul Galtier, *Le sacrement de la pénitence* by Paul Anciaux;<sup>6</sup> *Sacraments and forgiveness: history and doctrinal development of penance, extreme unction and indulgences* by Paul F.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, ed., *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing* and (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited 2013), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Astley et al, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 74.

<sup>3</sup> Astley et al, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 73.

<sup>4</sup> Astley et al, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 74.

<sup>5</sup> Bernhard Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick* (New York, 1964).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Anciaux, *Le sacrement de la pénitence* (Louvain/Paris, Nauwelaerts, 1960).

Palmer;<sup>7</sup> *A History of the Cure of Souls* by John T. McNeill<sup>8</sup>; *De penitentia Christiana* by Z. Alzephy; and *The Forgiveness of sins* by William Telfer.<sup>9</sup>

One important early study is by Pierre Batiffol, *Etudes d'histoire et de théologie positive*.<sup>10</sup> This gives a broad explanation of the doctrine and theology of penance in the early Church. It focuses on the origins of penance, the primitive hierarchy of the Church, the Agape and the Eucharist. The first publication appeared in 1902. Seven editions were published between 1902 and 1926 with modification on Tertullian's theology and the year that followed on the theology of Hippolytus.<sup>11</sup> It gives attention to Tertullian's opposition to the Church forgiving the sins of apostasy, idolatry, and adultery, which led Tertullian to become hostile to the Church and plant the seed for venial and grave sin which Augustine developed later in his theology of redemption.<sup>12</sup>

Paul F. Palmer, in an article entitled "Jean Morin and the Problem of Private penance"<sup>13</sup>, discusses the position of what he calls "liberal writers" of the class of Bernhard Poschmann and the "conservative writers" who share the view of Paul Galtier. The article surveys the nature of public penance in the first 12 years of practice, arguing in favour of Morin's claims that public penance was reserved for heinous crimes, namely apostasy, gross impurity, and homicide, the canonical triad, whereas less severe sins were sacramentally forgiven in private. The article goes on to substantiate the public penance as advanced by the liberal writers Jean Morin and Denys Petau.

Robert Cecil Mortimer's publication in 1939 entitled *The Origins of Private penance in the Western Church*,<sup>14</sup> argues that alongside a rigorous rite of public penance which sees people not only relegated to a specific place of the church and dismissed before the reception of Holy Communion, but also excommunicated until their death-bed, there was

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<sup>7</sup> Paul F. Palmer, *Sacraments and forgiveness: history and doctrinal development of penance, extreme unction and indulgences* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1959).

<sup>8</sup> John T. McNeill, *A History of the cure of Souls* (New York: 1951).

<sup>9</sup> William Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins: An Essay in the History of Christian Doctrine and Practice* (Virginia: SCM Press, 1959).

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Batiffol, *Etudes d'histoire et de théologie positive* (Paris: Librairie Victoir Lecoffre, 1861-1929),

<sup>11</sup> *La Théologie de Tertullian* (Paris, 1905) et *la Théologie de saint Hippolyte* (Paris, 1906).

<sup>12</sup> Adhémar d'Alès, *L'Édit de Calliste, Étude sur les Origines de la Pénitence Chrétienne* (Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1914).

<sup>13</sup> Palmer, "Jean Morin and the Problem of Private Penance", 317-57.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Cecil Mortimer, *The Origins of Private Penance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939).

also a sympathetic rite of forgiveness and absolution for minor sins. This argument is presented against Galtier's argument that people were satisfied with the absolution which, according to Mortimer's investigation, was given in rare occasions when people were given penance for years before they were admitted to the Church.

In *L'Église et la rémission des péchés aux premiers siècles*, Paul Galtier explores two major roles of forgiveness of sins in the first three centuries. He divides his book in two parts. In the first part, Galtier discusses the significance of the absolution and refers to his earlier works on the subject.<sup>15</sup> The means of forgiveness of sins was purely directed towards the priestly absolution. Was priestly absolution important? If so why? Galtier finds that the absolution was necessary for the faith of the ecclesial community and efficacy of God's forgiveness of sins on the penitent. Although at this early stage of the Church people did not look at the absolution as a sacrament, nevertheless, it assures of divine reconciliation and releases people from the thoughts of eternal punishment. This line of thought is shared by Poschmann and Adam see absolution as peace and reconciliation between penitents, God, and the Church. In the second part of the book, Galtier discusses the penitential rite from the third century to the Gregorian period.<sup>16</sup> No doubt, Tertullian stands out with the rite of *exomologesis* which became the benchmark of the Roman Catholic structure of reconciliation.

How does the Church forgive sins? How, who, and what sins are to be forgiven was the cause of debate among early theologians and Church Fathers. Much of the history of the forgiveness of sins relates to the interpretation of John 20:23: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained".<sup>17</sup> I will treat the literature pertaining to the interpretation of John 20:19-23 in a dedicated chapter (Chapter 2).

Given the complexity and various ways in which the Church has pastorally exercised the ministry of God's forgiveness of sins,<sup>18</sup> we will begin our overview with the Jewish concept

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Galtier, *L'Église et la rémission des péchés aux premiers siècles* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932); Vernance Grumel, 'Review of P. Galtier's *L'Église et la rémission des péchés aux premiers siècles*', *Échos d'Orient Année* 34/177 (1935), 108-9.

<sup>16</sup> Grumel, 'Review of P. Galtier's *L'Église*', 109.

<sup>17</sup> The Biblical references would be from the New Standard Catholic Version unless otherwise stated.

<sup>18</sup> Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing*, 3. Forgiveness of sin as a sacrament not only changes throughout history but also was lived differently from one place to another.

of forgiveness of sins, giving particular attention to the priestly writings concerning the Temple.

### **1.1 Jewish concept of the forgiveness of sins**

The message of God's forgiveness of sins has been preached by various prophets: Micah 7:18, 19; Isaiah 38:17, 43:25, 44:22, and Jeremiah 31:34, 50:20 to name just a few. The Hebrew Bible gives a set of rules needed for one to obtain divine forgiveness of sins through a covenantal relationship with YHWH. Israel depended on YHWH to maintain this relationship, and certain rituals were the means whereby this was done.<sup>19</sup> The following gives a brief overview of this vast field of study, with a focus on the periods when the Temple was functioning.

Exodus 25-40 briefly frame a religious system of worship which is dictated by YHWH. YHWH not only dwells among the people but also forgives their sins through multiple offerings. Since YHWH is holy and occupied a place of the Holiest of Holies, then a distinction between holy and unholy is fundamental to the religious system. The presence of YHWH in the Holiest of Holies implies various degrees of holiness within the Temple and beyond it, as well as among the people who worship in it, and the animals which were part of the system. All of this connects with the essential role of divine forgiveness of sins through certain prescribed rituals. An ethical life is connected with the holiness system. Constant purification is necessary according to the observance of the law. In establishing the system, YHWH instructs Moses how to build the Temple by using specific materials for various parts of the Temple (Exodus 25:8), and the various sacrifices are prescribed in Leviticus 1 -7.

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<sup>19</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, *Leviticus 1, 1–10, 20* (Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany, 2004), 1; Christian Eberhart *Studien zur Bedeutung der Opfer im Alten Testament: Die Signifikanz von Blut- und Verbrennungsriten im kultischen Rahmen*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany, 2002), 5; Esias E. Meyer, "Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte", *Journal for ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Law*. Volume 20 (2014): 267-280; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, AB 3, (New Haven/New Jersey, 2001); Jan Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Idiational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17-26*. Volume 67 (Leiden: Brill, 1996) Joosten cultivate the concept of holiness that is reflected in relation between people, their land, and the presence of YHWH both in the temple and amidst the people; Baruch Levine, *Leviticus: The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA.: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 12.

Leviticus chapters 1-7 gives a list of offerings depending on either sin committed or on other joyful occasions. There were burnt offering (Leviticus 1:13)<sup>20</sup>, grain offerings (Leviticus 2:1)<sup>21</sup>, ordination offerings (Leviticus 6:19-23)<sup>22</sup>, fellowship offerings or peace offerings (Leviticus 3; 7:11-36)<sup>23</sup>, sin offerings (Leviticus 4-5:13; 6:24-30)<sup>24</sup>, and guilt offerings (Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10).<sup>25</sup> In all of the above offerings, the priest had a role to exercise before the people and YHWH. The following are the texts prescribed for the priest in each circumstance: Leviticus 6:8-13 for the burnt offerings; Leviticus 6:13-23 for cereal or grain offerings; Leviticus 7:11-27, 31-36 for peace offerings; Leviticus 6:24-30 for sin offerings; and Leviticus 7:1-10 for guilt offerings.

YHWH's forgiveness of sins was marked once a year by Israel. This day was (is) called *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement, as described by Leviticus 16. *Yom Kippur* is rich in meaning, which includes the concept of "atonement", meaning "to cover". This day was dedicated to YHWH forgiving the sins of Israel. It was the Day of Atonement on which the High Priest entered the Holiest of Holies of to atone for the sins of the Israelites through blood sacrifice. A mention should be made that not every sacrifice was blood sacrifice. However, sacrificial blood has been a subject of scholarly interest in regard to whether YHWH forgave the sins of Israel or cleansed the defilement cause by the people in the Temple or even covered up their sins and passed over.

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Schultz, *Leviticus: God Among His People* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 52; Schultz argues that the first burnt offering occurred after the flood when Noah came out of the Ark and offered an aroma of praise which "was apparently a natural expression of Noah's relationship to God" after he was saved from the flood. The burnt offering is always found in the Temple either in the morning or at twilight, as per Numbers 28:4. Mark F. Rooker sees in burnt offering the "expression of total obedience". Mark F. Rooker, *The New American Commentary: Leviticus*, Volume 3A, (Broadman & Holman Publishers: USA 2000), 93.

<sup>21</sup> Mark F Rooker, *The New American Commentary: Leviticus*, Volume 3A, 94.

<sup>22</sup> Rooker, *The New American Commentary*, 131; this offering that begins on the day of the priest's consecration continues daily because it "illustrated the high priest's sinfulness and need for daily forgiveness and was offered on behalf of the priests".

<sup>23</sup> The peace offering was a thank offering (Leviticus 7:12-15), a gratitude and appreciation that one grants to God (Leviticus 7:16-27). This is the only sacrifice for which the gender of the animal is not specified, and the priests and the sinner can eat the meat together.

<sup>24</sup> A ceremony is required depending of the one who committed the sins. Whether a priest (Leviticus 4:3-12), an individual (Leviticus 4:27-35, 5:7-13), or a community (Leviticus 4:13-21).

<sup>25</sup> Karel van der Toom, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (Assen/ Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1985) 94-74.

Jacob Milgrom's three-volume commentary on Leviticus (1991) was ground-breaking in the field of Biblical study.<sup>26</sup> For Milgrom, Leviticus chapters 1-7 as presented by the Priestly Writing is the core passage to understand the sacrificial system of purification by blood in the Temple. Further, Milgrom argued that the blood sacrifice cleansed or purified the sanctuary, not the unintentional sins and the people who committed them.<sup>27</sup> This theory has drawn more debate among scholars, both for and against.<sup>28</sup> Those who are against this theory argued, like John Dennis, that blood sacrifice purifies both the sanctuary and the people because other texts like Leviticus 4 and Numbers 15 point to forgiveness of sins committed by the one who offers sacrifice and the purification of the Temple. Equally Nobuyoshi Kiushi and Roy Gane made a similar point.<sup>29</sup> Those who agree with certain aspects of purification sacrifices argue, like Gane, that from the vocabulary and the analysis of the syntax of the texts in Priestly Writing with regard to the use of the verb *kipper*, forgiveness of sins applies to both the sins of the sinner and the physical impurity of the

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<sup>26</sup> John Dennis, "The Function of the Sacrifice in the Priestly Literature: An Evaluation of the View of Jacob Milgrom", *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, vol. 78, (2002), 108–129; the blood plays a significant role in the purification process. The concept of *hattā't* becomes the defining term for discussion whether blood purifies the place of worship and the people or both or perhaps only the people. Cf. Adrian Schenker, "Once again the Expiatory Sacrifices", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 116, (1997), 697- 699 especially 697; Adrian Schenker, "Interprétations récentes et dimensions spécifiques du sacrifice *hattā't*", *Biblica*, vol. 75, (1994), 59–70; Jacob Milgrom *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York: Doubleday, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Doubleday: New York, 1991); Idem, 'Priestly ("P") Source', in DN Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday New York, 1995), 454–61. Milgrom relies on his understanding of the verb *kipper* which refers to Akkadian cognate. For him *kipper* means "to wipe" as experienced in the expiation or cleansing sins in the Temple cf. Milgrom page 1079-1081.

<sup>28</sup> Alfred Marx, "Le sacrifice dans l'Ancien Testament. Regard impressioniste sur un quart de siècle de recherches", *Foi et vie*, vol. 95 (1996) 3–17 especially 17; David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: A Study of Four Writings* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 1–2; Philip P Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 66–74; Gary Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (Old Testament)", in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 870–876 especially 871; Lester L. Grabbe, *Leviticus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1993), 43–7; Budd, *Leviticus* (Grand Rapids William B. Eerdmans, 1996 ), 28–34; Christian Eberhart, *Studien zur Bedeutung der Opfer im Alten Testament: Die Signifikanz von Blut- und Verbrennungsriten im kultischen Rahmen* (Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn: 2002), 187–99; Tzvi Abusch, "Blood in Israel and Mesopotamia", in SM Paul, RA Kraft, LH Schiffman and WW Fields (eds.), *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, pp. 675–84 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 678–679.

<sup>29</sup> John Dennis "The Function of the Sacrifice in the Priestly Literature: An Evaluation of the View of Jacob Milgrom", *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, vol. 78, (2002), 108–129 especially 112-114 and 117-108; Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, 2005), 106–30; Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 98.



Temple.<sup>30</sup> Gane argues that sacrifice acts to purify the sanctuary only in the case of cultic activities on the Day of Atonement, narrated in Leviticus 16.<sup>31</sup> One can fairly claim that the notion of forgiveness of sins in the Jewish Temple was firmly established in the Priestly Writing.

In the Jewish tradition, the concept of purification distinguished God who is Holy and people who are sinners.<sup>32</sup> To come into the presence of YHWH required certain rites of

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<sup>30</sup> Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN, 2005), 106–30; Adrian Schenker, “Interprétations récentes et dimensions spécifiques du sacrifice *hatta’t*”, *Biblica*, vol. 75, (1994) 59–70 especially 64; for various argumentation cf. Alfred Marx, *Les systèmes sacrificiels de l’Ancien Testament: Formes et fonctions du culte sacrificiel à Yhwh* (Leiden, Brill, The Netherlands, 2005), 192–195; Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *A Study of Hata’ and Hatta’t in Leviticus 4–5* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) especially 3–48 and 85–99; Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006) 56–57 Klawans argued that the killing of an animal symbolises the death of sinful nature. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel”, in CL Meyers and M O’Connor (eds.), *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 399–414; David Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987b); Idem, “The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity”, in GA Anderson and SM Olyan (eds.), *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987b), 150–181; David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: A Study of Four Writings*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 112–14; William Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 78–84 then 182 and 186. Gilders argued that it is difficult to see blood sacrifice in Leviticus 17:11 to be equal to life of blood sacrifice in Priestly writing; Baruch Levine and Maccoby argued that from the ransom perspective, it is understandably that the sacrificial death of an animal replaces the deserving death of human life cf. Baruch Levine, *Leviticus: The JPS Torah Commentary*, The Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia: PA, 1989), 6–7; Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 180 – 181; the same sentiments are expressed by Tzvi Abusch who goes further and sees in sacrificial blood the as a reciprocal kingship relationship between God and Israel cf. Tzvi Abusch, “Blood in Israel and Mesopotamia”, in SM Paul, RA Kraft, LH Schiffman and WW Fields (eds.), *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2003), 675–684; Rolf Rendtorff argued that the priestly Writing of the verb *kipper* cannot be translate to ‘to wipe or to expiate’ as Milgrom argued because *kipper* appears in the context of unbloodied sacrifices akin to cereal offering cf. Rolf Rendtorff, *Leviticus 1,1–10, 20* (Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany, 2004), 176–8; Hyam Maccoby equally argued that Milgrom’s view of impurity in Priestly writing to expiate sins from the altar cannot be justified on the text cf. Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171– 179; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 225–232; Israel Knoll, *the Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 25–35.

<sup>31</sup> Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*, 130– 142; John Dennis “The Function of the Sacrifice in the Priestly Literature: An Evaluation of the View of Jacob Milgrom”, *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, vol. 78, (2002), 108–129 especially 108; Adrian Schenker, “Once again the Expiatory Sacrifices”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 116, (1997), 697.

<sup>32</sup> Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code*, 124–132; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 731–732 for Milgrom Impurity is a physical substance cf. page 25 and on pages 253–260, Milgrom considers blood a detergent purifier that through the ritual cleanses the tabernacle from Israel impurity. Purification is needed unless the sanctuary becomes unholy as it comes to contact with the profane cf. pages 310–313. Any contact with impurity contaminates the holy (pages 731–733); for elaborate division between holiness and uncleanness cf. Philip Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

purification, either by blood sacrifice or burnt sacrifice or other offerings. The Hebrew Bible provides various texts that witness to the well-organised system of religious beliefs based on the covenantal relationship with YHWH. For example: “You shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the Ark of the Covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.” Exodus 25: 21-22.

Briefly, forgiveness of sins is possible within the covenantal relation between YHWH and Israel.

According to the Torah, the first time Moses received the Ten Commandments was on the sixth day of *Sivan* which is on the seventeenth day of *Tammuz*. This day marks the forty days after Moses received the Torah (*Shavuot*) at Mount Sinai. Due to his anger at the disobedience of Israel, Moses broke the tablets. It took him another forty days to plead to YHWH for the second reception of the Decalogue. On Elul 1(Exodus 34:4-8) Moses received the Decalogue for a second time and on the day of *Tishri* 10, he returned to the people with the Ten Commandments. This day was then later called *Yom Kippur* (Exodus 34:10). It follows that some Jews begin the period of repentance or *Teshuvah* on Elul 1 until *Tishri* 10, which lasted forty days in reference to the forty days Moses spent on Mount Sinai receiving the second Ten Commandments.

Briefly, YHWH forgives the sins of the Israelites when they repent, and certain practices are connected with key stories of the history of God’s people.

The meaning of the word *Kippur* or *kafar* is derived from the word *kofer*, which means ransom. Ransom is closely related to redemption, as in Psalm 49:7 (Truly, no ransom avails for one’s life, there is no price one can give to God for it). To redeem in this sense is to atone by offering a substitute. In the *Tanakh*, the priest makes atonement by sprinkling animal sacrificial blood whose symbolism is to remove sin or any sort of defilement. One bull and two goats are presented to the High Priest. The bull is killed, and the blood is sprinkled in the temple for the sins of the priests and their relatives. One goat is also killed, and its blood sprinkled in the Temple for the sins of the offerer, while the second goat is prayed over, and the offer confess the sins by laying hands over the head of the goat. To

complete the ceremony, the sinner places his hands over the head of the animal and confesses his/her sins (Leviticus 1: 4; 4:4; 16:21). This animal is a sacrifice (*semichah*). This animal was then either killed or deliberately led into wildness as a scapegoat (Leviticus 16:10). The sacrificial blood was often presented in the *Kapporet* or mercy seat (a golden covering the Holy of Holiest in the Tabernacle (Leviticus 17:11; “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for as life, it is the blood that makes atonement”). The life of the animal and its blood were essential requirement for the sacrifice in exchange for the life and blood of the sinner. This explains the life of the innocent animal replacing the life of the guilty sinner.

Briefly, YHWH forgives cultic sins through sacrificial atonement. The redemption of a human life by the ritual sacrifice of an animal life is significant in the sense that “the sacrifice correlates with the forgiveness of persons (Lev 4:20-35; 5:10-18) and a restoration of relationships”.<sup>33</sup> The 10 days that lead to Yom Kippur are consecrated to repentance, purification, and cleansing from all sorts of sins. These 10 days are called Days of Awe or *yamin nora'im*. Leading to Yom Kippur, 40 days of preparation are held which also one consecrates to works of penance and purification so that on the Day of Yom Kippur, one seals the Book of righteousness of wickedness. These 40 days are called the Season of *Teshuvah*. In other words, the 40 days are preparation for Salvation Day (*Yom Ke- Purim*) on which YHWH forgives the sins of those who repent.

Briefly, YHWH forgives ethical sins through sacrificial atonement.

To go against one of the 613 laws of Jewish religious life was a sin, and people sought to avoid wittingly or unwittingly infringing against the law. There were debates within different schools of Judaism as to how to avoid infringing against the law. It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss these debates. It is sufficient to state that the sacrificial system was robust and, while the Temple was standing, served to offer forgiveness of sins to many. However, some people were excluded from the Temple system of worship and

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen Finland, *Sacrifice and Atonement: Psychological Motives and Biblical Patterns* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 10.

sacrifice, because their sins or impurities threatened the life of the community or the covenantal relation with YHWH.<sup>34</sup>

Briefly, YHWH offered forgiveness of sins through the rituals of the Temple. However, exclusion of some was stipulated for keeping the Temple undefiled.

### Summary

The Jewish religion provided a stable system and theological foundation for God's forgiveness of sins, with a focus on *Yom Kippur*. YHWH forgives sins based on the covenantal relationship with Israel. The High Priest offered atoning sacrifices for the sins of the people. The people in their turn were required to confess and offer various sacrifices to YHWH. Those who were excluded from the Temple system had no access to forgiveness of sins.

## 1.2 New Testament

The New Testament presents John the Baptist baptising for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3). In John's Gospel the Baptist declares that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of world (John 1:29). While in the Old Testament God forgives sins, in the New Testament we see a shift in how this forgiveness is offered. William Telfer rightly describes it as "an eschatological forgiveness that Jesus preached".<sup>35</sup> It is a forgiveness of sins in the present context, yet it breaks through the past and the future. While the Jewish tradition required sacrifice, repentance, atonement, the New Testament demands faith in Jesus. Again, and again Jesus healed people or forgave their sins, and many accounts connect this forgiveness with the faith of the person. Some examples include the sinful woman who was forgiven by Jesus (Luke 7:36-50), the blind man who was cured by Jesus, who believed and worshipped the Lord (John 9: 1-41), and the cleansing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19). In each case Jesus appealed to their faith.

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<sup>34</sup> G.W.H. Lampe, "Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians", *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies presented to John Knox*, W.R. Farmer, C.F.D. Moule and R.R. Niebuhr eds. (Cambridge, CUP 1967), 355; Göran Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community* (Lund, CWK Gleerup 1972) 70–8; Adela Y. Collins, 'The Function of Excommunication in Paul', *HTR* 73 (1980) 263; Brian S. Rosner, "Temple and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 5", *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1 (1991) 137-145.

<sup>35</sup> William Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins: An Essay in the History of Christian Doctrine and Practice* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1959), 18.

### 1.3 Era of the disciples

After the ascension of the Risen Lord, the primitive Christian community was living in an atmosphere of tense expectancy and inspired effort waiting for the return of the Risen Lord.<sup>36</sup> This period was a time of intense preparation, focus and anticipation for the coming of the Lord. They understood his return was imminent. As written by William Telfer: “The time of John writing like that of Paul and Peter, was a period of awaiting the second coming. A time to leave the material world for the promised world of peace and eternal life”.<sup>37</sup> Baptism was the only doctrinal and communal pathway to forgiveness of sins and salvation. I suggest it was a time of anticipating the eschatological order in the sense that “the temporal order will yield to be merged into the eternal order”.<sup>38</sup> The Christians of this period lived in a constant time of moral change, spiritual awareness not because they discarded the material world but, as Telfer suggests, the spiritual needs transcended the transient affairs.<sup>39</sup> People increasingly sought for forgiveness of their sins because the notion that Jesus was coming soon was popular and an effective means to wait for the Lord in a state of holiness. The Lord returning in the immediate future was a call to stop sinning. “This was the unquestionable conviction of the first disciples which was rapidly communicated to the ever-increasing number of the new converts”.<sup>40</sup> Christians were alert! “This impression seems to continue in undiminished force for more than a decade; a fact which gives us the measure of the intensity of those experiences of the person and resurrection of Christ which formed the matrix of Christian faith, and of the Church”.<sup>41</sup>

There has been very little evidence to suggest that the disciples forgave sins during their life time in anything comparable to the way forgiveness of sins is administered in the Church today. On the contrary, the evidence of both early and contemporary writings is that baptism was and is still the means to become Christian, belong to the community of Christ’s faithful and denounce evil by being born anew as child of God.

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<sup>36</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 26.

<sup>38</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 20.

Research shows that baptism was the only means for forgiveness of sins in the early Church. Although forgiveness of sins is linked to baptism, Johannine Scholars do not relate John 20:19-23 to baptism only.<sup>42</sup> It is not clear whether this Gospel text was a key factor for the Church to forgive sins alongside the Gospel of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 (I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven) or any other Biblical passages that speaks of forgiveness of sins.<sup>43</sup> The aim of this study is not to establish the relative weighting of such passages. For our purposes, it suffices to point out that the earliest believers were concerned with the forgiveness of sins which comes through baptism, not with the issue of how to deal with sins committed after baptism.

In this era, three documents are singled out to supply information on how the Early Church understood the mission of God's forgiveness of sins: the *Gospel of John*, the *Epistles of Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

#### **1.4 The Gospel of John**

The Gospel of John is ambiguous on its authorship and scholars are divided on this issue.<sup>44</sup> Scholars take various views on the identity of the evangelist, or author of the Fourth Gospel, and a discussion of authorship is beyond the scope of this study. Similarly, the precise date when the Gospel was written is also beyond the scope of this study. The majority of scholars place the writing of the Gospel in the late first century, between 90 and 100 CE. The specific text for this research is a part of the Gospel of John, chapter 20:19-23.

The pericope provides the account of Jesus appearing to his disciples in a locked room. Jesus wishes them peace twice and shows his hands and side. The disciples rejoiced in seeing the crucified and Risen Lord. Then the Risen Lord proceeded to impart the Holy Spirit

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<sup>42</sup> T. Worden argues that reconciliation and baptism are related theme on John 20:19-23, "*The Remission of Sins, Scripture 9, I & II*" (1957a), 65-79; (1957b), 115-127. Such interpretation has been rejected by Raymond Brown as baseless. Osborne remarks: "Worden notes that in the first three centuries, the fathers of the church interpreted this Johannine passage in reference to baptism, but Brown indicates both the textual and contextual reasons why such an interpretation cannot be maintained with assurance". Kenan Osborne, *Reconciliation and Justification: The Sacrament and Its Theology* (Eugene / Oregon: Paulist Press, 2001), 257.

<sup>43</sup> 1 John 5:9ff; Hebrews 10:1-18; Tertullian was the first theologian to refer to Matthew Gospel (Matthew 16:19) over the debate about who must forgive the sins of apostasy, murderer and adultery.

<sup>44</sup> For a comprehensive discussion and treatment of various views on authorship cf. Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 68-81.

to them and sends them to forgive and retain sins as he was sent by His Father. It is interesting that John remains silent on the ministry of the disciples after such a unique commission. None of the disciples is described as immediately walking out of the fearful room and baptising or forgiving sins in the manner instructed by Jesus in John 20:19-23. A description of the disciples preaching and baptising as a practical embodiment of the words of the Risen Jesus is not part of the narrative scope of the John's Gospel. This information is obtained or reconstructed through other biblical sources such as the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:14-42 Peter Preaches to the Crowd). The power of forgiveness of sins in John 20:22-23 "goes far beyond the sacrament of baptism".<sup>45</sup> Raymond Brown describes this mission as bearing divine power from the Father to Jesus and the disciples through the Holy Spirit. "The power to isolate, repel, and negate evil and sin, a power given to Jesus in his mission by the Father and given in turn by Jesus through the Spirit to those whom he commissioned".<sup>46</sup> Kenan writes: "Reconciliation like baptism is a process radically moving a person from sin to grace".<sup>47</sup> Previous research by Poschmann shows that the Gospels and other books of the New Testament are the sources of Jesus' message of God's forgiveness of sins and the Fourth Gospel is not an exception.<sup>48</sup> One important text relating to forgiveness of sins is 1 John 5:16-17. It reads:

If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one-- to those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal.

A distinction was being drawn between mortal sins—those that lead to death, and sins that are not mortal (i.e. venial sins). In the Johannine tradition, believers had passed from death to life (1 John 3:14), but ongoing sin was acknowledged as possible. This was to become an

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<sup>45</sup> Galtier, *L'Eglise et la rémission des péchés aux premiers siècles*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Raymond Brown, *Gospel of John* vol 2, 1040.

<sup>47</sup> Kenan Osborne, *Reconciliation and Justification: The Sacrament and Its Theology* (Eugene / Oregon: Paulist Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>48</sup> Bernhard Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing* 6-18; cf. Matthew 6:12; 7; 11; 12:31; 18:15-17, Mark 1:15; 16:16, Luke 9:62; 14:25; 24:47, John 9:22; 12: 42; 16:1; 20:21-23, Saint Paul Letters Romans 6:2-12; 8: 5-13; 8:34; 1 Corinthians 3:3ff, 11, 18ff, 5:3-5; 5:7ff; 5:18ff; 6:9ff, 11:31ff; 2 Corinthians 2: 5-1; 7:10; 12:21 Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24ff; Galatians 2:19ff; 5:19ff; 6:1ff ; Philippians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6ff ; 14-16 Timothy 1:20, the Epistle to the Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:29; 4:15, 16; 5:2; 7:24ff ; the Catholic Epistles and Apocalypse James 1: 21-22ff, 1: 4, 18, 3:2; 2:13-14ff, 5: 16-19ff; 1 John 1:8-9, 2:1-5, 3:9-10, 5: 14-16; 2 John 8-11; 2 Peter 3:9; Apocalypse 2: 5, 11, 3:1-5, 15-20.

important distinction, as it raised the issue of which sins were able to be forgiven through prayer, and which sins were outside the scope of prayer or other human intervention.

In the light of the unspecified sins, for example apostasy and murder, the Church has defended its position to have authority to forgive any kind of sins, mortal or venial based on both baptism and in penance.<sup>49</sup> Johannine scholarship agrees that this pericope is the scene of transformation and commissioning.<sup>50</sup> In this sense, scholars agree that the Church has the authority to forgive sins. Whether the Church has the descriptive or prescriptive authority is a matter of discussion.

The notion of Jesus coming very soon continued into this era. Christians lived for God and in a constant expectancy of the second coming of the risen Lord.<sup>51</sup> Baptism was the norm for forgiveness of sins.<sup>52</sup> New converts were expected to be sinless after baptism, and in most cases there was no hope for forgiveness of major sins after baptism.<sup>53</sup> Penance after baptism was only admitted once in one's life-time.<sup>54</sup> What was the Church's approach to post-baptismal sins? It depended on the type of sin committed. One could expiate sin by prayer, fasting, work of charity, penance; excommunication from the community could also ensue.

According to Jean Coletier in his two volumes work entitled *SS. Patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt, Barnabæ, Clementis, Hermæ, Ignatii, Polycarpi opera edita et non edita, vera et supposita, græce et latine, cum notis*, the following are the earliest writings in the history of the Church:<sup>55</sup> the letters of Clement, Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas,

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<sup>49</sup> Cyprian, Ep. 69,11; 73,7 (power to forgive sins in baptism); Origen, De or, 28,9; Ambrose, De Paen. 1, 2, 6; De Spir. S. 3, 18, 137 (the power to forgive sins in penance); cf. Bernhard Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing*, 8; here Penance is seen in terms of work of satisfaction.

<sup>50</sup> Scholars for both side of the spectrums whether Catholics or Protestants have come to a consensus that his pericope is the "commissioning passage".

<sup>51</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church Volume I* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1895), 410-411.

<sup>53</sup> Clement "Epistles to the Romans", In *Early Christian Fathers* (Library of Christian Classics I), 1959, 193-202; Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 27; Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church Volume I* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1895), 410-411.

<sup>54</sup> Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church Volume I*, 410-411.

<sup>55</sup> Jean Coletier, (cf. *SS. Patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt, Barnabæ, Clementis, Hermæ, Ignatii, Polycarpi opera edita et non edita, vera et supposita, græce et latine, cum notis* (Paris, 1672). The revised editions of the books were published in Antwerp and Amsterdam. The former in 1698 and the latter in 1724. The reprints of the 1873 editions is accessed in Migne, P. G., I, II, V. in 1873, Byrennios discovers the *Didache*, which is now considered as one of the non- canonical Apostolic letters. To these sources, the *Didascalia* is associated although it was more influenced by the *Didache*.



the seven letters of Ignatius, and one of Polycarp. These letters are known as the non-inspired Christian letters or non-canonical letters. A chart is included at the end of this chapter to give an overview of the most important patristic and medieval writers on the subject of the forgiveness of sins.

The concept of forgiveness of sins occurred in some other very early documents of the Church. While the *Didache*<sup>56</sup> (80-90) and *The Shepherd of Hermas* (139–155)<sup>57</sup> showed a significant need for post-baptismal forgiveness of sins, Clement of Rome,<sup>58</sup> Polycarp (69-156), and Irenaeus<sup>59</sup> through their letters exhort people to confess their sins. I will focus on Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas, because Clement is the earliest authority in the post-apostolic early Church and makes references to most of the teachings of early Fathers and the controversies. Hermas is selected because it contains more material pertaining to penance that is disputed by scholars.

#### **1.4.1 Clement of Rome (c. 35–99 CE)**

Clement role as a bishop of Rome in terms of the sacrament of reconciliation is twofold. First, in chapter XL VIII in the first letter of Clement to the Corinthians, sins among the new Christians are acknowledged and they are called to holiness through repentance to gain God's forgiveness of sins.<sup>60</sup> Clement writes, "let us fall down before the Lord, and beseech Him with tears, that he would mercifully be reconciled to us, and restore us to our former seemly and holy practice of brotherly love".<sup>61</sup> This is not only an admission that the new converts sinned after baptism but also an exhortation to holiness and God's forgiveness of sins. The notion that repentance was unthinkable after baptism has been proven wrong.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In *Early Christian Fathers* (Library of Christian Classics I: 1953), 171-179.

<sup>57</sup> In the *Apostolic Fathers* (Ante-Nicene Christian Library I, 1867), 323-375; Joseph Barber, Lightfoot 1828-1889; M. R James (Montague Rhodes), 1862-1936 & Henry Barclay, Swete 1835-1917, *Excluded books of the New Testament* (London: E. Nash & Grayson, limited: 1927); Cf. Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 37.

<sup>58</sup> In *Early Christian Fathers*, 193-202. Cf. James S. Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome: social order and hierarchy in early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1956- 1991); Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 1:20; Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 1:185; Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Irenaeus, *Proof the Apostolic Preaching* (Ancient Christian Writers 16), 1952; The writings of Irenaeus, 2 vols. (Ante-Nicene Christian Library V), 1868; Cf. Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 43.

<sup>60</sup> In *Early Christian Fathers*, 193-202; Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 33.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Clement 48, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Arthur Cleveland Coxe (NY: Cosimo Classics, 2007) 18.

<sup>62</sup> 2 Clement 6,9; 7, 6 cf. Ignatius, *Eph.4,2; 8, 2; Barn, 6, 11-13 Justin, Apologetic 1 14, 61, Dialogue 114, 4.*

With this viewpoint, Clement's letter echoes the slow but a shift in the beliefs that Jesus is coming soon might not be as soon as people expected. As rightly written by Telfer: "Instead of expecting to see the return of Christ with the eye of flesh, Christians now expected to die without seeing it".<sup>63</sup> "At this stage, new Christian ethic of preparation for the afterlife starts replacing the old ethic".<sup>64</sup> According to early scholars, this was no doubt "the first breach in the rigorism and the expectation of reconversion or second repentance was doomed."<sup>65</sup> As a result, Clement calls the community to repentance and assured them of God's mercy in his *Epistle to the Corinthians*.<sup>66</sup>

Second, Clement did not hesitate to call the Corinthians a "den of thieves" and urge them to avoid sin. Poschmann remarks: "The so-called Second Epistle of Clement (14,1), the oldest surviving Christian homily, does not shrink from applying the prophetic image of the 'den of thieves' (Jeremiah 1:11; Matthew 21:13) to the Church on earth, in reference to its sinful members".<sup>67</sup> Clement insists on correction and change of life. He uses the expression *ελεγχειν*, which denotes the sense of correction "to bring home to someone a moral truth which he has failed to observe".<sup>68</sup> This leads one to acknowledge one's sins in the liturgy with reference to the breaking of the bread.<sup>69</sup> Clement uses a metaphor to reiterate his teaching for the penitents to have hope in forgiveness, saying that "just as a potter can refashion a vessel that breaks in his hands while being shaped, as long as he has not thrown it into the furnace, so a man who is still living and has time for repentance is capable of being refashioned by God".<sup>70</sup> Clement's letters shows that forgiveness of sins after baptism was important because new converts were not without sin. The Church was facing a new challenge for pastoral care in the theology of forgiveness of sins and the celebration of the Eucharist.

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<sup>63</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 36.

<sup>65</sup> Irenaeus, *Proof the Apostolic Preaching*, 1868. Cf. William Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 36, 43.

<sup>66</sup> In *Early Christian Fathers*, 193-202; Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Poschmann, *Penance*, 20.

<sup>68</sup> In *Early Christian Fathers*, 193-202. Cf. James S. Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome: social order and hierarchy in early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1956- 1991); Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 27, 33.

<sup>69</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 27.

<sup>70</sup> 2 Clement, 8,1-3.

Baptism was the focal point of forgiveness of sins during the apostolic period and the centuries that followed. However, the Didache provided hope for a second repentance which had been unthinkable at the time of baptism or before one was baptised.<sup>71</sup> Tim Carter has listed books and theologians who emphasised baptism as means for forgiveness of sins.<sup>72</sup> I will enumerate some examples, namely the *Epistula Apostolorum* (Epistle of the Apostles),<sup>73</sup> the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle to Barnabas, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus.<sup>74</sup> All of the above authors who emerge soon after the Apostolic Era agree that forgiveness of sins begins with baptism and continues with repentance for one to acquire eternal life.

Carter notes that among the Church Fathers, Irenaeus is the first to attest that the New Testament is the authoritative Scripture for forgiveness of sins.<sup>75</sup> For Irenaeus, forgiveness of sins is linked to baptism.<sup>76</sup> Irenaeus quotes more texts on forgiveness of sins from the New Testament than from the Old Testament (Luke 1:77; 24:47; Acts 2:28; 5:31, 10:43; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 3:18-19).<sup>77</sup> All of them agree that forgiveness of sins begins with baptism and continues with repentance for one to acquire eternal life.

#### **1.4.2 The Shepherd of Hermas**

The Shepherd of Hermas<sup>78</sup> is the first document to consider second repentance after baptism in the first three centuries, by means of rigorous penance. Pierre Batiffol observes: “conversion et guérison sont les deux termes fermement posés par eux. Hermas, qui est

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<sup>71</sup>Jonathan A. Draper, *The Apostolic Fathers: The Didache*, Expository Times, Vol.117, No.5, (2006), 178; In *Early Christian Fathers*, 171-179. Cf. W. Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 22; Jean-Paul Audet, *La Didachè: Instructions des Apôtres* (Paris: Gabalda, 1958).

<sup>72</sup>Tim Carter, *The Forgiveness of Sins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 234.

<sup>73</sup>*Epistula Apostolorum* refers to forgiveness of sins by quoting Luke 24:47 (and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem). It focuses on repentance as at the time in the second century its main goal was to defeat Gnosticism. For the *Epistula Apostolorum*, Jesus is the saviour of the world through his passion death and resurrection; Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., trans. R McL.Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 252-284.

<sup>74</sup>*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950).

<sup>75</sup>Tim Carter, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 234.

<sup>76</sup>Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.12.7 *Baptizari eos iussit in remissionem peccatorum*; cf. Hans von Campenhausen, *Formation of the Christian Bible*, Translated by J. A. Baker (The University of Virginia: Fortress Press, 1977), 185.

<sup>77</sup>Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.10.2; 3.16.5; 3.12.2; 3.12.5; 3.12.7; 4.26.1; 4.27.2; 5.2.2; 5.14.3; 5.33.1.

<sup>78</sup>The Shepherd of Hermas, in *The Apostolic Fathers* (Ante-Nicene Christian Library I, 1867), 323-375.

*les plus près de la rigueur ancienne, ajoute un autre terme, une autre condition: on ne peut se convertir qu'une fois*".<sup>79</sup> The point the Shepherd is making is to ensure that there is a second repentance for the new Christians who paradoxically are living both a life of holiness and of the sinful nature of the world which they just abandoned for Christ. The new Christians were torn between the worlds of socio-cultural and politico-religious demands.

There was some controversy whether Hermas was the first to suggest a second penance after baptism. Most of the scholars support Hermas' appeal for such repentance. Poschmann writes:

Herms demands separate treatment. In addition to be the first writer to make penance the object of special and thorough study, he is particularly important for his connection with one of the most controversial problems in the history of penance". The opinion that it was he who first broke with the strict theory of a single post-baptismal penance is prevalent to this day.<sup>80</sup>

Repentance (conversion) was only once in one's life time and baptism was the only means of salvation. There was no other pastoral ministry that guaranteed salvation because the Eucharist did not welcome sinners. In other words, as far as salvation was concerned, baptism was the main means for one to save his/her soul. Due to the Dacian persecution, as the number of lapses (apostasy) increased, the Church had to find an alternative solution for hope after life. The Shepherd, through his pastoral concern, came up with a solution which he claimed to be a divine revelation to save Christians who fall into sin after baptism. This new approach was "an extraordinary opportunity for penance"<sup>81</sup> and the beginning of the life of grace brought by the Risen Lord.

What is the message of Hermas and why is it so important? Hermas states:

I have heard from certain teachers that there is no other repentance beyond that which occurred when we descended into the water and received forgiveness of our previous sins.' He said to me, 'You have heard correctly, for so it is. For the one who has received forgiveness of sins ought never to sin again, but to live in purity [...] So, for those who were called before these days the Lord has established repentance [...] But the Lord, however, who is exceedingly merciful, had mercy on his creation and established this opportunity for repentance ... But I am warning you,' he said, 'if, after this great

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<sup>79</sup> Pierre Batiffol, *Etudes d'histoire et de théologie positive* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1861-1929), 65.

<sup>80</sup> Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing*, 26.

<sup>81</sup> Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing*, 26.

and holy call, anyone is tempted by the devil and sins, he has one opportunity for repentance.<sup>82</sup>

Central to the message of Hermas is God's mercy toward humans and an offer of forgiveness of sins beyond baptism. This was the unequivocal message that changed the attitude of the Church toward penitents who sinned after baptism. Up to this time in history, despite controversy over who the first person to suggest second repentance was, no evidence has proven that it was not Hermas. Between the first and the third centuries, a modification to what was once 'taboo', in the sense that second repentance was impossible, now became a reality. Post-baptismal human frailty was not only acknowledged but provided with forgiveness and readmission into the Jesus community.

## **1.5 Post-apostolic age**

This early period of the history of forgiveness of sins in the Church is foundational to the transition from the disciples to the new generation of leaders in the Church. From the second to the fourth centuries, a shift in pastoral life of the Church occurred. Baptism was no longer the first and last hope for salvation, but the beginning of a holy life. After baptism, new converts who fell into sins could hope for a second repentance. With the second repentance came the issue of what sins should and should not be forgiven by the Church.

Three key theologians with regard to the forgiveness of sins in the first three centuries of the Church were Tertullian (155–c. 230), Origen (c. 184–c. 253), and Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258).

### **1.5.1 Tertullian (c. 155–c. 240 CE)**

It was Tertullian who distinguished himself with a thorough rigorous theological and pastoral approach that challenged both the laity and the ecclesial authorities of the time.<sup>83</sup> Tertullian created a structure of penance and forgiveness of sins in his two monumental Books *De Paenitentia* and *De Pudicitia*, which established continuity with the Jewish notion

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<sup>82</sup> Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate 4, ch. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. from 3d German edition by Neil Buchanan et al. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1898) 5.14–15

of repentance but veered away from it in his understanding of penance. While *De paenitentia* deals with the penitential rites, the *De pudicitia* is a polemical response to a pastoral directive given by the Pope Callixtus I to absolve the sins of apostasy, fornication, adultery, and murder if the sinner was repentant.<sup>84</sup>

Tertullian distinguished between daily committed sins and unforgivable sins. Unforgivable sins deserved exclusion from the Church and no one could forgive them but God.<sup>85</sup> Such sins included murder, idolatry, fraud, apostasy, blasphemy, adultery and fornication and violation of the temple of God. This way of thinking about sins shows that Tertullian's understanding of sins was connected with Jewish distinctive offerings based on sins committed against the 613 Jewish law. However, it was Basil the Great (330–379 CE) in the fourth century who made a detailed list of sins and their deserved punishment as one goes through the various classes of penitential system.<sup>86</sup>

In *De pudicitia*, Tertullian emphasises the role played by the Holy Spirit in granting forgiveness (*Pud.* 21). While this was written in his Montanist period, of interest to this study is the link he makes between Matthew 16:19; 18:18 and John 20:22b–23. This appears as an allusion: Tertullian interprets Peter's authority in Matt 16:19 by means of John 20:22b–23, as he glossed "binding" as "retaining". John 20:19-23 shows Jesus giving authority to the disciples to forgive and retain sins (John 20:23), which immediately follows Jesus breathing the Spirit into the disciples (v.22b). Tertullian's opponents shared his belief that possessing the Spirit is prerequisite to forgiveness, but they differed as to the sign of the Spirit's manifestation. For them, the disciples had passed down the Spirit through ordination, and so the bishops had the power to forgive whomever and whatever they wanted. Tertullian objected that the Church will indeed pardon sins, but the Church which is spirit, through a spiritual man, not the Church which is a collection of bishops. Law and

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<sup>84</sup> Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 9.20; 21.14; 19.6, 19.25; *Adv. Marc.* 4.9.

<sup>85</sup> Tertullian, *De Pudicitia*, Chapter 9.

<sup>86</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), Second Series, Volume 8, *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, Letter 217, Canons 56, 57, 58), 256; for example, one who attempted homicide incurred excommunication from the Eucharistic for approximately 20 years. In those 20 years, one will be a beggar at the door of the church while weeping and asking for the intercession of the faithful for four years. Then the next five years, one becomes a hearer. One enters the Church but remains at the rear. This will be followed by seven years as a kneeler. A period of fasting and penance. The next four years, one hears the word but does not participate in the oblation. At the end of this period when the bishop is satisfied, the penitent will be admitted to communion with a blessing.

judgement belong to the Lord, not to the servant, to God, not to the priest (*Pud.* 21.16–17).<sup>87</sup> Throughout *De pudicitia*, Tertullian attempted to curb what he perceived as a recent excess of priestly power, but surprisingly he ended the section by downplaying the priests' claim to authority. Although never cited explicitly, John 20:23 stands at the centre of Tertullian's argument, in which he interpreted Peter's authority in Matt 16:19 in light of Johannine texts pertaining to forgiveness of sins.<sup>88</sup>

Tertullian is the theologian who clearly writes about forgiveness of one's sins through the observation of *exomologesis*. *Exomologesis* is a Greek word employed by Tertullian to describe the structures through which one goes through to express sorrow and repentance. During *exomologesis* the penitent abstains from good food, wears sackcloth, sprinkles one's body with ashes, and spends perennial time in precatory prayers.<sup>89</sup> The procedure was painful but rewarding according to Tertullian. One needs to confess directly to God, because confession leads to penance and by so doing God grants pardon".<sup>90</sup> For Tertullian the confession of sins was a "part of the warp and woof of Church life".<sup>91</sup> Consequently, Tertullian exhorts penitents to prayer, fasting and humiliating themselves in the presence of God by weeping and groaning. They were to prostrate themselves "at the feet of the priest and kneel before the beloved of God making all the brethren commissioned ambassador of your prayer for pardon".<sup>92</sup> *Exomologesis* in this sense becomes more like the rite or procedure through which God forgives the sinner. In other word "penance" has the sense that one tortures oneself in order to gain divine pardon. Tertullian writes on the *exomologesis* that: "in humbling a man it [the *exomologesis*] exalts him. When it defies him, he is cleansed. In accusing, it excuses. In condemning, it absolves. In proportion as you have no mercy on yourself, believe me, in just this same measure God

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<sup>87</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity* (The History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, vol. 3; trans. David Smith and John Austin Baker; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 439–40.

<sup>88</sup> William Tabbernee, "To Pardon or not to Pardon? North African Montanism and the forgiveness of sins", *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001): 375- 386.

<sup>89</sup> Osborne, *Reconciliation & Justification*, 57; *De oration* 7, 1-2; *De poenitentia* 8, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Tertullian, *Treatise on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity*, in *Ancient Christian Writers* 28 (New York: Newman Press, 1959), 32.

<sup>91</sup> Osborne, *Reconciliation & Justification*, 56.

<sup>92</sup> Tertullian, *Treatise on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity*, 3.

will have mercy upon you”.<sup>93</sup> This was the belief of the time. The *exomologesis* became the standard structure of the sacrament of reconciliation which in a later form led to the sort of abuses that climaxed in the Reformation.

Briefly, Tertullian believed that God forgives sins through rigorous penance or *exomologesis*. Some sins cannot be forgiven by any human being but only by God and so he argued that sinners should be excluded from the Church for an infinite period of penance.

### **1.5.2 Origen**

Origen supported Tertullian’s *exomologesis* and confession in continuity with the Old Testament and made his own list of sins to be confessed to a priest. Like Tertullian, Origen believed that murder, apostasy, and adultery can only be forgiven by God.<sup>94</sup> However, Origen departed from Tertullian in that he believed all sins can be forgiven by God if one resolves to sin no more. This idea is in harmony with the Talmudic and Midrashic teaching of the God of compassion and mercy who always forgives the iniquity of his people (Pes. Rab. 44:185a; Hag. 5a; Ber. 12b, “he who sins and regrets his acts is at once forgiven”).

For Origen, there should be a distinction between *metanoia* (repentance) and *aphesis* (remission/release). The latter means God’s goodness and free will to forgive the sins of a penitent at baptism or in martyrdom. God forgives the penitent completely as though there never been sins in the first place. The former for Origen means that sins deserve punishment either on earth or after death unless the penitent does penance, changes and renounces sins in humiliation or public *exomologesis*. For Origen, sins are forgiven completely in baptism. But for post-baptismal forgiveness of sins, one has to repent.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, it is a moral miracle to be sinlessness after baptism.<sup>96</sup> Thus, there are two forms of Christian repentance, namely a once only repentance for grave or deliberate sins and a repeated repentance for slight or involuntary sins. Confession is of great help when

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<sup>93</sup> Tertullian, *Treatise on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity*, 32.

<sup>94</sup> Ernest F. Latko, *Origen's Concept of Penance* (Quebec / Persée: Université de Lyon 1949), 11.

<sup>95</sup> Origen, *De Oratione* 28.10. cf. Origen on Prayer.

<sup>96</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 59.



done to a person who is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To this end, “a bishop bound in sin cannot loose sinners”.<sup>97</sup>

For Origen, reconciliation comes through a priest who is filled with the Spirit and so ‘forgives whatever God forgives’ (ἀφήσιν, ἃ ἐὰν ἀφῆ ὁ θεός) (*De or.* 28,8). Origen connects forgiveness of sins to the book of Leviticus and insists that in Jesus there are seven sacrifices for sins, namely: baptism; martyrdom (Luke 11: 41); acts of forgiveness for others, as mentioned in the Lord Prayer; by converting a sinner (James 5:20); the sinner who loves much in Luke 7:47, 1 Peter 4:8; Proverbs 10:12; and an outpouring of love and penance.<sup>98</sup> Origen further states: “people can sin after baptism, however, on rare occasions some are to be found who have not sinned since their conversion”.<sup>99</sup>

In brief, Origen believes that forgiveness of sins is obtained through *metanoia*, *aphesis*, repentance, confession to a holy priest, and there are occasions where some sins need exclusion and God’s prerogative to forgive.

### **1.5.3 Cyprian (c. 200–258 CE)**

Cyprian asserts the ecclesial power to forgive the apostates and refutes Tertullian and Origen’s position to not forgive certain sins.<sup>100</sup> For Cyprian, the Church has the authority to forgive any sins. Confession to a priest is necessary for one’s sins to be forgiven. Cyprian appointed priests to become spiritual judges over the people and thus perform the judicial function or magistracy in spiritual matters.<sup>101</sup> Although Cyprian encourages the exomologesis of Tertullian, he adds the concept of *pax*, peace at the end of exomologesis, which later on became the absolution. He also brings the concept of *satisfactio*, which means making token, not full amends.<sup>102</sup> At this time, “there is no evidence of any confession in the presence of the congregation”.<sup>103</sup> In continuing Cyprian’s *pax*, the “bishop

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<sup>97</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 65.

<sup>98</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 57.

<sup>99</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 59.

<sup>100</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *De lapsis* 16; *Epist.* 61.3.

<sup>101</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 68; Eamon Duffy comment on the role of every bishop becoming judge over the penitent cf. Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene Press, 1987, 2001), 37.

<sup>102</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 70.

<sup>103</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 70.

laid his hand upon the penitent for his reconciliation and restoration to the communion of the faithful”.<sup>104</sup> The sign of this imposition of a single hand seems to be “the recalling of the Holy Spirit repelled by grave sin”.<sup>105</sup> Cyprian and later Augustine claimed that Tertullian’s teaching of sins that were not forgivable by the bishop did not represent the teaching of the church.<sup>106</sup>

Briefly, while Cyprian supported the concept of repentance and confession, he veered away from his teacher Tertullian in that all sins must be confessed to a priest and penance is a duty to be done by the penitent. The priest became the judge over the confession of sins, while the bishop reconciles the excommunicated penitent with *pax*. For Cyprian, confession was seen as the main part of forgiveness of sins.<sup>107</sup>

In 217 C.E Pope Callixtus decreed the authority of the bishop to forgive all sins, including the sins of adultery, fornication and apostasy. This decree made a difference not only to people but also to the theology of penance in the third century. It created division and led to the birth of Novatianism, as well as Tertullian’s hostility towards the bishop.<sup>108</sup> It was at this period that Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Origen rejected the authority of the bishop to forgive all sins including adultery and fornication.

These three leaders made the following opposition against the bishops’ claim to the authority to forgive all sins: firstly, Hippolytus, in his work *Philosophumena*<sup>109</sup>; secondly, Tertullian, in his work “Modesty”<sup>110</sup> and thirdly, Origen in his work “on Prayer”.<sup>111</sup> For Tertullian, the bishop can only forgive the sin which he calls “offenses of comparative moral insignificance”.<sup>112</sup> Origen states: “A bishop bound in sin cannot loose sinners”.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 70.

<sup>105</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 70.

<sup>106</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 55*; Augustine, *De libro Act. Apost.*; *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, 217 v., indexes 4 v. (Paris 1878–90) 34:994.

<sup>107</sup> Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 184-185.

<sup>108</sup> The rejection of Tertullian is in his *De Pudicitia* chapter 19; cf. William P. Le Saint, “Tertullian Treatises on Penance, on Penitence, on Purity, Issue 28”, in *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York Paulist Press, 1959), 48.

<sup>109</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*: 62.

<sup>110</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 63.

<sup>111</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 65.

<sup>112</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 63.

<sup>113</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 65. For Origen’s argument against the bishop to forgive the triad sin and his understanding of John 20:22-23.

Against this background, Cyprian in his Treatise “On the Lapsed”<sup>114</sup> argued that the bishop and basically all priests have the power assigned to them by the Lord Jesus to forgive all sins.<sup>115</sup> His work on the unity of the Church and priests around his Bishop was reinforced by the episcopal position to exercise the power of the keys. One should remember that at this time, from the third to the fourth centuries, the Church was growing rapidly and was seen by people as “an ark to save the perishing”.<sup>116</sup> With this view, converts came to Church because the church forgives their sins.<sup>117</sup> And so “redemption from sin through Christianity became an element of popular thought.”<sup>118</sup> This thought was strongly reinforced by the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312 CE.

Two major changes were now applied by the Church to show that repentant sinners were forgiven by God and are reconciled with both the Church and God. The first change was Cyprian’s *pax* at the end of the *exomologesis*. Basically “the bishop laid his hand upon the penitent for his reconciliation and restoration to the communion of the faithful”.<sup>119</sup> Metaphorically, the imposition of a single hand of the bishop over the head of the penitents seemingly recalled the Holy Spirit who had been repelled by serious sins to dwell with the penitent again.<sup>120</sup> Of great interest, “there is no evidence of any confession in the presence of the congregation”,<sup>121</sup> but only an external sign which marks the reconciliation of penitents with God and the Church through imposition of a hand by the bishop. This sign is equivalent to satisfaction (*satisfactio*), which is akin to a kind of token for sorrow.<sup>122</sup> At this point in the history of penance, the bishop held the authority to direct penitents in matters of penitential discipline.

Second, the priest became judge over the sacrament of penance. This meant the need for the priests to be united around the bishop in pastoral ministry. Cyprian accorded to all

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<sup>114</sup> Cyprian, *Ancient Christian Writers*, 25; Cf. Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 67.

<sup>115</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 67.

<sup>116</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 77.

<sup>117</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 77.

<sup>118</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 78.

<sup>119</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 70.

<sup>120</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 70.

<sup>121</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 70.

<sup>122</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 70.

priests “a judicial function or magistracy in spiritual things”.<sup>123</sup> A priest could now give penance (penalty) to the penitent. In this sense, Cyprian believed that penance are works and must be paid. Later, this thought degenerates to a weakness in Cyprian’s teaching that made him “largely responsible for the growth of the idea that *operatio* really means the payment of penalties fixed by a tariff relating them to the nature of the offence”.<sup>124</sup>

The two major changes of the fourth century, namely the authority of the bishop to forgive all sins and the judicial function of the priests in spiritual matters, led Cyril of Alexandria to claim that the power to forgive sins lay with the cleric, as per John’s Gospel. From this vantage point, the Gospel of John 20:19-23 becomes central to the Church’s teaching about forgiveness of sins in the Church. This teaching was disputed by scholars in the medieval period and reaffirmed by the Council of Trent (1556) and continues to be a discussion among scholars. I now turn to Cyril of Alexandria’s theological view of forgiveness in John 20:19-23.

#### **1.5.4 Patristic era (400–700 CE)**

In this period the most influential theologians were Augustine (354–430) and Cyril of Alexandria (376–444). Augustine took a lead from Tertullian and the middle way between Origen and Cyprian. For Augustine, venial sins are forgiven by God through prayer, fasting, almsgiving and prayer, particularly the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>125</sup> However, the Church of his time continued excommunication as an ecclesial disciplinary action for those who were threatening the moral unity with God and the community.<sup>126</sup>

Cyril of Alexandria (376–444) focused on priestly confession of sins and absolution. He continued the legacy of Cyprian of Alexandria. The rest of the Church Fathers in this period followed Cyril of Alexandria’s lead with little differences. These included Basil the Great

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<sup>123</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 68.

<sup>124</sup> Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 72.

<sup>125</sup> Augustine, *Sermons*, 351 and 352.

<sup>126</sup> Augustine, “Letter 185.3.13, The Correction of the Donatists,” in Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City, 1990), 187; Gregory A. Wills, “A Historical Analysis of Church Discipline,” in *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, ed. John S. Hammett and Benjamin L. Merkle (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 132–39.

(329 or 330-379)<sup>127</sup>, Ambrose of Milan (340-397)<sup>128</sup>, Theodore of Mopsuestia (392-428)<sup>129</sup>, John Chrysostom (349-407)<sup>130</sup>, and Pope Leo the Great (400-461)<sup>131</sup>. Adolf von Harnack, an authority in dogmatic theology, has made some remarks on the interpretation of patristic theology.<sup>132</sup> He cited Tertullian and Augustine as the most influential theologians of the early centuries.<sup>133</sup>

### **1.5.5 Augustine of Hippo (354–430)**

Augustine is the theologian to whom Protestants turn in their debates with the Roman Catholics. He influenced the theology of Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin as they formulated their own theologies. Although maintaining the priests' special role in granting forgiveness, Augustine established interdependence between priest and laity in order for forgiveness to take effect. In effect, then, Augustine established a mediating position between Tertullian and Cyprian.

Despite Augustine's influence on later scholarship, I will add Cyril of Alexandria to von Harnack's list, as it is Cyril of Alexandria who made confession to a priest a *sine qua non* for all Catholics; this was taken up by the Council of Trent. Although it was disputed at the second Vatican Council, it remains the official Roman Catholic Church system for forgiveness of sins.

With reference to John 20:19-23, Augustine connected John's account of Jesus bestowing the Holy Spirit with Paul's statement regarding the Holy Spirit's enabling the Church to love (Rom 5:5), which was the Scripture Augustine quoted more than any other throughout all his writings. Burns has shown how, by connecting to Rom 5:5, Augustine sharply diverged from Cyprian's understanding of the efficacy of forgiveness. Burns writes:

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<sup>127</sup> Basil the Great, *Rules Briefly Treated* 288.

<sup>128</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *Penance* 1:1.

<sup>129</sup> Theodore Of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 16

<sup>130</sup> John Chrysostom, *The Priesthood* 3:5

<sup>131</sup> Pope Leo the Great, Letter of Pope Leo I to the Bishops of Campania, Samnium and Picenum dated March 6, 459 AD.

<sup>132</sup> von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 5.14–15; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition [100–600] (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1971) 359.

<sup>133</sup> von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 5.14–15.

Augustine explained that the gift of the Holy Spirit which Christ bestowed upon his disciples in John 20:22–23 was given to the whole church ... and not to the episcopal college alone. Christ had empowered his true disciples to forgive sins and the saints performed this service by their prayer and intercession.<sup>134</sup>

For Augustine, sins are either forgiven or retained by the apostles according to the words of the risen Lord.<sup>135</sup>

Briefly, Augustine believed that prayer, almsgiving, and fasting are effective ways for God to forgive sins and advocated excommunication for those who do not repent. Cyril of Alexandria made confession to a priest and penance the official standard for God's forgiveness of sins.

### **1.5.6 Cyril of Alexandria (376–444)**

The homily of Cyril of Alexandria is the formal theological genesis establishing John 20:19–23 as the divine seal of the Church's authority to forgive sins. Arguably, this homily is the continuity that consistently links and mirrors the teachings of the Church Fathers both before and after him. On vv. 22 and 23 Cyril states:

After dignifying the holy Apostles with the glorious distinction of the apostleship, and appointing them ministers and priests of the Divine Altar, as I have just said, He at once sanctifies them by vouchsafing His Spirit unto them, through the outward sign of His Breath, that we might be firmly convinced that the Holy Spirit is not alien to the Son, but Consubstantial with Him, and through Him proceeding from the Father; He shows that the gift of the Spirit necessarily attends those who are ordained by Him to be Apostles of God. And why? Because they could have done nothing pleasing unto God and could not have triumphed over the snares of sin, if they had not been *clothed with power from on high* and been transformed into something other than they were before.<sup>136</sup>

This is an important link for our purposes between the developing theology of the forgiveness of sins and John 20:19–23. We see the link between Jesus breathing on the disciples, who are named apostles, and their ordination.

## **1.6 Correlation between breath and ordination to priesthood**

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<sup>134</sup> Burns, Cyprian the Bishop, 173.

<sup>135</sup> *NPNF* 6:156; trans. S.D.F. Salmond.

<sup>136</sup> St Cyril of Alexandria on John 20:19–23 cf. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on John, LFC 43, 48 (1874/1885).

Cyril of Alexandria affirms the teaching of Athanasius, Cyprian, and Clement. Other Church Fathers, in their own time and circumstances, have made their theological voices heard on this pericope as well. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem states: “Christ physically breathed on his disciples, showing that as the breath proceeds physically from the human mouth, so too does Christ in a manner befitting God pour forth the [Spirit] from the divine essence”.<sup>137</sup> In similar words, Athanasius remarks: “[He gave the Spirit to the disciples, demonstrating his Godhead and his majesty, and intimating that he was not inferior but equal to the Spirit”].<sup>138</sup>

Contemporary scholars understand the breathing on the disciples in similar way to the biblical creation story of Adam and Eve, when God breathes the breath of life into them. Likewise, it alludes to the “I am” statements of Jesus, who shares the same substance with the Father. “Jesus’ bestowal of the life-giving Spirit serves to affirm the truth of his claim that he possesses and mediates life”.<sup>139</sup> Ambrose, like other Church Fathers, insists that the Church has been given the power to forgive sins. Cyprian in commenting on the same point observes: “to all the apostles, after his resurrection he gives an equal power. And yet that he might promote unity, he arranged by his authority the origin of that authority, as beginning from one”.<sup>140</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia exclaims: “what truly wonderful gifts! Indeed, it does not only give the power over the elements and the faculty to make signs and wonders but also concedes that God may name them [judges] and therefore the servants receive from him [God] the authority that is proper to him [God]”.<sup>141</sup> Chrysostom emphasises the priestly function over that of angels in that: “[Priests] have been entrusted with the stewardship of heavenly things and they have received an authority that God has not given to angels or archangels”.<sup>142</sup> Later in the 10th century he was quoted by Leo the

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<sup>137</sup> Cyril of Alexandria Commentary on the Gospel of John 9.1 LF 48:303 quoted from Joel C. Elowsky, Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVb* (Downers Groves, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 362.

<sup>138</sup> Athanasius Discourses against the Arians 1.12.50. NPNF 24:336.

<sup>139</sup> Catrin H. Williams, “The Gospel of John”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* eds., Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2011), 108.

<sup>140</sup> Cyprian, The Unity of the Church 4. ANF 5: 422; quoted from Joel C. Elowsky, Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVb*, 362.

<sup>141</sup> CCSCO 4 3:357 quoted from Joel C. Elowsky, Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVb*, 363.

<sup>142</sup> Chrysostom quoted from Joel C. Elowsky, Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVb* (Downers Groves, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 363.

Great who insists that priestly ordination is the rite that installs upon priests the commission to forgive sins as per John 20:19-23. Leo goes further to suggest that ordination to priesthood should “take place on Sunday, since that is the day Jesus ordained his apostles”.<sup>143</sup> The issue did not end with Leo the Great, but took a dramatic stand at the Council of Trent. This remains the normative theological teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In the Protestant Churches, the minister or pastor or priest has a role of leadership and pastoral responsibility, as appointed by the ecclesial structures, but does not exclusively stand in the place of the apostles (disciples).

For the Roman Catholics, priesthood becomes the defining Church office to forgive all sins by virtue of the Holy Spirit that comes from the Father through Christ to the apostles (disciples in John 20:19-23). This position did not go long without challenge. From the eighth century through the Carolingian Empire, the Middle Ages and culminating in the Reformation, theologians gradually started asking when God forgives sins.<sup>144</sup> This question leads me to the pre-Reformation period, to which I turn now.

As I have mentioned above, the homily of Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth century is the commencement of almost two thousand years of scholarship of forgiveness of sins based on John 20:19-23. The name and praxis has changed to suit the pastoral needs of the time. Rinaldo Ronzani rightly states: “‘Over the centuries, the concrete form in which the church has exercised this power received from the Lord varied considerably’ according to the shift that took place in theology as well as in the changing pastoral situations”.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, Osborne reflects on the sacrament of penance, noting that “certain practices take shape within the church (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant), and these practices perdure even though they are not ideal or pure”.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Leo the Great, Cf. Letter 9.2.

<sup>144</sup> Rob Meens, *Penance Medieval Europe 600-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101-139, and between 10th and 11th century 140-189.

<sup>145</sup> Rinaldo Ronzani, *Conversion and Reconciliation: The Rite of Penance* (Kolbe Press: Limuru, 2007), 57-58.

<sup>146</sup> Osborne, *Reconciliation and Justification*, 135; For an elaborated understanding of the theology of justification cf. G Tvard, *Justification an Ecumenical Study* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); A. McGrath, *Justitia Dei: A History of a Christian Doctrine of Justification*, v. I & V. II commencing in 1500 to the present day (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).



According to Annemarie Kidder, confessors were wise people in the communities with impeccable Godly lives, and sound in their Christian spiritual life.<sup>147</sup> Confessors were mostly lay people.<sup>148</sup>

## 1.7 From 800–1200 CE

The year 800 marks rise of the penitential rite as a public function in both public and individual confession.<sup>149</sup> This is also known as the tariff penance, as it publicly proclaimed that penalty was due. As written by Abigail Firey:

Louis the Pious, emperor, made a public confession. Pope Leo III made a public confession. Archbishop Ebo of Rheims made a public confession. Gottschalk, monk of Orbais, made a public confession. Queen Theutberga, wife of Lothar II, made a public confession.<sup>150</sup>

In the Carolingian Empire public confession became a vehicle for individuals and communities to express not only their faith in God, but also a rejection of prestige and political and religious grandeur.<sup>151</sup> The socio-political and religious life blended on the subject of confession and divine protection in all endeavours. Julia Hillner in her book *Prison, Punishment, and Penance in Late Antiquity* argues while referring to the sixth century that “the penalty was, however, to have a remarkable carrier in the ever-closer affinity of public punishment and Christian penance over the early medieval period.”<sup>152</sup> This meant that both lay rulers and church authorities in this era discovered that monastic institutions could be put to use in meeting social needs. Public penance gained respect in the society as well as proving that one was serious about repentance before God. This view Hillner argues “corresponds accurately to the more general cultural acceptance in the sixth century”.<sup>153</sup> In the East such cultural acceptance may have been supported by what Claudia

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<sup>147</sup> Annemarie Kidder, *Making Confession*, Hearing Confession: A History of the cure of Souls (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical press, 2010), 196.

<sup>148</sup> Kidder, *Making Confession*, 196.

<sup>149</sup> Julia Hillner, *Prison, Punishment, and Penance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 349-350.

<sup>150</sup> Abigail Firey, *A New History of Penance* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2008), 73.

<sup>151</sup> Mayke de Jong, “Power and Humility in Carolingian Society: The Public Penance of Louis the Pious”, *Early Medieval Europe I* (1992), 29-52; Mayke de Jong, “Transformations of Penance”, in *Ritual of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Frans Theuvs and Janet L. Nelso, the Transformation of the Roman World, 8 (Leiden, 2000), 185-224.

<sup>152</sup> Hillner, *Prison, Punishment*, 349.

<sup>153</sup> Hillner, *Prison, Punishment*, 333.

Rapp has called the concept of ‘vicarious penance’, a strong understanding of monks’ ability to shoulder sins on behalf of the less spiritually advanced and to act as a guarantor and intercessor at the final judgement”.<sup>154</sup>

During this period the individual in the society and institution came into consideration in a new way.<sup>155</sup> In this period, the low scholasticism or Cathedral Schools began to influence the thoughts of forgiveness of sins, moving from pastoral terms to academic usage of attrition, contrition and confession to priestly absolution.

The Roman Empire under Charlemagne revitalised the schools for education, monasteries and Cathedrals.<sup>156</sup> Particularly monasteries were for elites who sought spiritual enlightenment.<sup>157</sup> Interest in philosophical thought and religious beliefs gave rise to theological debates in the years that followed. Education was well received by the monasteries which played a significant role in the empire. Central to this period in the Carolingian empire is the role of the monasteries to forgive sins of both the living and the dead.<sup>158</sup> This function was restricted to monks who performed penance on behalf of penitents’ sins. It was an intercessory role that was understood to bring about forgiveness of sins and ensure that the society is under divine protection.<sup>159</sup>

Education in the monasteries and religious communities steered a change in scholarship. New theologians emerged from the monasteries. In their book *Medieval handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales and Selections from Related*

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<sup>154</sup> Claudia Rapp, (2007), 136-145. The term ‘vicarious penance’ was first coined in German by J. Hömann, the early 20th century theologian.

<sup>155</sup> Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (London: SPCK, 1972), 158; Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in the Twelfth Century Romance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 1-2.

<sup>156</sup> Lupus of Ferrières, “Letter 5”, in *The Letters of Lupus of Ferrières*, trans. Graydon Regenos (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966a), 15-16; The monasteries were the main institutions not only for prayers and entertainments but also monuments for elites education in the ninth century. “Monasteries were symbols of Christian beliefs and were thus used in frontier regions in order to extend Frankish authority and help built the image of a unified Christian empire”. Cf. letters of Ferrières to seek for advice from Einhard in reading the spiritual meaning of Boethius’ *De institutione arithmetica* as well as the intention to study the work of Victorios, “guided by the grace of God and instructed by you”. The correspondence of Lupus’ with Altuin provides insight into the monasteries academic status in the society. Lupus of Ferrières, “Letter 8”, in *The Letters of Lupus of Ferrières*, trans. Graydon Regenos (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966b), 21.

<sup>157</sup> Mayke de Jong, “Carolingian Monasticism: The power of Prayer”, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History. Volume II, c. 700-c.900*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 637.

<sup>158</sup> de Jong, “Carolingian Monasticism: The power of Prayer”, 629.

<sup>159</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism. Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 1984), 66-67.

*Documents*, John McNeill and Helena Gamer give a description of penance and the procedures followed by the clerics on how to impose the just penance (penalty) on the penitents, according to the documents of the time.<sup>160</sup> Shortly afterwards Paul Anciaux published his book entitled “*La théologie Du Sacrement de Pénitence aux XII siècle*”.<sup>161</sup> This book illustrates the genesis of new theological thoughts on the essence of forgiveness of sins as a shift from penance to contrition, attrition, and confession. It goes on to present the theology of the two contritionists and proponents of the sacramental theology of the time, namely Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard. These two figures mark a turning point in the forgiveness of sins and the beginning of sacramental theology.<sup>162</sup> For Abelard and Lombard, God forgives sins at the moment of contrition. From this view, the question to be raised is: what is the role of the community and of the clerics? Marie-Dominique Chenu puts into context the cultural and historical background of Medieval Scholasticism to illustrate the point of theological debates that were taking place in the 12th century and which spread in the following centuries, showing how they led to the rise of Reformation.<sup>163</sup>

A major topic of the day was penance and so the emerging scholars had the task of explaining what penance is in the ones’ belief. These scholars are important for our purposes because they shape the theological and pastoral understanding of divine forgiveness of sins. Some of the scholars who contributed to the theology of forgiveness of sins include Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scott. I will summarise the tenet of each theologian regarding forgiveness of sins.

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<sup>160</sup> John McNeill & Helena Gamer, *Medieval handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales and Selections from Related Document* (Columbia University Press, 1948 (1990)).

<sup>161</sup> Anciaux *La théologie Du Sacrement de Pénitence au XII siècle*, vii. For a comprehensive comparison and understanding of penance and practice in the Middle Ages, see Sarah Hamilton, “The Unique Favour of Penance: The Church and the People c. 800 – c. 1100”, in Peter Linehan & Janet L. Nelson (eds), *The Medieval World* (London /New York: Routledge, 2001), 229-245. On confession, see Peter Biller, “Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction”, in Peter Biller, Alastair J. Minnis (eds), *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* (York: York Medieval Press, 1998), 3-33.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Lucas Briola, “A Case Study of Scholasticism: Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard on Penance”, *Journal of Moral theology*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2016): 65-85.

<sup>163</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) especially Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Nature and Man” *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*”, in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* (ed) and Trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 1-48.

### 1.7.1 Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109)

Anselm from the Benedictine Order is a product of monastic life and an example of how individualistic society was coming to discuss matters of faith openly.

For Anselm, in approaching questions of life, faith should come first. This approach led to his axiom “Faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*)”. Anselm (1033-1109)<sup>164</sup> became the first theologian to borrow the term atonement from the Old Testament and formulate a theology of redemption and satisfaction. Anselm’s theology is influenced by Augustine. He is well known for his satisfaction theory of the atonement of Christ and the ontological argument about the existence of God. For Anselm, the satisfaction theory is based on God’s mercy and love, which forgives the sins of people by the obedience and death of Jesus. The act of Jesus dying gives God honour, in contrast to human sinning which deprives God of honour. In this sense the satisfaction theory is far from penal substitution in which Jesus died in place of sinners.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo* (Why Did God Become Man?), 1098. Nicholas E. Lombardo (Nicholas Emerson), *The Father's will: Christ's crucifixion and the goodness of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>165</sup> He has been criticised by recent scholars such as Cynthia Crysdale and Rita Nakashima Brock among others. Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 115; Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 56; Hans Boersma, “Eschatological Justice and the Cross: Violence and Penal Substitution”, *Theology Today*, Vol.60: 2 (July 2003):186-199. Crysdale and Brock argued that Anselm’s theory of satisfaction makes God a “sadistic and bloodthirsty” God. They reject the traditional atonement models on the grounds that if God is satisfied by human suffering then penal substitution is of no value. Rather for Brock divine penal substitution is “an eschatological justice that furthers peace and reconciliation and, as such, offers hope to both victims and perpetrators of violence”. It is not the aim of this paper to argue about satisfaction theory of Anselm. However, to briefly respond to Crysdale and Brock as well as others who argued against Anselm’s theory of satisfaction and penal substitution, it is necessary to understand the premise of Anselm’s argument, which is that justice for God is to save humankind through the death of Jesus. God does not owe Satan anything and therefore there is nothing for God to pay Satan. Human beings owe God love, praise and glory. The satisfaction theory does not mean rejoicing in the suffering of Jesus, but primarily making a restitution. Chapter seven and eight of the *Cur Deus Homo* deals specifically with this difficult subject. Anselm refers to Colossians 2:14; Psalms 77:39 (78:39) and John 8:34 to explain that the person who sins is liable to punishment and that is the judgement of God. However, “Now, he who sins ought not to be let off unpunished—unless mercy spares the sinner and frees him and restores him.” The vicarious atonement of Christ explains the significance of Christ’s sufferings, rather than painting a sadistic God who graciously out of love and mercy saves humankind. For more details on penal justice, penal substitution and theory of satisfaction cf. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), 305-310 especially 308; Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Father's will: Christ's crucifixion and the goodness of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), Book I.8–10 deals with Anselm’s argument of the *Cur Deus Homo*, Abelard’s response to Anselm’s notion of redemption, and the Devil’s Ransom revisited theology. For the alternative argument cf. Aaron Milavec, “Is God Arbitrary and Sadistic? Anselm's Atonement Theory Reconsidered”, *Schola* 4 (1981): 45-94; Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God So Loved the World?” in *Christianity, Patriarchy and*

Central to forgiveness of sins in this period is the priest. Confession to the priest was supported by the bishops of the time and the Carolingian empire. With Anselm's position, more theological schools of thoughts emerged, including Augustinians, Dominicans and Franciscans. The school of Augustinians was led by Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536).<sup>166</sup> He was an influential Catholic humanist who produced considerable scholarly patristic work, especially on the works of Augustine. The Franciscan school was led by the Duns Scotus (1265-1308), and the Dominican school by Thomas Aquinas. These schools held considerable diversity on theological topics such as justification, salvation by faith and grace through works and human merit, sacraments and other topics pertaining to eternal life which are beyond the scope of this study.

Anselm relates Faith and Reason as compatible in explaining the existence of God. For Anselm, faith should come first in order to understand the mysteries of life. Anselm's approach leads to his axiom "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*). He applied this line of thinking in his Ontological argument to explain the existence of God. His Discourse, the *Proslogium* is a philosophical and yet faith filled texts ranging from the Biblical texts, Church Fathers' teaching, and other topics of moral and social teaching pertaining to the existence of God.<sup>167</sup> In the *Prologium*, Anselm, argues that God is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" (*a liquid quod maius non cogitari potest*). Like Augustine, Anselm discusses other issues of faith in other works and insists that a starting point for knowledge is faith than the other way around.<sup>168</sup>

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*Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bonn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), 1-30; Darby Kathleen Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1998); Craig L. Nesson, "Violence and Atonement", *Dialog* 35 (1996): 26-35; Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011).

<sup>166</sup> Protestantism in a number of ways. One of these was his translation of the Greek New Testament. Secondly, he was able to produce many of the scholarly patristic works, especially those of Augustine. He also wrote the *Enchiridion*, which became a bestseller, and began reforming echoes at Zurich and Wittenberg. In such influences it is said that Luther hatched the egg that Erasmus laid.

<sup>167</sup> It is fair to say that in the "In *De Veritate*", Anselm is known, as a theologian and philosopher who paved the way to prove that God exists from rationale perspective.

<sup>168</sup> Anselm, *De Veritate*. Anselm argues that God is the source of all life cf. *De Libertate Arbitrii* (On Free Will), *De Casu Diaboli* (The Fall of the Devil), *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God became Man) the above four seem to be the main theological interest of Medieval Theology.

The 12th century presents a major turning point in the scholarship of the sacrament of penance.<sup>169</sup> Two schools of thoughts appeared in this period as a result of individualistic thinking.<sup>170</sup> Emmet McLaughlin observes: “The historical study of the sacramental penance from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries has been driven confessional apologetic and intra-Catholic theological politics”.<sup>171</sup> On the one hand, Catholic Scholars such as Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, follows the Fourth Lateran Council’s teaching on forgiveness of sins. On the other hand, John Wyclif, John Huss, and later Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley counter the view of forgiveness of sins as traditionally understood by the Catholics. In my view, from the above scholars stem both a new sacramental theology and a practical theology of forgiveness of sins in Christian Churches under study namely, Roman Catholic, Anglican Church, Lutheran Church, and the Uniting Church. This theology could well be identified as what Bernhard Poschmann calls “the early scholastic period to the Reformation: the reformation of a theoretical doctrine of penance”.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, in 1215 the decree *Omnis Utriusque Sexus* of the Fourth Lateran Council initiates more debated on the sacrament of reconciliation. This decree makes the yearly confession to a priest an obligation for all Christians. This decision did not satisfy some theologians such as Wyclif. While the Roman Church claims power of both spiritual and temporal matters, theologians, “schoolmen” independently start thinking of the essence of forgiveness of sins. I will turn to some scholars of the time and describe their theological view on forgiveness of sins.

### **1.7.2 Peter Abélard (1079–1142)**

Abélard stands out as the scholar whose theological argument of forgiveness of sins<sup>173</sup> based on attrition gained acceptance in all theological institutions of the time. Abélard not only brought a new term “attrition” as the basis for forgiveness of sins, but also formulated the concept of the seven Sacraments, which is in use in the Roman Catholic Church today

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<sup>169</sup> David Schaff, *John Huss, His Life, Teachings, and Death After Five Hundred Years* (New York: New Library Press Net, 2015), 107.

<sup>170</sup> Morris, *The Discovery*, 158; Hanning, *The Individual*, 1-2.

<sup>171</sup> Emmet R. McLaughlin, *Truth, Tradition, and History: The Historiography of High / Late Medieval and Early Modern Penance* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 19.

<sup>172</sup> Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing*, 3.

<sup>173</sup> Peter Abelard, “Ethics”, in *Ethical Writings*, trans. Paul V. Spade (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995) 150.

but is rejected by Protestants, who hold that only two sacraments are dominical: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Abélard develops his argument concerning the forgiveness of sins based on intention as the guiding principle for moral rightness or wrongness and the locus of divine forgiveness of sins.<sup>174</sup> The *contritione cordis* happens in the interior inner life of a penitent. Both faith and works are incomplete without each other.

Peter Abelard's theological position is well known in two works namely, the *Ethics* and the *Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Christian, and a Jew*. The former is known as "Know yourself" and the latter known as "Colationes". Both his works are incomplete. The development of divine forgiveness of sins concerns the second part of his *Ethics*. In this, Abelard develops his argument based on intention as the guiding principle for moral rightness or wrongness and the locus of divine forgiveness of sins.<sup>175</sup> The *contritione cordis* happens in the interior inner life of a penitent.

The rise of new universities and Cathedral schools stimulated debates on the existence of God and the natures of God's forgiveness among other theological topics. Arguments on the essential key element for forgiveness sins were put in three separate components: contrition, confession and satisfaction. The debates on penance and other matters of faith led to new branches of theological thinking.

### **1.7.3 Peter Lombard (c. 1100–1160)**

For Peter Lombard, forgiveness of sins happens at the moment of contrition.<sup>176</sup> However, contrition is not complete without confession. In other words, Peter Lombard insists that

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<sup>174</sup> Abelard, "Ethics", in *Ethical Writings*, 150 cf. D. E. Luscombe's edition (New York: Oxford University Press 1971), 32 the Latin translation "*Tria itaque sunt in reconciliatio peccatoris ad Deum, penitentia scilicet, confession, satisfaction*"; Peter Abelard, "Ethics" in *Ethical Writings*, trans. Paul V. Spade (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), Paragraph 7; Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non: A Critical Edition*, ed., Blanche B. Boyer and Richard McKeon (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 510;

<sup>175</sup> Abelard, "Ethics", in *Ethical Writings*, 32; Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non: A Critical Edition*, ed., Blanche B. Boyer and Richard McKeon (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 510.

<sup>176</sup> Abelard, "Ethics", in *Ethical Writings*, 150.

confession is necessary for true contrition<sup>177</sup> because “true penance includes the intention to submit oneself to each divine rule”.<sup>178</sup>

Peter Lombard is known for his Sentences<sup>179</sup> in four Books.<sup>180</sup> Book I, *De Dei Unitate et Trinitate* (The Mystery of the Trinity) lays down the doctrine of the Trinity. Book II, *De Rerum Creatione et Formatione Corporalium et Aliis Pluribus eo Pertinentibus* (On Creation), Book III, *De Incarnatione Verbi et Humani Generis Reparatione* (On the Incarnation of the Word) and Book IV, *De Doctrina Signorum* (On the Doctrine of Signs).<sup>181</sup> It is Book IV that addresses the topic of the forgiveness of sins; here, Lombard demonstrates his theological expertise on the sacraments and signs and their significance in Christian life.<sup>182</sup> Peter Lombard was the first theologian to enumerate the seven sacraments<sup>183</sup> and emphasise the need for penance in Christian life. The Sentences were the principal books for teaching theology in the all universities in the Middle Ages.<sup>184</sup> Paul Anciaux writes : “Peter Lombard (c.1100-1160) was the first truly magisterial teacher of the emerging schools of Paris, which were to become the greatest of all medieval universities. The Sentences, his most important work, date from the middle of the twelfth century”.<sup>185</sup>

The medieval era was a revolutionary scholasticism of new ways of learning with the rise of new universities, Cathedral schools, and interests in the beauty of both earthly and

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<sup>177</sup> Anciaux published a book entitled, *La théologie Du Sacrement de Pénitence au XII siècle* (Louvain: É. Nauwelaerts, 1949), 230.

<sup>178</sup> Peter Lombard in P. L., CXCII, 885.

<sup>179</sup> *The Sentences* of Peter Lombard are a collection of discussions on various topics in the early Church. It includes the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, various topics on faith, creation, fall, and theology of penance in the medieval period. For Lombard, the sacraments are both a “visible sign of invisible grace” and a “cause of the grace they signify”. His understanding of sacraments includes Augustine of Hippo’s theology of sacraments.

<sup>180</sup> Lombard, *The Sentences*, Books 1–4. trans. Giulio Silano, 4 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007-2010); Peter Lombard, *Four Books of Sentences of Peter Lombard: Book I, Distinction Forty-three : Invective Against Those who Say that God Can Do Nothing Except what He Wills and Does*, trans. Janine Marie Idziak (Department of Philosophy, Oklahoma State University, 1983); Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of medieval Studies, 2010), IV,d.1,c.4, a.2.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Frances Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System* (Merrick, NY: Richwood Pub. Co., 1976).

<sup>182</sup> Lombard, *The Sentences*, Books IV. translator, Giulio Silano, 4 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007-2010).

<sup>183</sup> Thomas M. Finn, “The sacramental world in the sentences of Peter Lombard”, in *Theological Studies* 69 (2008), 557- 582.

<sup>184</sup> Finn, “The sacramental world in the sentences of Peter Lombard”, 557- 582.

<sup>185</sup> Anciaux, *La théologie Du Sacrement de Pénitence au XII siècle*, 230.



heavenly life. The period is marked by philosophical and theological questions on the understanding of forgiveness of sins, debates among scholars, and new way of presenting argument based on Biblical passages in the light of logic and reason. People sought to know when and how God forgives sins. Argumentation on the essential key element for forgiveness of sins were put in three separate components mainly contrition, confession and satisfaction. The debates on penance and other matters of faith lead to new branches of theological thinking that later in my view, produces the doctrine of penance in the four churches under study notably, the Lutheran, Anglican and the now Uniting Church as then inspired by Wesleyan belief of salvation.

For Peter Lombard, forgiveness of sins happens at the moment of contrition. However, contrition is not complete without confession. In other words, Peter Lombard insists that confession is necessary for true contrition because “true penance includes the intention to submit oneself to each divine rule”.<sup>186</sup>

## **1.8 Pre-Reformation period 1200–1500 CE**

### **1.8.1 Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)**

Thomas Aquinas retained Lombard’s emphasis on the role of contrition in the forgiveness of sins and added that the absolution of the priest justifies the penitent.<sup>187</sup> For Aquinas the sacrament sanctifies and consists of two parts, namely matter and form.<sup>188</sup> This is Aristotle’s philosophical reasoning for explaining the nature of things. In his work *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas borrowed Aristotle’s philosophical paradigm to explain God’s forgiveness of sins.<sup>189</sup> For Aquinas the priest’s words, “I absolve you” (*Ego te absolvo*), were the form of the sacrament, whereas the penitent was the matter of the sacrament.<sup>190</sup> In this sense, the words, “I absolve you” pronounced by the priest in the indicative mood,

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<sup>186</sup> Anciaux, *La théologie Du Sacrement de Pénitence ay XII siècle*, 230.

<sup>187</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica III, Question 86 Article 4*. Here Aquinas deals with the effective pardon of God to all mortal sins.

<sup>188</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 4:2351 (Q. 62. 3. 3).

<sup>189</sup> *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder, O.P. (1941; Rockford, Ill.: Tan, 1978).

<sup>190</sup> Anne T. Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming of the Reformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 95.

cause grace to effectively take place. Without the priest, according to Aquinas, forgiveness of sins is incomplete.

Thomas Aquinas retains Lombard's significance role of contrition in the forgiveness of sins and adds that the absolution of the priest justifies the penitent.<sup>191</sup> For Aquinas the sacrament consists of two parts, namely matter and form. His most famous work is *Summa Theologica*.<sup>192</sup> In the sacrament of penance, the priest's words, "I absolve you" (*Ego te absolvo*), were the form of the sacrament whereas the penitent was the matter of the sacrament.<sup>193</sup> In this sense, the words, "I absolve you" pronounced by the priest in the inductive mood, cause grace to effectively take place. His understanding has influenced the now theological concept of baptism. According to scholastic teaching, at baptism the Trinitarian formula is the form of the sacrament and the water is the matter. The two together produce grace".<sup>194</sup> "Only the absolution of the priest, Aquinas argues, can apply the passion of Christ to the forgiveness of the guilt of sins".<sup>195</sup> Aquinas want to limit the administration of forgiveness of sins to a priest because following the scholastic teaching of matter and form producing grace in the case of baptism, any person can baptise, even a non-Christian or atheist as long as they use the Trinitarian formula and water. By contrast, if the absolution is the culmination of forgiveness of sin and can only by given by the priest, then no one can forgive sins but the priest.

Based on the research find in "penance and Anointing of the sick" by Poschmann, it become evident to Ludwig Ott that Aquinas' indicative absolution was a combination of justification and the sacrament of penance. Thus, concurred with Poschmann that "The great and epoch-making achievement of Thomas Aquinas' teaching on penance was the integration of the sacrament in the process of justification, and consequently the proof that it was an indispensable cause of the forgiveness of sins".<sup>196</sup> Thomas Aquinas associates contrition,

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<sup>191</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica III, Question 86 Article 4*. Here Aquinas deals with the effective pardon of God to all mortal sins.

<sup>192</sup> *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder, O.P. (1941; Rockford, Ill.: Tan, 1978).

<sup>193</sup> Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching, and the Coming*, 95.

<sup>194</sup> Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Liguori Publications 2014), 24.

<sup>195</sup> Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 24.

<sup>196</sup> Poschmann, *Penance and the anointing*, 169-174; Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 25; Ludwig Ott, "Das Opusculum des hl. Thomas von Aquin: De Forma absolutionis in dogmengeschichtlicher Betrachtung", in Martin Grabmann and K. Hoffmann, eds., *Festschrift Eduard Eichmann* (Paderborn, 1940), 98-136.

the contritionist position of Peter Lombard to the absolution of the priest for a complete forgiveness of sins.<sup>197</sup>

### **1.8.2 John Duns Scotus (1265–1308)**

John Duns Scotus expanded the power and necessity of the absolution beyond the teaching of Aquinas. While acknowledging in cases of rare devotion and profound contrition, forgiveness might be granted directly from God, in most cases he maintained forgiveness of sins was the result of the absolution itself within the sacrament of penance. The absolution would overcome the deficiencies of the penitent's sorrow for sin and bring about forgiveness.<sup>198</sup> At the head of these evangelical tenets was the belief that sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. In the medieval understanding, the concept of grace was a key factor for spiritual healing and sanctification. Thus, a sacrament "makes people holy".<sup>199</sup> Thus, "only those are called sacraments which signify the perfection of holiness in man."<sup>200</sup> There is a shift from contrition, confession, and attrition to faith alone. The emphasis is now on the grace of God who graciously and freely forgives the sins of one who believes.

Later John Duns Scotus expanded the power and necessity of the absolution beyond the teaching of Aquinas. While acknowledging in cases of rare devotion and profound contrition, forgiveness might be granted directly from God, in most cases he maintained forgiveness was the result of the absolution itself within the sacrament of penance. The absolution would overcome the deficiencies of the penitent's sorrow for sin and bring about forgiveness.<sup>201</sup> At the head of these evangelical tenets was the belief that sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. In the medieval understanding, the concept of grace was a key factor for spiritual healing and

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<sup>197</sup> Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching*, 95.

<sup>198</sup> Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching*, 95.

<sup>199</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Question 69, Article 9, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (reprint, Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948), 4:2409.

<sup>200</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, III, q. 60, a. 2, 4: 2340; cf. III, q 69, a. 9, 4:2409; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 60, a. 2, 4: 2340.

<sup>201</sup> Thayer, *Penitence, Preaching*, 95.

sanctification. Thus, a sacrament “makes people holy”.<sup>202</sup> Thus, Aquinas insists that “only those are called sacraments which signify the perfection of holiness in man”.<sup>203</sup>

### 1.8.3 John Wyclif (1320–1384)

Wyclif lived all his life during the turbulent period of the Avignon Popes.<sup>204</sup> His theology of forgiveness of sins is best found in his *Sermones* and the *Triologus*.<sup>205</sup> His early sermons (1376) show his struggle and yet consistency with traditional teaching of forgiveness of sins. While Wyclif accepted the necessity of contrition, confession and satisfaction, he also argued that faith in God was more necessary for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>206</sup> For the young Wyclif, “God redeems no one to the Kingdom unless he truly repents after sin”.<sup>207</sup> Confession to a priest after a true contrition is essential for the forgiveness of sins. To illustrate his argument, Wyclif used medical terminology, as was the language of the Church at the time, to explain and understand forgiveness of sins based on the tripartite sacramental terms.<sup>208</sup> Central to Wyclif is the Scripture. Wyclif noted that the Scriptures are consistent with confession to God rather than to anyone else.<sup>209</sup> This line of thought is parallel with Augustine’s teaching of the Hebrew Bible, for example Psalm 51, when David is asking forgiveness from God.

In his *Triologus*, Wyclif expressed a difficulty in understanding the sacrament of penance based on the three components; namely contrition, confession, and satisfaction.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Question 69, Article 9, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948), 4:2409.

<sup>203</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, III, q. 60, a. 2, 4: 2340; cf. III, q 69, a. 9, 4:2409.

<sup>204</sup> The period of the Avignon papacy stretches from 1309 to 1376. At this period seven popes reside in Avignon. The Church was in crisis and schism. There were two Popes the great schism 1378-1417 and later in 1378 three Popes claiming legitimacy at the same time. This schism is to be confused with the great schism between the Eastern and Western Church in 1054.

<sup>205</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, edited by Johann Leserth, 4 vols., London, 1896, iv,35, 296-304; John Wyclif, *Triologus*, edited by Gotthard Lechler (Oxford: 1869), 326-330.

<sup>206</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, iv, 35, 296-304; Stephen Penn, “Wyclif and the Sacraments”, in Ian Christopher Levy, editor, *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian*, Leiden, 2006, 283-289.

<sup>207</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, iv,35, 302 / 20-21.

<sup>208</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, iv,35, 296-304.

<sup>209</sup> Sean A. Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, in *Change and Transformation: Essays in Anglican History* edited by Thomas P. Power (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 10; *Sermones* iv, 6, 56/13-8.

<sup>210</sup> Wyclif, *Triologus*, 326-330; Sean A. Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, in *Change and Transformation: Essays in Anglican History* edited by Thomas P. Power (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 10; cf. John Wyclif, *Triologus*, 326-330.

Although the understanding of the sacrament of penance included the three components, in his late sermons and the *Triologus* (1382), Wyclif breaks with the traditional teaching of the Church and opposes the Pope on many subjects of faith, including forgiveness of sins.<sup>211</sup> For Wyclif, contrition, confession and satisfaction are not related and but “distinct types (*genera*)”.<sup>212</sup> In other words they are useful, but not necessary for salvation. Faith in God alone is the surest way to be forgiven. Wyclif lives all his life during the period of the Avignon Popes.<sup>213</sup> His theology of forgiveness of sins is best found in his *Sermones* and the *Triologus*.<sup>214</sup> His early sermons (1376) show his struggle and yet consistency with traditional teaching of forgiveness of sins, and the necessity of contrition, confession and satisfaction.<sup>215</sup> For the young Wyclif, “God redeems no one to the Kingdom unless he truly repents after sin”.<sup>216</sup> Confession to a priest after a true contrition is essential for the forgiveness of sins. To illustrate his argument, Wyclif uses medical terminology as was the language of the Church at the time to explain and understand forgiveness of sins based on the tripartite.<sup>217</sup>

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) convoked by Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) issued a bull *Omnis Utriusque Sexus* on 19 April 1213. Among other things, Innocent III emphasised the sovereignty of the Church over both spiritual and secular matters. The decree retraced back to the teaching of Cyprian in the third century that the bishop has the fullness of the role of Shepherd, the Pope is infallible and lay people should at least confess their sins once a year to a priest.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Wyclif, *Triologus*, 326.

<sup>212</sup> Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, 10.

<sup>213</sup> The period of the Avignon papacy stretches from 1309 to 1376. At this period seven popes reside in Avignon. The Church was in crisis and schism. There were two Popes the great schism 1378-1417 and later in 1378 three Popes claiming legitimacy at the same time. This schism is to be confused with the great schism between the Eastern and Western Church in 1054.

<sup>214</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, edited by Johann Leserth, 4 vols., London, 1896, iv,35, 296-304; John Wyclif, *Triologus*, edited by Gotthard Lechler (Oxford: 1869), 326-330.

<sup>215</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, 283-289.

<sup>216</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, iv,35, 302 / 20-21.

<sup>217</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, iv,35, 296-304.

<sup>218</sup> Wyclif, *Sermones*, iv, 6, 56/10-3; *Sermones* iii, 9, 67-9; iv,6, 49-57; Sean A. Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, in *Change and Transformation: Essays in Anglican History* edited by Thomas P. Power (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 10.

Wyclif rejects Pope Innocent III *decreo Omnis Utriusque Sexus* on two factors:<sup>219</sup> First, divine forgiveness requires a true contrition of the heart not a confession to a priest. “first, while it is necessary for the sinner to repent with a contrite heart in order to be forgiven, this does not include the necessity confession to a priest.”<sup>220</sup> Second, the authority of the Pope to impose a yearly confession of sins is not Biblical rather an innovation of Pope innocent III. On these grounds, Wyclif rejects confession to a priest and suggests the alternative which is the “inward confession to God”.<sup>221</sup> For Wyclif, Scripture is consistent with confession to God than to anyone else.<sup>222</sup> In his *Triologus* Wyclif expresses a difficulty in understanding the sacrament of penance based on the three components; namely contrition, confession, and satisfaction.<sup>223</sup> Although the understanding of the sacrament of penance includes the three components, in his late sermons and the *Triologus* (1382), Wyclif breaks with the traditional teaching of the Church and opposes the Pope on many subjects of faith including forgiveness of sins.<sup>224</sup> For Wyclif, contrition, confession and satisfaction are not related but “distinct types (*genera*)”.<sup>225</sup>

#### **1.8.4 Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469–1536)**<sup>226</sup>

Erasmus was trained by the Brethren of the Common Life. He lived and died as a Roman Catholic scholar, although well admired by Protestants. As Torrence Reynolds notes, Erasmus was accused by the monks for preparing the Reformation. They claimed that

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<sup>219</sup> Stephen Penn, “Wyclif and the Sacraments”, in Ian Christopher Levy, ed., *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian*, Leiden, 2006, 285-6; Sean A. Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, in *Change and Transformation: Essays in Anglican History* edited by Thomas P. Power (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 10.

<sup>220</sup> Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance, 10; *De eucharistia et poenitentia*, 322-323.

<sup>221</sup> Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, 10.

<sup>222</sup> Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, 10.

<sup>223</sup> Wyclif, *Triologus*, 326-330; Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, 10.

<sup>224</sup> Wyclif, *Triologus*, 326-330; Stephen Penn, “Wyclif and the Sacraments”, in Ian Christopher Levy, ed., *A Companion to John Wyclif*, 326.

<sup>225</sup> Otto, “John Wyclif and Thomas Cranmer on Penance”, 10.

<sup>226</sup> Protestantism in a number of ways. One of these was his translation of the Greek New Testament. Secondly, he was able to produce many of the scholarly patristic works, especially those of Augustine. He also wrote the *Enchiridion*, which became a bestseller, and began reforming echoes at Zurich and Wittenberg. In such influences it is said that Luther hatched the egg that Erasmus laid.

“[Erasmus] ‘had laid the egg, and Luther had hatched it’. Erasmus wittily dismissed the charge, claiming that Luther had hatched a different bird entirely”.<sup>227</sup>

Erasmus distanced himself from the scholastic triad of sacramental terms and justification in terms of Reformation *sola fide*. Instead, Erasmus spoke of faith and work coupled with human merit and he especially found comfort in the Church Fathers’ terminology of repentance that goes back into the Hebrew Bible. He reflected on what he calls the “Christian philosophy” or the philosophy of Christ of the Scriptures<sup>228</sup> replacing penance for repentance based on Matthew 3:2 of the Greek translation of the word *metanoieite* (*repent!*). For Erasmus the meaning of repent implies a change of heart rather than a work to be performed. It required conversion rather than an external action. The Catholics were not satisfied to see Erasmus replacing the use of *poenitentiam agite* (do penance) with *poeniteat vos* (repent).<sup>229</sup> It seems that Luther carefully studied Erasmus’ New Greek Translation of the New Testament (*Novum Instrumentum omne* of 1516)<sup>230</sup> and that this assisted him to formulate his ninety-five Theses, which launched the Reformation<sup>231</sup> and a series of attack against the Roman Catholic Church.

As a Biblical scholar, Erasmus supported the humanistic call *Ad fontes*, a return to the texts in the original languages and, therefore, promoted the study of the Biblical languages Hebrew and Greek, as well as Latin. For Erasmus, a scholar’s work is a “religious work”

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<sup>227</sup> Terrence M. Reynolds, Was Erasmus Responsible for Luther? A Study of the Relationship of the Two Reformers and Their Clash Over the Question of the Will, *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Volume 41 Number 4 (1977): 2; Arthur Robert Pennington, *The Life and Character of Erasmus* (London, 1875), 219.

<sup>228</sup> Hans Hillebrand, ed., *Philosophy of Christ in Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>229</sup> Similarly, there was an uproar also about his omission of the so-called Comma Johanneum at I John 5:7, one of the proofs for the divine trinity, for which Erasmus had found no evidence in the Greek manuscripts or support in the Fathers. The biblical commentaries of the Church Fathers and their quotations from the bible were important sources for Erasmus in establishing the text of the New Testament. He read widely and published numerous editions and translations of patristic writings, among them Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Origen, and in many cases established the first reliable critical text of their works.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>230</sup> A chronological detail on how Erasmus worked on the Greek New Testament cf. Frederick Seebohm, *The Oxford Reformers: John Colet, Erasmus, and Thomas More. Being a History of Their Fellow-Work*, 3rd ed. (London; Longmans, Green and Co., 1887), 276-278, 294-305, 312-336 and 391-407; Bludau, *Op sit.*; pp 1-58, and Rabil, *Op sit.*; pp. 83-97; Karl August Meisinger, *Erasmus von Rotter dam* (Berlin: Albert Nauch & Co., 1948), 200; Willihad Paul Eckert, *Erasmus von Rotterdam: Werk und Wirkung* (Cologne: Wienand-Verlag, 1967), 1:223.

<sup>231</sup> Lowell C. Green, “The Influence of Erasmus upon Melanchthon, Luther and the Formula of Concord in the Doctrine of Justification”. *Church History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1974): 183-200 especially 187.

because it leavens Christ in the world and is necessary for *salus*.<sup>232</sup> While *salus* means well-being or survival in classical Latin, Erasmus insists that it means “salvation” in Christian Latin”.<sup>233</sup> When one is studying the Bible, one is sacred and making one’s way to eternity.

From this vantage point, Erasmus notes; “Live as if you were going to die tomorrow” and “study as if you were to live forever”.<sup>234</sup> For those who would like to know how Biblical studies sanctifies one’s life, Erasmus gives the most humanistic answer that the question, stating that it is self-evident and in fact, “those who ‘give themselves to study with this intent will easily attain their end and become perfect’”.<sup>235</sup> Lowell C. Green notes that “It cannot be denied that he [Erasmus] provided the grammatical foundation upon which they [Luther and Melancthon] built their teaching of justification”.<sup>236</sup> Similarly Terrance shows that “Erasmus, although not consciously, to a large extent was responsible for the rise of Luther and the subsequent success of the Reformation”.<sup>237</sup>

Erasmus looked at what justification by faith could mean. He replaced the Scholastic view of grace (*gratia infusa*) with grace as divine kindness (*favour Dei*). The use of terms *imputare* and *reputare* are key to understanding Erasmus’ justification by faith. *Repute* means the qualities of a person from an analytic perspective, meaning the intrinsic qualities. *Impute* is concerned with extrinsic qualities like in Psalm 32:2 (Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit). For Erasmus then, justification through *reputare* would base a favourable judgement upon meritorious qualities within an individual, whereas *imputare* would point to a merit from without (the late *Justitia passiva*)”.<sup>238</sup> Taking the example of Romans 4:4 (Now to the one who works,

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<sup>232</sup> Constance M. Furey, *Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic of Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 44.

<sup>233</sup> Furey, *Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic of Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 44; cf. *Antibarbari* (1489-1495).

<sup>234</sup> Furey, Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic, 45; cf. *Antibarbari*.

<sup>235</sup> Furey, Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic, 45; cf. *Antibarbari*.

<sup>236</sup> Green, *The Influence of Erasmus upon Melancthon*, 187; McGrath, A. E. (1982). Humanist elements in the early Reformed doctrine of justification.

<sup>237</sup> Terrence M. Reynolds, “Was Erasmus Responsible for Luther? A Study of the Relationship of the Two Reformers and Their Clash Over the Question of the Will”, *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Volume 41 Number 4 (Dec 1977): 18-34; Lowell C. Green, “The Influence of Erasmus upon Melancthon, Luther and the Formula of Concord in the Doctrine of Justification”. *Church History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jun. 1974): 183-200 especially 188.

<sup>238</sup> Green, “The Influence of Erasmus upon Melancthon, 185; Green argued that Luther used *reputare* in his early writings. Later on when Luther speaks of *imputare*, it has the same meaning as used by Melancthon cf. Lowell C. Green, *Die Entwicklung der evangelischen Rechtfertigungslehre bei Melancthon bis 1521 im*



wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation), Erasmus explains that to be imputed in this sense means that the person has been set free, “not that the debt has been paid off in fact, but that notwithstanding one has been released, out of imputed benignity”.<sup>239</sup>

Erasmus’ opinions on forgiveness of sins through confession are expressed in his little poetic book called *Institutum christiani hominis* of 1514 affixed to his *Cato*.<sup>240</sup> For Erasmus confession is not divinely instituted. He accepted the Church’s teaching and the teaching of the Church Fathers but expressed his concern.<sup>241</sup> Like Augustine, forgiveness of sins for Erasmus is best done through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

## 1.9 Reformation

### 1.9.1 Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Luther rejected the scholastic teaching of the sacramental triad and replaced it with faith alone. The scholastic teaching is that contrition is a sorrowful heart for the sins committed and a firm decision to not sin again. Based on this definition, Luther writes: “A contrite heart is a precious thing, but it is found only where there is an ardent faith in the promises and threats of God”.<sup>242</sup> For Luther contrition is meaningless without faith. It is even deceptive when contrition is motivated by attrition, which is motivated more by the fear of punishment of hell than by the love for God. With regard to confession, Luther agreed with the decretal of Innocent III (1198–1216) that people should confess their sins at least once a year. Luther wrote: “As to the current practice of confession, I am heartily in favour

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*Vergleich mit der Luthers* (Erlangen, 1955), 86-91; for different view cf. Martin Greschat, *Melanchthon neben Luther. Studien zur Gestalt der Rechtfertigungslehre zwischen 1518 und 1537* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1965), 71 n. 107, et passim. Green has argued that Greschat’ criticisms are based on a partial look at his paper based on pp 111, 118, 141, and that he did not consider the vital reasons on pp. 86-91 which have reference from the original sources.

<sup>239</sup> Green, “The Influence of Erasmus upon Melanchthon”, 187, 200.

<sup>240</sup> Thomas N. Tentler, “Forgiveness and Consolation in the Religious Thought of Erasmus”, *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. 12 (1965), 111.

<sup>241</sup> Erasmus, *Responsio ad annotationes Edvardi Lei* (1520), LB, IX, 255-262; see especially 256B, 258-259B; Erasmus, *Apologia ad conclusiones Stunicae* (1524), LB, IX, 389B-D.

<sup>242</sup> Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520: The Annotated Luther Study Edition*, ed. Eric H. Herrmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 87.

of it, I rejoice that it exists in the church of Christ, for it is a cure without equal for distressed consciences”.<sup>243</sup>

However, for Luther, forgiveness of sins through priestly absolution is declaratory.<sup>244</sup> This means it comes from Christ and is spiritually helpful, but does not bring about the forgiveness. In the small catechism, Luther gives a form of absolution that reads: “Be it done for you as you have believed. According to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace”.<sup>245</sup> But what does Luther respond to Aquinas’ understanding of confession and absolution to the priest for a complete sacramental act? Luther’s held that Christ has given to anyone of his believers the power to absolve even open sin. Further, the enumeration of all sins to a priest is almost impossible and unnecessary.<sup>246</sup> Reinhard Schwarz writes: “Justification through faith which holds fast to Christ is not tied to a priestly administered sacrament of penance”.<sup>247</sup> There are two additional kinds of confession Luther argued, one is confession to God alone; this is a practice throughout one’s life. There is also the confession of sins one Christian makes to another.<sup>248</sup> Luther, although following Augustine’s thoughts on faith and grace to explain forgiveness of sins, also differs greatly. Luther focused on faith alone to justify human salvation. He however supported the Church’s teaching on repentance and excommunication, if it was needed as a disciplinary

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<sup>243</sup> Eric H. Herrmann, *Babylonian Captivity*, 87.

<sup>244</sup> Osborne, *Reconciliation & Justification*, 149.

<sup>245</sup> Osborne, *Reconciliation & Justification*, 142.

<sup>246</sup> Mary Jane Haemig, *The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 233; cf. *The Annotated Luther*, Martin Luther 1483-1546, author: Hans Joachim Hillerbrand editor; Kirsi Irmeli Stjerna 1963-, editor. Timothy J. Wengert editor: 2015- Available at Adelaide Theological Library Main Collection, Brooklyn Park (284.1 L973.W).

<sup>247</sup> Reinhard Schwarz, in *Luther* (1986).

<sup>248</sup> “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession”, in *The Book of Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord based on the Translation by William Hermann Theodore Dau, Gerhard Friedrich Bente, Revised, Updated, and Annotated by Paul Timothy McCain, Robert Cleveland Baker, Gene Edward Veith, Edward Andrew Engelbrecht* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 367.

measure.<sup>249</sup> Luther insisted that “whereas medieval, sacramental view of forgiveness caused the sinner torment and anxiety, salvation by faith offered consolation”.<sup>250</sup>

Augustine is a model of pre-Reformation theology of justification.<sup>251</sup> Robert Charles Sproul noted that for Luther “justification by faith alone [is] ‘the article upon which the church stands or falls’ (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*)”.<sup>252</sup> Luther and Calvin associate themselves with Augustine, who is consistent with the writings of Paul about faith, grace and the law. But Luther is not Augustinian in his thinking, as Augustine’s theological doctrine on faith by grace demonstrates.<sup>253</sup> Both Luther and Calvin diverged from Augustine in holding that justification was solely by faith without the need for human merit, whereas Augustine used faith to justify human merit, for faith and forgiveness are received by God’s grace.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Martin Luther, “A Sermon on the Ban,” in *Church and Ministry I*, LW 39, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 3–22; idem, “The Keys,” in *Church and Ministry II*, LW 40, ed. Helmut H. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 321–77; idem, “On the Councils and the Church,” in *Church and Ministry III*, LW 41, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 3–178.

<sup>250</sup> Thomas N. Tentler, “Forgiveness and Consolation in the Religious Thought of Erasmus”, *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. 12 (1965), 110-133; Helmut Appel, *Anfechtung und Trost in Spätmittelalter und bei Luther* (Leipzig, 1938, Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte CLXV), 126 and passim; E. Fischer, op. cit., pp. I, 198, 211-212; Hartmann Grisar, *Luther* (London, 1913-1917), IV, 72.

<sup>251</sup> Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17-36; Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (London / New York T. & T. Clark, 2002), 45-46; for more exploration on the Holy Spirit’s role in the work of faith that is manifested in one’s gracious grace. The language of Justification among Catholics and evangelicals, the relation of merit, law, and grace, reference to both Calvin and Trent. Justification from the Roman Catholic perspective and the joint Declaration of Justification between protestant and Roman Catholics in 1999. cf. Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: Studies in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London / New York T. & T. Clark, 2006).

<sup>252</sup> This concept was used for the first time not by Luther but by Valentin E. Löscher in anti-Pietist essay in 1718. Cf. Valentin E. Löscher, Eric W. Gritsch, “The Origins of the Lutheran Teaching on Justification”, in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (ed. H. George Anderson et al.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) n. 3, 351; cf. Matthew C. Heckel, Is R. C. Sproul Wrong about Martin Luther? An Analysis of R. C., *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, 1 (2004): 89-120; Robert Charles Sproul, *Justified by Faith Alone* (Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 18, 30 and 40-44.

<sup>253</sup> *The Spirit and the Letter in the Work of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Trans. Roland Teske; ed. John E. Rotelle; Hyde Park, New York: New York City, 1997), vol. 23: Answer to the Pelagians) 4, 6.

<sup>254</sup> *Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Justification* (Kirkwood: Missouri Synod, 2017), 6; to an extent, scholars agree that Erasmus, the renaissance humanist philosopher and theologian modified the Greek term *logizomai* (reckon) to *imputat* to explain about justification. Probably the examination of justification by imputation is from Erasmus rather than from any other Reformers; cf. Lowell C. Green, *The Influence of Erasmus upon Melancthon, Luther and the Formula of Concord in the Doctrine of Justification*, JSTOR vol. 43, no 2, (Jun 1974): 183-200; Green explain the use of the terms *imputare* and *impute*. The former is concerned with “intrinsic quality” whereas the latter focuses on the “extrinsic qualities”. This explain the analytic and synthetic usage of justification through divine grace by faith which on one hand is justified by the merit of one’s work and on the other hand human merit is not considered. For a comprehensive understanding of the

For Luther, “hence there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the Church of God—baptism and the bread”.<sup>255</sup> His sacramental theology develops through his spiritual struggles as reflected in his *Anfechtungen*, *tentatio* or temptation or trial.<sup>256</sup> There is no specific word that could best describe *Anfechtungen*. The Latin word *tentatio* is the closest meaning of the term.<sup>257</sup> After a great deal of time of reflection and study, Luther comes to understand the sacrament of reconciliation as justification by faith alone.<sup>258</sup> This is evidenced in Luther beginning with three sacraments<sup>259</sup> and later accepting only two.<sup>260</sup> “The doctrine of justification by faith is termed by Luther, the distinguishing characteristic of a rising or falling Church”.<sup>261</sup>

Luther’s teaching on penance can be found in his Smalcald Articles, Large Catechism, *The Book of Concord* and in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.<sup>262</sup>

Luther rejects the scholastic teaching of sacramental triad and replaces it with faith alone. While the scholastic teaches that contrition is a sorrowful heart and a hatred for the sins committed and a firm decision to not sin again, Luther writes: “A contrite heart is a precious thing, but it is found only where there is an ardent faith in the promises and threats of God”.<sup>263</sup> For Luther, contrition is meaningless without faith. It is even deceptive when contrition is motivated by attrition for the fear of punishment then the love for God. On Confession, Luther agrees with the decretal of Innocent III (1198–1216) that people should confess their sins at least once a year. Luther writes: As to the current practice of confession, I am heartily in favour of it, I rejoice that it exists in the church of Christ, for it

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use and distinction between *imputare* and *impute* cf. Martin Greschat, *Melanchthon neben Luther. Studien zur Gestalt der Rechtfertigungslehre zwischen 1528 und 1537* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1965), 71 n. 107, et passim, Lowell C. Green, *Die Entwicklung der evangelischen Rechtfertigungslehre bei Melanchthon bis 1521 im Vergleich mit der Luthers* (Erlangen, 1955), 86-91.

<sup>255</sup> Martin Luther, in Eric H. Herrmann, ed., *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520: The Annotated Luther Study Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 127.

<sup>256</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 10.

<sup>257</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 10.

<sup>258</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 87.

<sup>259</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 21, 127.

<sup>260</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 127.

<sup>261</sup> Philips D. W. Krey, *Reformation Observances 1517-2017* (Eugene Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 36.

<sup>262</sup> Martin Luther, “Smalcald Articles”, in *The Book of Concordia: The Lutheran confessions: A reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord based on the translation by William Hermann, Theodore Dau, Gerhard Friedrich Bente, revised, and annotated by Paul Timothy McCain, Robert Cleveland Baker, Gene Edward Veith, Edward Andrew Engelbrecht* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 306.

<sup>263</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 87.

is a cure without equal for distressed consciences".<sup>264</sup> However, for Luther, forgiveness of sins through priestly absolution is declaratory.<sup>265</sup> This means it comes from Christ and is spiritually helpful. In the small catechism, Luther gives a form of absolution that reads: "Be it done for you as you have believed. According to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace".<sup>266</sup> But what does he respond to Aquinas' understanding of confession and absolution to the priest for a complete sacramental act? Luther's response is "Christ has given to anyone of his believers the power to absolve even open sin".<sup>267</sup> Further, the enumeration of all sins to a priest is almost impossible and unnecessary.<sup>268</sup> Luther argues that two additional kinds of confession are: (1) confession to God alone (this is a practice throughout one's life) and (2) confession of sins made by one Christian to another.<sup>269</sup> In both instances, Luther rejects the concept of one to recites all the sins and circumstances to a priest. Luther insists that "my advice would be to ignore all 'circumstances' whatsoever".<sup>270</sup>

The power of the keys refers to Matthew 16:18 and 18:18 and to John 20:23.<sup>271</sup> The tendency is to see Luther rejecting confession and absolution, but this is not the case. The Book of Concord insists that: "At no point did the Lutheran Church ever reject private confession and absolution. Rather, Luther commended it as a very beneficial practice".<sup>272</sup> Furthermore, Luther defends private confession in the Babylonian Captivity of the Church emphasising that individual confession is a healing for the troubled consciences, although

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<sup>264</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 87.

<sup>265</sup> Osborne, *Reconciliation & Justification: The Sacrament and Its Theology* (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 149.

<sup>266</sup> Osborne, *Reconciliation & Justification*, 142.

<sup>267</sup> Luther, *The Sacrament of Penance* (1519) 2, 252.

<sup>268</sup> Mary Jane Haemig, *The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 233.

<sup>269</sup> Luther, "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession", in *The Book of Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 367.

<sup>270</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*: 92 cf. "In his exhortation, Luther admonishes Christians to privately confess their sins so that they will hear the Lord's absolving word from the lips of another human being. God's word applied in this very personal way is another great treasure, which is so great and precious we should be willing to run more than a hundred miles to receive it".

<sup>271</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 10; Martin Luther, "Smalcald Articles", in *The Book of Concordia: The Lutheran confessions*, 306.

<sup>272</sup> Luther, "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession", in *The Book of Concordia: The Lutheran confessions*, 181.

it is not Biblical.<sup>273</sup> “As to the current practice of private confession, I am heartily in favour of it, even though it cannot be proved from the scriptures. It is useful, even necessary, and I will not have it abolished. Indeed, I rejoice that it exists in the Church of Christ, for it is a cure without equal for distressed consciences”.<sup>274</sup>

On the issue of satisfaction, Luther insists that “satisfaction really is, namely, the renewal of one’s life.”<sup>275</sup> In this sense, Luther distanced himself from indulgences, pilgrimages and all sorts of work but faith alone.

### **1.9.2 John Calvin (1509–1564)**

John Calvin believed that one should confess sins directly to God in prayer.<sup>276</sup> This led him to think in similar theological terms to Luther, Augustine, and also back to Jewish concepts of forgiveness. For Calvin, Jesus died for a few elected people. Salvation is the work of God and not of humans. In Book three, Calvin writes about justification which goes hand in hand with sanctification.<sup>277</sup> One cannot be justified without being sanctified, because it is through the Holy Spirit that Christ is united to humans.<sup>278</sup> As noted by Berkouwer: “Calvin’s thought is concentric—Salvation is Christ”.<sup>279</sup>

The historic role of preacher as confessor also influenced the early Protestant reformers, who concluded that pastors were the most qualified among Christians for hearing confessions, providing counsel, and offering spiritual guidance. Even when confession as a sacrament was abolished in the Protestant churches, Luther and Calvin would still urge congregants to seek out the pastor, rather than another church member, if they wished to make private confession or gain solace from a troubled conscience.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Haemig, *The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 233.

<sup>274</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*: 89; Luther, “The Small Catechism,” in *The Book of Concord*, 86.

<sup>275</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church 1520*, 92.

<sup>276</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter XX, Section 9. (London: James Clarke, 1962a).

<sup>277</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2 (London: James Clarke, 1962b), 99.

<sup>278</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, 462-466.

<sup>279</sup> Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977, 1954), 28.

<sup>280</sup> Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession, Hearing Confession: A History of the cure of Souls* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical press, 2010), 197.

Kidder who has investigated the history of confession attests that Protestant Reformers namely Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli would still encourage their congregations to seek out the pastor for confession rather than another Church member, in case they need to gain spiritual advice in private confession or gain solace from a troubled conscience”.<sup>281</sup>

**Table 1.1: Trajectory of the forgiveness of sins**

<b>Atonement</b>	<b>Repentance/ Penance</b>	<b>Confession/God/ Community/ Prayer/Fasting &amp; Almsgiving</b>	<b>Absolution from priest</b>	<b>Contrition/ Attrition</b>
Anselm	Clement of Rome <i>Didache</i> <sup>282</sup> , <i>The Letter of Barnabas</i> <sup>283</sup> Irenaeus Of Lyons <sup>284</sup> Ignatius of Antioch <sup>285</sup> Tertullian (d. 225), Origen <sup>286</sup> , Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), <sup>287</sup>	<i>Didache</i> <sup>288</sup> Clement of Rome <i>The Letter of Barnabas</i> <sup>289</sup> Irenaeus Of Lyons <sup>290</sup> Origen <sup>291</sup> Augustine (354–430) Aphraahat the Persian Sage <sup>292</sup> Athanasius <sup>293</sup> ,	Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), <sup>296</sup> Cyril of Alexandria Basil the Great <sup>297</sup> Aquinas (d. 1274) <sup>298</sup> John Chrysostom <sup>299</sup> Ambrose of Milan <sup>300</sup> Athanasius <sup>301</sup> Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1142)	Abelard (d. 1130) Lombard (d. 1160) Duns Scotus Aquinas (d. 1274) <sup>302</sup> Wyclif

<sup>281</sup> Kidder, *Making Confession, Hearing Confession*, 197.

<sup>282</sup> *Didache* 4:14, 14:1.

<sup>283</sup> *Letter of Barnabas* 19, “You shall confess your sins. You shall not go to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light”.

<sup>284</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 1:22.

<sup>285</sup> *Letter to the Philadelphians* 3

<sup>286</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 2:4

<sup>287</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *The Lapsed* 15:1–3; *A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1844), *The Epistles of S. Cyprian* 75.4.

<sup>288</sup> *Didache* 4:14, 14:1.

<sup>289</sup> *Letter of Barnabas* 19, “You shall confess your sins. You shall not go to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light”.

<sup>290</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 1:22.

<sup>291</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 2:4

<sup>292</sup> Aphraahat the Persian Sage, *Treatises* 7:3

<sup>293</sup> Athanasius, *The Gospel of Luke* 19.

<sup>296</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *The Lapsed* 15:1–3; *A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1844), *The Epistles of S. Cyprian* 75.4.

<sup>297</sup> Basil the Great, *Rules Briefly Treated* 288.

<sup>298</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* vol. 56, 7.

<sup>299</sup> John Chrysostom, *The Priesthood* 3:5

<sup>300</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *Penance* 1:1.

<sup>301</sup> Athanasius, *The Gospel of Luke* 19.

<sup>302</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* vol. 56, 7.

	Lombard Wesley (conversion)	Theodore Of Mopsuestia <sup>294</sup> , Pope Leo the Great <sup>295</sup> Luther		
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### 1.10 From 1900–present

The 16th century passed on to the 19th century two streams of forgiveness of sins, namely, justification through faith alone and justification through faith and works. The Protestants rejected the Catholic scholastic triad form of forgiveness of sins, whereas the Catholics maintained that confession of sins to a priest and priestly absolution are core factors for God’s forgiveness of sins.

The Protestant denominations defended their position and developed the five *solas*.<sup>303</sup> The five *solas* consist of *sola fide*, *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus* and *solus Deo Gloria*.<sup>304</sup> They are grounded in the Scriptures and declare that one is saved by faith alone through the grace of God (Romans 3:28, For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law; Galatians 3:24, So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith). As Protestants and Reformed churches fenced themselves against the Roman Catholics, they gradually moved away from the five *solas* under polemical sentiments to attack the papacy, indulgences, and the status of Mary, among other Catholic forms of devotion.<sup>305</sup> The Roman Catholics, in turn, responded with the Counter-Reformation<sup>306</sup> and carried out the decisions made at the Council of Trent (1545–1563).

<sup>294</sup> Theodore Of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* 16

<sup>295</sup> Pope Leo the Great, *Letter of Pope Leo I to the Bishops of Campania, Samnium and Picenum* dated March 6, 459 AD

<sup>303</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *Grace Alone—Salvation as a Gift of God: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017) 1-29, 177; Overview description; John Barber, *The Road from Eden: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (Academica Press, 2008), 233.

<sup>304</sup> Thomas Schreiner *Faith Alone - the Doctrine of Justification* (The Five Solas Series); Thomas Schreiner, “Some Reflections on Sola Fide”. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 58(1), (2015): 5-14.

<sup>305</sup> Report of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion | Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig/Bonifatius, Evangelische Verlangsanstalt, 2013); Phase III (1986-1993) and Phase IV (1995-2006) of the international dialogue between Lutherans and Romans Catholics look particularly at the Church and justification, the joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and the Apostolicity of the Church. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue focuses on theological issues including justification by faith, Petrine ministry, and the place of Mary and Saints.

<sup>306</sup> Religious Orders or congregations that arose in the 16th century as a result of Reformation to reform the Roman Catholic Church and give support to Papacy, Mary, and other devotions. For comprehensive



Confession and priestly absolution were maintained as the official way for God's forgiveness of sins in the Roman Catholic Church (James 2:24 says, you see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone).

For the past fifty years of dialogue between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church, the once hoped for unity seemed far away with regard to theological debate about forgiveness of sins. In 1963 the Lutheran World Federation convened The Fourth Assembly at Helsinki, Finland, with the core topic of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Catholic observers were invited to witness the study of the doctrine of justification based on the historical-critical method of exegesis. The method was condoned by Ernst Käsemann who argued "that the historical-critical method is inseparable from Protestantism, is indeed its very genius".<sup>307</sup> At the end of the study, there was hope for unity between the two Churches. The conclusion read: "New modes of thinking,' a kind of new logic, made doctrinal differences "not necessarily divisive".<sup>308</sup> But this hope diminished in 1992 when the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church in America closely examined the Dialogue between Lutheran and Catholic Report VII and concluded that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod notes that: "Having reviewed carefully the 'Commitment Statement' we have come to the conclusion that beneath the 'differences in theological formulation' often noted, there remain substantive differences between the churches which go to the very heart of the Gospel itself and are therefore divisive."<sup>309</sup>

The recent report on the dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics comes to the conclusion that the divisive doctrinal lines on justification are as sound as they were when

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understanding of the reform within the Roman Catholic Church cf. Pierre Janelle and Joseph Husslein, *Catholic Reformation* (Bruce Publishing, 1949); John Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Beresford J. Kidd, *The Counter-Reformation, 1500-1600* (The Edinburgh Press, Edinburgh 1933); John C. Olin, *Catholic Reform: From Cardinal Ximenes to the Council of Trent, 1495-1563: An Essay with Illustrative Documents and a Brief Study of St. Ignatius Loyola* (Fordham University Press, 1990); Regina Pörtner, *The Counter-Reformation in Central Europe: Styria 1580-1630* (Oxford University Press: Oxford / New York, 2001)

<sup>307</sup> James W. McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2: *Doctrine* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 465

<sup>308</sup> Robert D. Preus, *Justification and Rome: An Evaluation of Recent Dialogues* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997), 22.

<sup>309</sup> Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 23.

the dialogue started in 1964.<sup>310</sup> Part of article one of the report cited Luther's "first and chief article"<sup>311</sup> and the Council of Trent and then reads; "Doctrinal condemnations were put forward both in the Lutheran Confessions and by the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent. These condemnations are still valid today and thus have a church-dividing effect".<sup>312</sup>

The Anglican Communion broke away from the Roman Catholic Church mainly for political reasons.<sup>313</sup> Their dialogue is taken separately for the reason that the breakaway was not caused by the theological understanding of forgiveness of sins. However, the Vatican office of Catholic-Anglican dialogue has released a document suggesting that both churches discuss issues of authority, ordination, salvation, and the role of laity.<sup>314</sup> The separation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church has never officially existed because the Uniting Church is a Christian Denomination which was newly-formed in Australia on 22 June 1977. It consists of the Congregational Union in Australia, the

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<sup>310</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue: Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, (1997): Published by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity in the context of the 2017 commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and the 50th anniversary of dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics; For the unity of the two Churches cf. Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion | Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig/Bonifatius, Evangelische Verlanganstalt, 2013); Phase III (1986-1993) and Phase IV (1995-2006) of the international dialogue between Lutherans and Romans Catholics look particularly at the Church and justification, the joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and the Apostolicity of the Church. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue focuses on theological issues including justification by faith, Petrine ministry, and the place of Mary and Saints.

<sup>311</sup> Luther, The Smalcald Articles, II, 1; The Book of Concord, 292.

<sup>312</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue. For the unity of the two Churches cf. Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion | Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig/Bonifatius, Evangelische Verlanganstalt, 2013); Phase III (1986-1993) and Phase IV (1995-2006) of the international dialogue between Lutherans and Romans Catholics look particularly at the Church and justification, the joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and the Apostolicity of the Church. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue focuses on theological issues including justification by faith, Petrine ministry, and the place of Mary and Saints. It worth mentioning that not all the Lutherans Churches combine the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism to speak of Lutheran Confession. The Churches who combine only the above mentioned confessional books are in agreement with the Roman Catholic Church on justification teaching.

<sup>313</sup> Bokenkotter, *A Concise History*, 235.

<sup>314</sup> Joshua J. McElwee, "Catholic-Anglican dialogue document suggests both churches can learn from other. First report by Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission in 13 years considers authority, role of laity". National Catholic Reporter: The Independent Source (Jul 2, 2018); the first historic between Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion occurred in 1966 between Pope Paul VI and Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey. Four years later, the dialogue commission worked together and published the first report in 1971 that focused on the understanding of the Eucharist.

<sup>314</sup> Ecumenical Relationships Committee, National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and Uniting Church – Study Guide: Queensland Synod (2008).

Methodist Church of Australia, and part of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Taken from its different branches, it has connections with John Calvin, John Lesley, and Frederick Miller (the founder of the congregational Church in Hobart in 1830 or possibly Thomas Q. Stow, one of the foundational ministers in South Australia). In this sense it might separate from the Roman Catholic Church but not immediately. However, the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church in Australia occurred between 2002 and 2008 and focused on the *The Mission of the Church*.<sup>315</sup>

Various scholars such as Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert D. Preus, James Montgomery Boice, Thomas Schreiner, and Paul A. Rainbow among others have written on justification with fresh insights.<sup>316</sup> Some have expressed similar aspirations as those in the New Perspectives on Paul which reinstated Luther's position and reinforced the divisive lines on justification. It is equally true that the Reformers and reformed Churches have taken the theological views consistent with Paul and some of the Church Fathers. But Church Fathers, as shown in this chapter, have differing theological perspectives. How is it possible to reduce the between Protestants and Roman Catholic Church? Pelikan said: "Recent research on the Reformation entitles us to sharpen it and say that the Reformation began because the reformers were too catholic in the midst of a church that had forgotten its catholicity".<sup>317</sup> Among the above authors, Rainbow has produced a counterbalanced view of Justification that to my view, would lead to common understanding with less pain from shifting away from some of the core traditional beliefs of both Protestants and Catholics.<sup>318</sup>

What is that the Churches have done or not done and still have more to do? One of the answers is to consult lay people on the subject of God's forgiveness of sins and compare

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<sup>315</sup> Ecumenical Relationships Committee, National Dialogue.

<sup>316</sup> Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 359; Robert D. Preus, *Justification and Rome: An Evaluation of Recent Dialogues* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997), 22- 23; James Montgomery Boice; Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Eugene: Paternoster, 2012); for various understanding of justification cf. Matthew C. Heckel, "Is R. C. Sproul Wrong About Martin Luther? An Analysis of R. C. Sproul's Faith Alone: the Evangelical Doctrine of Justification With respect To Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Catholic Luther Scholarship". *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:1 (Mar 2004): 89-120.

<sup>317</sup> Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism*, 46.

<sup>318</sup> Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Eugene: Paternoster Press, 2012), 339-341.

the results with scholars' understanding of God's forgiveness of sins in the Biblical passages.

Various scholars have reflected on the development of the theology of God's forgiveness of sins and found this the most divisive subject between the Christian churches. Jesus did not give any structure to forgiveness of sins; he simply asked the disciples to go and forgive sins (John 20:19-23). Many Biblical texts on the forgiveness of sins could possibly be used for this study. For example, the text for pardon and reconciliation for fraternal correction (Mt 8:15–20; Gal 6:1–2), prayer (1 John 5:16; Jas 5:16), or confession to one another (Mt 5:23–24), or the famous power of the keys in Matthew 16:19 or Matthew 18:18.

I have selected John 20:19-23 because it is a text that describes the risen Lord sending his disciples to forgive sins, and breathing the Holy Spirit on them to enable this to take place. The text needs also more understanding among churches.

### **1.11 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have examined the various trajectories of the understanding of God's forgiveness of sins from various theologians. I began with the Jewish tradition concerning the Temple's sacrificial system, which gives the platform for Christian understandings of God's forgiveness. From Jesus, there is a turn around and new shift in the understanding of God's forgiveness which centred on Christ's passion, death and resurrection. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, his apostles preached and baptised. The early focus was on baptism as the entry point into the forgiveness of sins, but left open the question as to the Church should manage post-baptismal sins. From here repentance, public and private penance, fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and exclusion from communion were central to the Church's way of dealing with the forgiveness of sins.

In the Carolingian period, confession to a priest was fundamental. The Medieval period saw the rise of scholasticism, which advocated atonement for sins by attrition, contrition, and confession, leading to absolution. At the dawn of reformation, faith in Jesus was emphasised by the Protestants, whereas the Roman Catholics continued practise confession and absolution from the priest. These basic outlines are unchanged in the current practices today.

What must one learn from the trajectories that defined Church understanding of God's forgiveness of sins? Church and eminent theologians of the time lead people to believe and follow what they understood to be the most efficacious way to show God's love and obtain mercy for sins committed. Lay people have not yet been asked to explain their understanding of God's forgiveness of their sins. This study is going to do just that.

## Chapter 2:

### Formal Theology as Seen in the Exegesis of John 20:19-23

The concept of God's own privilege to forgive sins being administered by human agency—as depicted in John 20:19-23—is contentious for some and a miracle for others. This is not the only biblical passage that is relevant to an understanding of God's forgiveness of sins. It is, however, the focal point for this study of the forgiveness of sins, enabling the voices of theology to come into dialogue.

In this chapter, the attention turns to formal theology, as it is derived from exegetical interpretation of this passage. In John 20:19-23, the divine prerogative to forgive sins is shown to incorporate human agency or participation in the world, and this is a cause of ongoing debate among scholars. How are sins forgiven? Who has the authority to forgive sins in the world and the Church? This chapter explores the interpretation of John 20:19-23 with reference to these questions, first by an exegesis of the passage, then by giving particular attention to the work of four selected Biblical scholars, namely Edwyn Hoskyns, Rudolf Bultmann, Raymond Brown, and C. Kingsley Barrett.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part is my own exegesis of John 20:19-23, drawing on the expertise of multiple scholars. The second part is the exegesis of the four selected scholars. The last part is the formulation of themes, noting similarities and differences between the selected scholars, and concluding with a summary of the findings.

Some definitions are in order. In this study, the terms 'author' and 'evangelist' are used interchangeably. Both terms are used in reference to the writer; the identity of the author of the Fourth Gospel is beyond the scope of this study.

Discriminatory judgement: it is one's freedom to believe or reject Jesus' message. In Johannine theology, it is associated with realised eschatology which holds that future judgement is already being realised—carried out—in the present.

The Fourth Gospel is the Gospel of John or simply John. The Gospel of Mathew is interchangeable with Matthew. The Gospel of Luke is interchangeable with Luke. The Gospel of Mark is also called Mark.

The Twelve means the small group of disciples of the historical Jesus although they were 10 or 11 depending on the absence of Judas and Thomas.

## 2.1 Chapter overview

The five verses of John 20:19-23 constitute “a literary and theological unit”<sup>1</sup>, which complement each other and climax into the eternal message of salvation. Here we find a clear articulation of the soteriological message of the Fourth Gospel. The pericope is Christocentric with an eschatological aim. The evangelist reports that the risen Jesus appears amid his disciples on Easter Sunday. He greets the disciples twice with peace and shows them the marks of the nails in his hands and the mark of the lance in his side. The disciples expressed their joy toward him. Subsequently, the Lord breathes on them and sends them in the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive sins (20:22-23) – in the same manner in which he has been sent by the Father (20:21). Central to the pericope is the risen Lord’s message of peace which is repeated twice (20:19, 21) and the commission to forgive or retain sins (20:23). Throughout the pericope, it is the risen Lord who is at the centre of the event. He comes in a mysterious way. Nothing is mentioned about how he leaves the locked house, nor is there a word of welcoming or goodbye from the disciples, except the description of their rejoicing (20:20).

The closest parallels to this Johannine pericope are Matthew 16:19, where the authority to bind and loose on earth is given to Peter, and Matthew 18:18, where the disciples (plural) are given the authority to bind and loose. The tension between the individual authority invested in Peter and the communal authority invested in the disciples is not resolved in Matthew’s Gospel, and the history of interpretation of these passages alongside John 20:19-23 shows interpreters wrestling with the scope of these sayings from the second century onwards.<sup>2</sup>

The method which will be used throughout this exegesis is that of literary criticism based on the narrative of the pericope framed within context of its original historical meaning as

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<sup>1</sup> Udo Schnelle, *New Testament writings*, 469-516, sees John 1-20 as a literary and theological unit; Raymond Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.; ABRL; New York Doubleday, 2003), place the accent differently.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001, 455-457.

well as its literary context.<sup>3</sup> The exegesis seeks to identify the ‘literal sense’ of the pericope, namely ‘the meaning conveyed by the words of scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rule of sound interpretation’.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas notes that “all other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal”. The attraction of this method is that it holds out the possibility of capturing the real meaning of the words in their historical and literal contexts as written by the author.<sup>5</sup> The weakness of this method is that one cannot know the intention of the author. In this sense it is easy for interpreters to fall into eisegesis<sup>6</sup>, particularly in relation to controversial texts, and lose sight of the original meaning in the process of interpretation. In order to mitigate this possibility, the method of exegesis employed in this study is informed by the meaning of the words in their context as used by professionals<sup>7</sup>, and is based on the literal meaning of John 20:19-23.

## **2.2 General interpretation of John 20:19-23**

John 20:19-23 is situated towards the end of chapter 20, probably the original end of the Gospel,<sup>8</sup> in what is often called the Book of Glory (beginning at John 13:1), which follows the Book of signs, referring to chapters 1-12.

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<sup>3</sup> Dean P. Béchar, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthropology of official Catholic Teachings* (Collegeville / Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 231, 257.

<sup>4</sup> Béchar, *The Scripture Documents*, 239.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Béchar, *The Scripture Documents*, 284.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Gove ed., *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 8th edition (Merriam Company, 1976), 364.

<sup>7</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1995), 56; Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 7; Edwyn C. Hoskyns and F.N Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber & Faber, 1931), 171.

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. 3, (NY: Crossroad, 1982) 341-344.



### **John 20:19-23**

<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." <sup>22</sup>And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (RSV).

John 20:19-23 is a single unit that has no complete parallel in the synoptic Gospels. Some aspects of the Johannine pericope have similarities to resurrection accounts in the synoptic tradition. The sudden appearance of Jesus among the disciples and his words 'Peace be with you' are found in Luke 24:36. Jesus also shows the disciples his hands in Luke 24:39-40, but unlike John's account, in which he also shows them his side, in Luke 24:39-40 Jesus shows them his feet. In Luke 24:41, the disciples 'in their joy' (ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς) were disbelieving, whereas in John 20:20 they were rejoicing (χαίρω).

The scene of the appearance takes place in Jerusalem, although this is not mentioned within the pericope. John 20:19-23 can be subdivided into two parts. The first part is John 20:19-20. This part introduces the risen Lord among his disciples and the disciples recognised him by the signs of crucifixion. The second part is John 21-23. This part consists of Jesus empowering and sending the disciples to forgive and retain sins in continuation of his mission from the Father. The sending is grounded in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **John 20:19**

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

This verse situates the appearance of the risen Lord to his disciples on the 'first day of the week', which indicates that the Sabbath is over, and that it is in fact the day of resurrection. The 'first day of the week' has already been mentioned in John 20:1 as the day on which Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, and so this appearance is on that same day in the evening.

The day is both a chronological reference in the Gospel narrative and points beyond the narrative to the gathering of early Christians on the day of resurrection. The author proceeds to say that the doors of the house where the disciples were gathered had been shut (κλείω, perfect passive participle). The verb can mean shut, locked or even barred. This fact indicates both the fear of the disciples and the miraculous entrance of Jesus into the house. The author does not indicate how Jesus enters the room. Sandra Schneiders notes that the entrance of Jesus into the house through locked doors shows that Jesus' physical material body which could pass through walls.<sup>9</sup> This entrance indicates the fact that Jesus had a resurrected body which was qualitatively distinct from his historical body.<sup>10</sup> The resurrected Jesus could find the disciples in their secret place where the disciples apparently thought that his opponents would not. This fact, like Jesus' mysterious entrance into the room and his qualitatively distinct body, shows that Jesus had more power than his opponents.

The 'Jews' are to be understood as the group of Jews who were Jesus' opponents, namely the Jewish authorities. It would be fair to consider this as a limited group, rather than as every Jew, because Jesus and his disciples were Jews. The term *Ἰουδαῖοι* can represent three categories of people. First, it can refer to the entire Jewish people; second, it can denote the residents of Jerusalem and surrounding territory as Judeans, and third, it can mean the authorities in Jerusalem who were hostile to Jesus. In this pericope, I understand the term to mean the Jewish leaders. The location of the disciples and the reason for being locked behind doors in fear of their life are explained as caused by the Jewish opponents of Jesus. Care must be taken to distinguish these opponents from the Jewish population more generally, in order to avoid anti-Jewish implications.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *Jesus Risen in Our Midst: The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Wilmington, Delaware, United States: Michael Glazier, 2013), 102-103, 106. Schneiders observes: "It is the concentric exploration of the change mode of Jesus' presence to his disciples as the physical, mortal mode of his pre-Easter presence gives way in their experience to his new, equally real and personal, ecclesial mode of presence".

<sup>10</sup> Schneiders, *Jesus Risen in Our Midst*, 21; cf. 'Toucher Jésus le Ressuscité: Marie de Magdala et Thomas le Jumeau en Jean 20', *Théologiques* 15/2 (2007) 163-192, especially 164; Graham Ward, "Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ", in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London / New York: Routledge, 1999), 163-168, especially 168; Graham Ward, "Transcorporeality: The Ontological Scandal", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 80 (1998): 235-256.

<sup>11</sup> Marilyn J. Salmon, *Preaching without contempt: overcoming unintended anti-Judaism* (Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 2006), ch. 4. R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, "Wrestling with

The question of the identity of the disciples who were present is not solved in this pericope. Some scholars argue that there were women among the disciples, namely Martha and Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene and others.<sup>12</sup> Others argue that the message of the risen Lord was given specifically and chiefly to the “Twelve” disciples, even if it is not clear how they are to represent a wider audience.<sup>13</sup> The information of more disciples at the event comes from the synoptic tradition (Luke 24:31-36). Paul also speaks about the Risen Lord appearing to the twelve, and to a large group of disciples (1 Corinthians 15:5). The Fourth Gospel is not specific on the number of the disciples present when Jesus appeared to them. This leaves room for debate concerning who was present and who was not. The mention of Thomas a week later directly alludes to the twelve, although it does not exclude others.

In contrast, Schneiders insists that “It is important to start with an explicit recognition that Jesus, in this resurrection scene (20: 19-23), addresses his *disciples* (see 20:17-18)—not, as some interpreters suggest, the Twelve, the apostles, or some specialised group representing later church officials.<sup>14</sup> “Disciple” in John is an inclusive term.”<sup>15</sup> The community of the Fourth Gospel clearly includes Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles, women and men, known members of the Twelve and many who are not in that group, married and single people, itinerants and householders. In other words, “the great commission of the risen Jesus, in John, is given to the whole church, who will be, henceforth, Jesus’ real presence in the world”.<sup>16</sup>

The uncertainty of who was present continues a lively debate among scholars based on John 20:26a (A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them). It is not possible to exclude the possibility that many disciples were present both on

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Johannine Anti-Judaism: A Hermeneutical Framework for the Analysis of the Current Debate”, in Bieringer, R., D. Pollefeyt, F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 3-37.

<sup>12</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, “The Holy Spirit and the Forgiveness of Sin(s) in the Fourth Gospel”, in *The Spirit in the New Millennium* (June 12-13, Duquesne University: 2009), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols.; AB 29–29A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966–1970), 1034.

<sup>14</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s)”, 1-29.

<sup>15</sup> Schneiders explores the concept of forgiveness of sins in term of the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world and violence in her book *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (2nd rev. and expanded ed.; New York: Crossroad, 2003). She dedicated two chapters on this issue.

<sup>16</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin (s)”, 1-29.

this first day of the week and then again the following week. What we can affirm is that the 'Twelve' as a designated group were present, though on this resurrection day, Thomas was absent. Judas was no longer part of the Twelve, and has not been mentioned in John's narrative since Jesus' betrayal in John 18:1-11.

Once the risen Lord is present amid his disciples, he greets them with the usual conventional Semitic salutation: "Peace be with you" (*shalom lachem*). While this text uses the Greek word for peace, εἰρήνη, it evokes the rich Jewish concept of shalom, which has connotations spanning prophetic and eschatological wellbeing as well as being a gift of YHWH (1 Samuel 25:6; Judges 6:22-23; Daniel 10:19).<sup>17</sup> The salutation could simply mean "May all be well with you". However, given the context of Jesus' resurrection, *shalom lachem* means more than an ordinary Hebrew greeting. The repeated greeting of εἰρήνη (vv. 19 & 21) lends support to understanding εἰρήνη to refer to the eschatological messianic salvation which comes from God.<sup>18</sup> The prophet Isaiah is an example in point when he proclaims εἰρήνη εἰρήνη in the context of wholeness which means salvation (Isaiah 57:19). Similarly Isaiah 54:10 emphasises the concept of messianic salvation which comes from God. Artur Weiser' notes that εἰρήνη in Psalm 29:11 signifies salvation, and in other texts εἰρήνη relates to the longed for eschatological blessing of peace (Psalm 29:11; Isaiah 9:6; 52:7; 55:12; Ezekiel 37:26; Zechariah 9:10 LXX).<sup>19</sup>

In the New Testament, the messianic salvation is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This is reflected in John 14:27; 16:33; and Acts 10:36.<sup>20</sup> Apparently, the disciples did not receive εἰρήνη at the greeting in the context of the above texts because it is only after they recognised the risen Lord that they were overjoyed (v. 20). This fulfilled the promise Jesus gave to them in John 16:21-22. As James Martin suggests, εἰρήνη is "a peace that can only open [oneself] myself, heart and soul, to the God of peace".<sup>21</sup> This εἰρήνη is found neither in socio-economic power, nor in the absence of war. On the contrary as Martin describes, it is "a peace that

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<sup>17</sup> G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. II, Trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964b), 402-406.

<sup>18</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. II, 412-414.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: a redactional study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 166.

<sup>20</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word, 1987), 379.

<sup>21</sup> James Martin, *The First Spiritual Exercises: Four Guided Retreats, As Originally Conceived by St. Ignatius Loyola Adapted by Michael Hansen* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 7.

is experienced in divine relationship”.<sup>22</sup> (John 14:25-26: ‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives’). The disciples’ joy along with εἰρήνη are seen in relation to the Hebrew Bible as the signs of God’s salvation both in the present and the future (Psalm 96:11; 97:1; Isaiah 49:13; 61:10; 66:10, 14; Joel 2:21-27; Habakkuk 3:18; Zechariah 10:7). Both εἰρήνη and joy come from the presence of the risen Jesus, the very presence of God come to earth (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Verse 19 indicates a timeline. Scholars agree that John’s Gospel associates Jesus with the Passover lamb. He was crucified and died when the paschal lambs were slaughtered in the Temple (John 19:31,42). John has a purpose for situating the death and resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week. While the events mark a chronological day, they also indicate an eschatological event.<sup>23</sup> The connection of wounds and peace point to the possibility of the εἰρήνη being understood both as an ordinary salutation and as a proclamation of universal salvation that can only come from the risen Lord. The ultimate answer of peace is that Jesus has conquered the world (John 16:16, 20).

### **John 20:20**

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Jesus showed his hands and his side to convince the disciples that he is their crucified and risen Lord. In the third appearance a week later, the evangelist clearly showed that Jesus was referring to the nail marks in his hands and the wound from the spear in his side (John 20:25). For John the wounds in Jesus’ hands and side are not just proof of his identity and of his crucifixion, but more importantly they are the signs of his victory over the world. This explains the joy of the disciples which is more than gladness; it is their response to the unexpected presence of their ‘Rabboni’ who has now fulfilled the promise of John 16:20-22<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Martin, *The First Spiritual Exercises*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray* (General Editor) R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1884-1976), 691.

<sup>24</sup> Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 543. Rabboni occurs only twice in the New Testament, in John 20:16 and Mark 10:51. Hoskyns suggests that Rabboni is declaration of faith similar to that of Thomas in John 20:28.

## John 20:21

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”

The connection between peace and joy has already been made in this Gospel in John 14:27-28.<sup>25</sup> In the Fourth Gospel, to see means to believe in the Son of God. Sandra Schneiders suggests that the peace of Jesus is “the peace the world cannot give. This is the peace that conquers the ‘sin of the world’, something only Jesus can do”.<sup>26</sup> She goes further to suggest that Jesus comes to greet the disciples with the peace of reconciliation. “He comes not to retaliate, to accuse, to extract a confession, to demand contrition, to impose penance, to set conditions for rehabilitation”.<sup>27</sup> “He comes only to forgive, and by forgiving them as he has promised at last supper (see Jn. 14:24), he gives the peace the world cannot give”.<sup>28</sup> Schneiders insists that Jesus’ peace “is first that of forgiveness”.<sup>29</sup>

In John 14:9 Jesus said to Phillip, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Jesus goes on to say that he and the Father are one: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14:11). This is typical Johannine Christology. The relationship between Jesus and the Father is unique. The Word is eternal and pre-existed with the Father, as the Prologue has shown, and the Word became flesh (John 1:14) and was sent by the Father.<sup>30</sup> The disciples are convinced and satisfied that the person in front of them is the risen Lord (John 10:27-28; 17:2) from the Father and so, there is a good reason to rejoice.

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<sup>25</sup> This connection is also evident in Pauline literature. Philippians 4:4-7 and Colossians 1:19-20. See also John 16:20-33.

<sup>26</sup> Schneiders, ‘The Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins (s)’, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Schneiders, ‘The Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins (s)’, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Schneiders, ‘The Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins (s)’, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Schneiders, ‘The Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins (s)’, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Contra Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “ἀποστέλλω” *TDNT* 1.404–6. See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953) 254; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* 569; Carson, *John* 648; Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 293–319; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 97–106; Rober Kysar insists that “The whole of the relationship of Christ with God is the model by which we understand our relationship with god, and our relationships with one another are also shaped by the relationship between God and Christ (15:12)” cf. Robert Kysar, “‘As you sent Me’: Identity and Mission in the Fourth Gospel”, *Word & World*, Volume XXI, Number 4 (2001), 374; Robert Kysar, *John, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 266.

John makes use of the words *μένω ἐν* (Jn. 15:4,6,7,9,10) to describe indwelling relation of the theology of divine presence. The verb *μένειν* could be translated as “abide in”, “dwell in”, or “remain in”. This word is used forty times in the Gospel of John, twenty-seven times in the letters of John and twelve times in the synoptics.<sup>31</sup> The fact that Jesus remains/dwells in the disciples explains their peace and joy.

The rejoicing of the disciples is followed by a transition to a profound relationship that existed before the world was made. This relation is manifested in the Prologue. A relation between Father and Son that continues now to the disciples in John 20:21. The Father Son relationship is of great interest in Johannine theology.<sup>32</sup> As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. This relationship is the kernel for the forgiveness of sin in John 20:23, according to most theologians. Schneiders observes: “He explicitly draws them into his own mission. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”.

Extended Christological analysis is beyond this study. However, it is necessary to observe that the relationship of the Father and the Son emphasises a continuity of the mission Jesus bestows on the disciples. The relation of Jesus and the Father is that of mutual indwelling, of *perichoresis*,<sup>33</sup> a relation of permanent love. According to Schnackenburg, Jesus “is the only true Son of God, one with the Father not only in what he does, but also in his being”.<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere, Schnackenburg states that the Son “in origin and essence is equal to the Father”.<sup>35</sup> This relation of same substance and equal divinity remain crucial to the sending understanding of the mission of forgiveness of sins. For Bruce, “What is meant is that the Word shared the nature and being of God”.<sup>36</sup> Beasley-Murray argues that the predication of *θεός* for the Logos “denotes *God in his nature*, as truly God as he with whom he ‘was’,

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<sup>31</sup> Denis Edwards, *Trinitarian Foundation: John Class notes* (Adelaide College of Divinity: 26/03/2013), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Jesus calls God “Father” 100 times in John, compared to 46 in the Synoptics (O. Michel, “πατήρ,” in Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard M. Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3.53 (Grand Rapids MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1990). Besides the designations “Son of God” and “Son of Man,” the absolute *ὁ υἱός* occurs thirteen times in John, compared to nine in the Synoptics (see Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* [rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] 277; and Monika Rutenfranz, “υἱός” *EDNT* 3.382).

<sup>33</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III 6.2; similar concept cf. Tatian (*Oratio ad Graecos*, chapter 5) or Athenagoras (*Legatio pro Christianis* 10.2-4); John A. McGuckin, “The Encyclopaedia of Eastern Orthodoxy” (Columbia University); Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 469.

<sup>34</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. 3, 333.

<sup>35</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. 2, (NY: Crossroad, 1979) 177.

<sup>36</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 31.

yet without exhausting the being of God”.<sup>37</sup> Westcott, referring to the Prologue (John 1:1), notes that “No idea of inferiority of nature is suggested by the form of expression, which simply affirms the true deity of the Word. [. . .] the Son can be regarded, according to that which is his peculiar characteristic, in relation to God as God”.<sup>38</sup> The Son is not less or superior to the Father but having the same substance as God. The Creed says of the Son, God from God, Light from Light, True God from true God. Begotten not made of one Being with the Father. This is the foundational understanding of the relation between Father and Son although Johannine theology recognises Jesus’ dependency on and obedience to the Father.

Brodie notes that the form καθώς ... κἀγώ (‘... as the Father has ... so I’) is an invitation to “active participation in the divine mission”.<sup>39</sup> The double sending has been repeated several times in the Book of Glory. For example: “As the Father has loved me ...so I love you” (John 15:9) indicates that what Jesus is in relation to the Father, so now the disciples will be in relation to Jesus (John 15:9, 17:18, 17:21, 20:21). The sending neither reduces the one who sends nor amplifies the sender. Here the disciples are commissioned, sent into the world as God has sent Jesus into the world (John 20:21; 17:18). Central to this Greek grammatical construction is a continuity of the relationship between the Father and Son, and Son and disciples.<sup>40</sup> This is also a continuity of mission. The grammatical construction stresses a continuity rather than transcendence or hierarchy. From the Father to the Son and on to the disciples, the mission is permanent or unchanged.<sup>41</sup> Although the Fourth Gospel uses two verbs ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω, they are synonymous.<sup>42</sup> In this

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<sup>37</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word, 1987) 11.

<sup>38</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 3. Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972) 84; cf. Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 568; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 117; Leon Morris, John 68–69; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003); Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 26–30.

<sup>39</sup> Raymond Brown, 1019; Brodie, *The Gospel According to John*, 568.

<sup>40</sup> G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. I, trans. by G. W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1964a), 405.

<sup>41</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. I, 435.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “ἀποστέλλω”, TDNT 1. 404-406; Andreas Köstenberger, *The Mission of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 97-106; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 254.



pericope, the first verb ἀποστέλλω is in the perfect tense (ἀπέσταλκέν) which implies that the mission of Jesus is continuous and effective and continuous. This fact is justified by the second verb πέμπω, which is in present tense.

This pattern of sending is the ground on which the selected Biblical scholars define God's forgiveness of sins, as we shall see below.

Nevertheless, the distinction between Jesus and his disciples is carefully preserved: "What Jesus is by nature; his disciples are by grace".<sup>43</sup> This explains the transformation the disciples go through by the consecration and breathing. Despite scholars' debate over the timing of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Johannine theology evidently indicates that the Holy Spirit – given by Jesus to his disciples in John 20:22 – emphasises the continuing presence of Jesus among the disciples (John 14:25-26; 16:12-15).<sup>44</sup> The disciples are endowed with the authority of the Holy Spirit following Jesus' revelation of his wounds. Unlike John 17:18 where Jesus prayed for them, here the disciples are commissioned. They are sent following the example of the Father sending the Son. In this sense, they are commissioned to take away the sins (plural) in contrast to Jesus taking away the sin (singular) of the world (John 1:29).<sup>45</sup>

### **John 20:22**

<sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

There are two significant analeptic references in this verse, namely the breathing and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathes on the disciples. This action recalls the creation story when God breathed into Adam the breath of life. This life is reflected in Genesis 2: 7 and the revivification of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37:5-10, as well as the Book of Wisdom 15:11 (ἐμφυσήσαντα). The Fourth Gospel used the same verb 'breathe' (ἐμφυσάω) to explain Jesus' transmission of his own life (Holy Spirit) into the disciples, as a parallel to the creation story. This life is creative life, in contrast to sacrificial life, as in John 10:18, or 'I

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<sup>43</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 543, citing Augustine.

<sup>44</sup> J. H. Bernard, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Gospel According to St. John*, vol. II, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 669-670.

<sup>45</sup> William R. Farmer (ed) et al, *The International Biblical Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press: 1998), 1499.

have come so that you may have life and life in abundance' (John 10:10). It seems that the Fourth Gospel is portraying Jesus recreating new life in the disciples by the action of breathing on them. Some scholars speak of Jesus consecrating the disciples.<sup>46</sup> The act of breathing on them completes the first act, namely speaking the words 'receive the Holy Spirit'.<sup>47</sup>

Scholars are divided on the action of Jesus breathing into the disciples the Spirit / Paraclete. Cassien Bésobrasoff was the first to coin this action of breathing as the Johannine Pentecost.<sup>48</sup> Charles H. Dodd, reflecting on the relation between John 20:22 and Acts 2:1-4, applauded Bésobrasoff for formulating the term "Johannine Pentecost".<sup>49</sup> Johannine Pentecost, Bésobrasoff argues is the moment of the outpouring Spirit upon the disciples following the traditional liberal interpretations of his predecessors Heitmüller and Bauer who recognised the parallel between the two events described in John 20:19-23 and Acts 2:1-4.<sup>50</sup> Defending the term, Bésobrasoff notes;

Il nous semble inévitable de revenir à la thèse qui est défendue par l'exégèse libérale et d'interpréter la péricope Jo. XX, 19-23 comme le récit johannique de la Pentecôte. Nous essayerons de la prouver sans nier l'historicité du Quatrième Evangile, tout en tenant compte du symbolisme qui le caractérise. Cette thèse étant prouvée, nous serons en possession d'une clé qui nous permettra d'arriver à la solution du problème de Jo. XX dans son ensemble et dans ses rapports avec les Synoptiques.<sup>51</sup>

Defending his position, Bésobrasoff rejected the exegetical study of the Spirit in John 20:22 based on the distinction between qualitative and quantitative analysis claiming that these

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<sup>46</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 546; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1036.

<sup>47</sup> Raymond Brown states that the verb "breathed on" can also be translated "breathed into" (some dictionaries say that this is a verb associated with wind instruments such as flutes, which one "breathes into"—the Master Musician playing a beautiful melody, with His followers as the "instruments"!). The disciples are created anew. *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary*, (Collegeville, Minn: Benedict Press, 1988, 99)

<sup>48</sup> Cassien Bésobrasoff, *Pentecôte johannique (Jn 20, 19-23)* (Valence-sur-Rhône: Imprimeries Reunies, 1939), 34; Cf. Walter Bauer, *Das Johannesevangelium*, HNT 6 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Siebeck), 1933), 182; Wilhelm Heitmüller, *Das Johannes-Evangelium*, Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1918), 151, 179. Bésobrasoff, *Pentecôte johannique*, 34.

<sup>49</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition*, 144 n.1.

<sup>50</sup> Cassien Bésobrasoff, *Pentecôte johannique (Jn 20, 19-23)* (Valence-sur-Rhône: Imprimeries Reunies, 1939), 9-10. See Walter Bauer, *Das Johannesevangelium*, HNT 6 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Siebeck), 1933), 182; Wilhelm Heitmüller, *Das Johannes-Evangelium*, Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1918), 151, 179.

<sup>51</sup> Bésobrasoff, *Pentecôte johannique*, 34.

solutions are just “une échappatoire purement verbal”.<sup>52</sup> There are three schools of thoughts regarding John 20:22.

The first group of scholars suggest that the Johannine Pentecost is equivalent to Lukan Pentecost in Acts 2. For these scholars the fulfilment of the outpouring of the Spirit is completed when Jesus breathed on the disciples. The proponents of this view argue that the descending of the Holy Spirit is to be understood within the frame of Johannine literary narrative as well as according to its historical and theological themes. Some scholars of the Johannine Pentecost view are Gary Burge,<sup>53</sup> Gerald L. Borchert,<sup>54</sup> and Craig S. Keener.<sup>55</sup>

A second group consider that John 20:22 is merely a symbolic action of the Holy Spirit which anticipates the full pouring and complete descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as attested in Acts 2. The proponents of symbolic view include Theodore of Mopsuestia<sup>56</sup>, Augustus

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<sup>52</sup> Bésobrasoff, *Pentecôte johannique*, 18.

<sup>53</sup> Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 114-49. Burge summarises his argument in the following; “On the one hand, there is no room in John’s thought for a second anointing of the Spirit (Acts 2). The Johannine horizon stops here. On the other hand, the Paraclete does not seem to be evident in 20:22. If John has fallen heir to two Spirit traditions, 20:22 must tie up with the Pneuma texts while the Paraclete passages are left to one side. Most scholars resolve this tension by denying one of these two problems.”<sup>53</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John*, 307-309. Borchert argues that there is only one event of the Holy Spirit and encourages to approach the Gospel of John as one unity. In summary Borchert notes “To view events holistically means that the story is told in such a way that the end is already part of the beginning. That also means that time sequences are not as important as meaning sequences, and it certainly does not imply that if someone writes in this manner he is polemicizing against someone who writes sequentially or that he creates the stories to provide the meanings” cf. *John*, 308.

<sup>55</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1197; For Keener John 20:19-23 is “the pneumatological climax to the Gospel, the fulfillment of the Paraclete sayings and much of the rest of the final discourse”; Keener made his position in his doctoral dissertation in 1991 cf. “The Function of Johannine Pneumatology in the Context of Late First Century Judaism”, 315-23.

<sup>56</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia is the first proponent of the symbolic view of John 20:22 presumably written in Syriac. His commentary on the fourth Gospel which was translated into Latin in 1940 although it was discovered in 1868, Theodore argues that Jesus breathing on the disciples in John 20:22 is a symbolic act of the coming of the Holy Spirit. His various arguments could be found in Charles Kannengiesser, *The Bible in Ancient Christianity 2* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 799-828, 892; McDonald K. Mckim, “Theodore of Mopsuestia”, in *Historical handbook of Major Biblical* (Downers Grove, Illinois / Leicester: InterVarsity, 1998), 65-69; Richard J. Parhai, *Antiochene Theoria in the Writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret of Cyprus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), no page number.

Tholuck<sup>57</sup>, Andreas J. Köstenberger<sup>58</sup>, Ben Witherington III<sup>59</sup>, John Christopher Thomas<sup>60</sup>, D. A. Carson<sup>61</sup>, James I. Packer<sup>62</sup>, Donald Guthrie<sup>63</sup> and George Eldon Ladd.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Augustus Tholuck, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, trans. Charles P. Krauth (Philadelphia: Smith, English & Co, 1859), 415. Tholuck's summary of the Spirit in John 20:22 is that "We must return, then, to the view of Grotius and Lampe, according to which the symbol typifies something future" and contended against Lücke's reference to Ezekiel 37:9 claiming that "most of the symbolical actions of the prophets are typifications of something future". Idem, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St.*, 416.

<sup>58</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 184-85; Köstenberger first rejects the treatment of Hatina, Brown, Barrett, Bultmann, Calvin, Beasley-Murray, Borchert, M. Turner, Moloney, Schnackenburg, Burge, and Keener on the grounds that "Otherwise, it is hard to see how John would not be found to stand in actual conflict with Luke's Pentecost narrative in Acts 2, not to mention his own disclaimers earlier in the narrative that the Spirit would be given only subsequent to Jesus' glorification, which entailed his return to the Father". This argument follows in line with Carson and Witherington. See also Köstenberger, *John*, 574-75.

<sup>59</sup> Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 339-40. Witherington summarised his argument in the following; "Thus in John 20:19-29 we have commissioning scenes in preparation for mission, but the Spirit was only later bestowed, enabling that mission to take place. The evangelist wished to make clear that the actual mission work did not begin until after Jesus had finally departed from earth; hence the Gospel closes twice (in John 20 and 21) without the portrayal of mission work but with the portrayal of two highly figurative stories that foreshadow the equipping for ministry (20:22) and foreshadow the actual mission work (21:4ff.)" Cf. Idem, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, 341.

<sup>60</sup> John Christopher Thomas, "The Spirit in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Spirit and the Mind: Essays in Informed Pentecostalism*, ed. Terry L. Cross and Emerson B. Powery (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 87-104, Idem, "The Spirit in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Explorations," in *The Spirit of the New Testament* (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 157-74. Thomas notes that "For the most part, previous investigations devoted to the pneumatology of the Fourth Gospel have focused upon the topic from the methodological perspective of historical criticism. While such attempts have contributed a great deal to an understanding of the Spirit's role in the Fourth Gospel, these enquiries have usually not paid sufficient attention to the story of the Holy Spirit as it unfolds within the narrative of the Fourth Gospel itself. Unfortunately, this lack of attention to the narrative has resulted in a number of false turns in seeking clarity on the role of the Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel. What has been missing is a reading of the Fourth Gospel which informs the reader of the Spirit's role as the narrative unfolds" Cf. Idem, "The Spirit in the Fourth Gospel", 158.

<sup>61</sup> D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 140-44; Idem, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 649-55. In summary Carson argues that John 20:22 is best understood as "a symbolic promise of the gift of the Spirit later to be given" as first espoused by Theodore of Mopsuestia. Cf. Idem, *The Gospel according to John*, 650. Carson admits that Theodore's position was condemned by the fifth ecumenical council at Constantinople in AD 533 but this does not seem to inhibit his enthusiasm for it. Other scholars who follow in the footsteps of Carson including Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 465-66; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 700 n.31;

<sup>62</sup> James I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984), 87-88. Packer argues in this way, "I am not convinced by those scholars who would persuade me that John means us to think of Christ as already glorified on the evening of resurrection day, and I conclude instead that John expects us to remember 7:37-39 and to infer from it as we read 20:21-23 that the promised gift of the Spirit could not in the nature of the case actually have been given at that time" Cf. *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 88.

<sup>63</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 533-34; Guthrie espoused the argument of Westcott insisting on the lack of the article before the "Holy Spirit" in John 20:22 indicates a gift while the presence of the article in Acts 2:1-4 indicates a person. Further Guthrie concludes that "The action of Jesus was a reminder of the Spirit's function in the disciples' all important task of proclaiming and applying the gospel".

A third group of scholars distinguish between two different gifts of the Spirit in John 20:19-23 and in Acts 2:1-4. These scholars see the gift of the Spirit in John 20:22 as an anticipation of the real gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. To a degree, scholars supporting the Two Gift View understand that the Holy Spirit at Easter is real and complete. The argument of these scholars is that the gifts of the Holy Spirit at both occasions are real but they still question

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<sup>64</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 325; Ladd argues that “the Spirit could not be given until Jesus’ ascension (7:39), and if Jesus actually gave his disciples the Spirit, we must assume two ascensions (see 20:17)”. Further, he rejects the two gift view on the grounds that “the disciples entered into their Christian mission until after Pentecost”. This prompts him to conclude that “There is no substantial objection to taking the Johannine incident as an acted parable that was actually fulfilled at Pentecost”. Cf. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* 415-16.

the legitimacy of the Spirit at both occasions. The proponents of two gift view include John Calvin,<sup>65</sup> B. F. Westcott,<sup>66</sup> David Earl Holwerda,<sup>67</sup> and Cornelis Bennema.<sup>68</sup>

## John 20:23

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<sup>65</sup> Qualitatively, Calvin explains the two gift view as a distinction between half and full grace. Cf. John Calvin, *The Gospel according to St John 11-21 and the First Epistle of John*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 205; *John Calvin, Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Volume 2 of Calvin's Commentaries, the Calvin Translation Society* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 269. Other scholars supporting the two gift view includes Felix Porsch, *Pneuma und Wort: Ein Exegetischer Beitrag zur Pneumatologie des Johannesevangeliums* (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1974), 71-80, 329-341, 473-379; Porsch' valuable understanding of the Johannine Pentecost has been indorsed by scholars such as Raymond Brown who notes that Porsch's understanding of the Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel is "a model dissertation on Johannine theology" cf. Review of *Pneuma und Wort: Ein Exegetischer Beitrag zur Pneumatologie des Johannesevangeliums*, TS 37 (1976); 684. A year later, Moody Smith reiterates Brown's remark in the following: "[Porsch has scarcely left an exegetical stone unturned in the examination of relevant Johannine text" cf. Review of *Pneuma und Wort: Ein Exegetischer Beitrag zur Pneumatologie des Johannesevangeliums*, JBL 96 (1977): 459; James D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 173-182; F. W. Bear, "The Risen Jesus Bestows the Spirit: A Study of John 20:19-23", in *Canadian Journal of theology* 4.2 (1958): 95-100; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1991), 651-655; B. F. Westcott argues that qualitatively the difference is between endowment and quickening. But before long, Westcott abandons his argument on the grounds of the meaning of *ἐμφυσάω* from the Hebrew scripture and Septuagint. Westcott concludes: "To regard the words and act as a promise only and a symbol of the future gift is wholly arbitrary and unnatural" cf. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 295; Reginald H. Fuller, "John 29:19-23", in *Interpretation* 32 (1978): 180-184; Max Turner, "The Concept of Receiving the Spirit in John's Gospel," VE 10 (1977): 24-42 Max-Alain Chevallier, "'Pentecôtes' lucaniennes et 'Pentecôtes' johanniques," RSR 69 (1981): 302-310. Chevallier argues that "Reprenant cette désignation, nous voudrions suggérer *cum grano salis* [emphasis his] qu'en réalité on devrait parler au pluriel de deux « Pentecôtes » johanniques et les comparer non seulement à la Pentecôte d'Actes 2, mais bien à la série des « Pentecôtes » des Actes (« Pentecôte » des Juifs à Jérusalem, « Pentecôte » des Samaritains, « Pentecôte » des païens à Césarée, « Pentecôte » des Johannites à Ephèse), sans oublier la double annonce de l'évangile de Luc et au début des Actes". Chevallier argues that John 20:19-23 like Acts 2:1-4 is a scene of multiple gifts of the Holy Spirit. for this reason, he notes that Johannine Pentecost should be understood as "entre deux aspects de la communication de l'Esprit, avec appropriation du premier d'entre eux, l'impulsion missionnaire, au groupe des Douze, et du deuxième, le don eschatologique, au peuple des croyants en general". Idem, "'Pentecôtes' lucaniennes et 'Pentecôtes' johanniques," RSR 69 (1981):310; Andrea J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT: Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 574; Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Breath of Life: John 20:22-23 Once More", in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker, and Stephen C. Barton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 69-70; Marianne M. Thompson, "The breath of Life" John 20:22-23 Once more", in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker, Stephen C. Barton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 69-78; David Crump, "Who get What? God or the disciples, human Spirit or Holy Spirit in John 19:30", Nov T 51 (2009): 78-89

<sup>66</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 191.

<sup>67</sup> David Earl Holwerda, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in the Gospel of John: A Critique of Rudolf Bultmann's Present Eschatology* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 21-24.

<sup>68</sup> Cornelis Bennema, "The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel: A New Proposal?," *EvQ* 74 (2002): 208-12.

<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”.

The use of *ἀφίημι* and *κρατέω*

The meaning and significance of *ἀφίημι* (release or let go) and *κρατέω* (retain or hold fast) in v. 23 have been at the centre of scholarly debate.

In 1939, two articles were published which claimed to solve the dispute over God’s forgiveness of sins based on the use of *ἀφίημι* and *κρατέω* in v. 23: the first was by Julius R. Mantey<sup>69</sup> and the second by Henry J. Cadbury.<sup>70</sup> On the one hand, Mantey argued that *ἀφίημι* has been mistranslated to suit the pastoral sacramental theology that gives the priest the authority to forgive sins. On the other hand, Cadbury argued that *ἀφίημι* has been used correctly based on the Greek grammatical use of apodosis and protasis.

Mantey claimed that the perfect *ἀφέωνται* was deliberately translated into the present indicative *ἀφίενται* and into future indicative *ἀφεθησεται*. These facts are evidenced in the Tischendorf<sup>71</sup> edition. They change the original text, precisely to maintain the Roman Catholic Sacramental doctrine of the priesthood. Mantey argued that the grammatical difference between the perfect and the present tenses of the verb is given by the change of two letters: *ίε* in *ἀφίενται* and *έω* in *ἀφέωνται*. The present and future tenses have been used for this purpose. Are forgiven (*ἀφίενται*) and are not forgiven (*κεκράτηνται*) have been written to support the Roman Catholic theology of individual confession to the priest.<sup>72</sup> For Mantey, the perfect tense denotes actions in the past which makes the reading “their sins have been forgiven”. This fact implies that theologically, sins are already forgiven. All is needed is just a declaration of what God has forgiven in the past.<sup>73</sup> For this

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<sup>69</sup> Julius R. Mantey, “The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense in John 20:23”, *JBL* 58 (1939) 243-249.

<sup>70</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, “The Meaning of John 20:23, Matthew 16:19, and Matthew 18:18”, *JBL* 58 (1939) 251-254.

<sup>71</sup> Helen and Kirsopp Lake, *Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 161; Constantinus Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine* (Hermann Mendelssohn, 1858), 418.

<sup>72</sup> Mantey, “The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense”, 244.

<sup>73</sup> Mantey, “The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense”, 243-249; a number of scholars agree with such interpretation cf. Mantey, “The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense”, *JBL* 58 (1939): 243-9; Mantey, Evidence That the Perfect Tense in John 20:23 and Matthew 16:19 is Mistranslated”, *JETS* 16 (1973): 129-38; Mantey, Distorted Translations in John 20:23; Matthew 16:18-19 and 18:18”, *RevExp* 78 (1981): 409-416. For a similar point cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 627; Gundry, *Matthew*, 334; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 430; Keener *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson,

reason, Mantey argues that God does not rely on the disciples' decision to forgive or not to forgive, and he thus disputed any priestly power to forgive sins.<sup>74</sup>

Against the argument of Mantey, Cadbury responded that the reading with perfect tense has the same meaning as the text with present and future tenses because they are in the apodosis.<sup>75</sup> The only fact is that the continuous aspect of the action is more emphasised by the perfect tense. This means that a perfect tense employed "in the apodosis of a general condition does not necessary refer to an action that is prior to the protasis".<sup>76</sup> In other words, the present and future tenses have the same meaning as the perfect tense because the perfect tense can refer to events in the future.<sup>77</sup> "A perfect tense used in the apodosis of a general condition does not necessary refer to an action that is prior to the protasis".<sup>78</sup> In this case, v. 23 used with present and future tenses has equal significance as the perfect tense. The only difference is that the perfect tense stresses the lasting aspect of the action.<sup>79</sup> The first clause of v. 23 could be well read as follows: "when you forgive men's [sic] sins, at that moment God forgives those sins and they remain forgiven"<sup>80</sup> because, as Brown notes, the passive voice is a "circumlocution for describing God's action".<sup>81</sup>

Cadbury concludes that Mantey's understanding of the perfect tense is inconsistent with the use of conditional sentences.<sup>82</sup> In the same vein, Brown notes that during antiquity scribes interpreted the perfect tense which allows the reading of John 20:23 use of ἀφέωνται (e.g., B<sub>2</sub>, W and ℣) and ἀφεθησεται (κ).<sup>83</sup>

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2003b), 2:1207; *idem*, "Exegetical Insight", in William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 121; Morris, *Gospel according to John*, 749–50.

<sup>74</sup> Mantey, "The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense", 246.

<sup>75</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, "The Meaning of John 20:23, Matthew 16:19, and Matthew 18:18", *JBL* 58 (1939): 252; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 366–7; Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2:1024; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:638; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 612.

<sup>76</sup> Cadbury, "The Meaning of John 20:23...", 151- 254.

<sup>77</sup> BDF paragraph 344 quoted from Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1024.

<sup>78</sup> Cadbury, "The Meaning of John 20:23...", 151- 254 quoted from Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1024.

<sup>79</sup> BDF, Para 344; BDF, para 323<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> Cadbury, "The Meaning of John 20:23...", 151- 254 quoted from Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1024.

<sup>81</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1024.

<sup>82</sup> Cadbury, "The Meaning of John 20:23...", 151- 254; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1024; cf. Tertullian *Pud.* 21.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1024.



Over 50 years ago, John Adney Emerton suggested an alternative explanation of John 20:23, using Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 as a model.<sup>84</sup> This model echoes the scene of Isaiah 22:22, where Eliakim, the king's prime minister, is invested with the authority of the key of the house of David, representing royal authority. Emerton wonders whether the words of Jesus to Peter about the key would refer to "the key of the house of David—he will open, and none will shut; and he will shut, and none will open".<sup>85</sup> In this sense, Jesus' saying in Matthew would refer to the Jewish formula of making open, which is equivalent to loosen; and shutting is equivalent to binding. If this is the case, then the Fourth Gospel may reflect synoptic tradition, replacing open with release or forgive and shut with hold in or retain. This argument of Emerton is based on a rabbinical approach, first to solve disputes between members in the community, and second to remove or impose a doctrinal obligation of excommunication.<sup>86</sup> Scholars who consider a possible Johannine reliance through oral tradition on the formula found in Matthew's Gospel support Emerton's hypothesis.<sup>87</sup>

Recently, Sandra Schneiders like Mantey argues that v. 23 has been mistranslated to support the theology of Roman Catholic confession to a priest. But she veers away from Mantey's claim of mistranslation of ἀφίημι to emphasise the role of κρατέω and the parallelism in Johannine theology. Schneiders states that she is "convinced that the 'traditional' translation of 20:23b is untenable"<sup>88</sup> and suggests the following reading of v. 23: ἄν τινων ἀφῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἀφένται αὐτοῖς ἄν τινων κρατῆτε κεκράτηνται. "Of whomever you forgive the sins, they (the sins) are forgiven to them; whomever you hold

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<sup>84</sup> John Adney Emerton, "Binding and Loosing—Forgiving and Retaining", *JTS* NS 13 (1962): 325–31.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted from Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1040.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted from Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1040.

<sup>87</sup> John A. Emerton, "Binding and Loosing", 325–31; E.g., Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 571; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 2:1039–40; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 392–397; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:640; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33A–33B; Dallas: Word Books, 1993–1995), 2:473; Keener, *Gospel of John*, 2:1207–8; Köstenberger, *John*, 575; Lindars, *Gospel of John*, 612–3; Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 535–6. To the contrary, Schweizer leaves Emerton uncited but rejects an Aramaic saying based on Isa 22:22 as underlying Matthew's binding and loosing [*Good News according to Matthew*, 343]. Others argue against related oral tradition by claiming that on different occasions Jesus likely uttered the related Matthean and Johannine logia; e.g., Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 655; Keener, *Matthew*, 430 n. 93.

<sup>88</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s) in the Fourth Gospel." *CBQ* 73/ 1 (January 2011): 27.

fast [or embrace], they are held fast”.<sup>89</sup> This means in the first clause, it is the forgiven person who possesses the sins whereas in the second clause it is the person who is the object and not the sins which are held fast.

**Table 2.1: Variations in translation**

John 20:23a	Of whomever ὅν τινων <i>possessive</i> genitive plural	you forgive the sins ἀφήτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας subjunctive aorist. active	They (the sins) are forgiven to them ἀφένονται αυτοῖς indicative perfect passive
John 20:23b	Whomever ὅν τινων <i>objective</i> genitive plural	you hold fast κρατήτε Subjunctive present active	are held fast κεκράτηνται indicative perfect passive
Matthew 18:18 (b-c)	whatever ὅσα ἐάν relative pronoun, accusative neuter plural and conjunction + subjunctive	you bind on earth δήσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς subjunctive aorist active, 2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural, indicating a forceful punctiliar act	will be bound in heaven ἔσται δεδεμένα ἐν οὐρανῶ future verb + perfect passive participle indicating a permanent continuing condition
Matthew 18:18 (d-e)	whatever ὅσα ἐάν relative pronoun, accusative neuter plural, and conjunction + subjunctive	you loose on earth. λύσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς subjunctive aorist active, 2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural, indicating a forceful punctiliar act	will be loosed in heaven. ἔσται λελυμένα ἐν οὐρανῶ future verb + perfect passive participle indicating a permanent continuing condition

<sup>89</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s) in the Fourth Gospel”, 1-29.

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With the following Greek translation of v. 23, Schneiders argues that this verse has been mistranslated on three reasons “besides a suspicion of the influence of ecclesiastical apologetics on the traditional translation”.<sup>90</sup> The first reason is grounded on the Johannine grammar and parallelism style: John 20:23 uses multiple tenses. John's 20:23a is subjunctive aorist active showing a forceful punctual act which is followed by the indicative perfect passive signifying a permanent state that continues. In 20:23b κρατέω has an active present in the subjunctive which denotes a continuous active state. This is followed by a passive perfect showing the permanent continuous condition of the person(s) who are the objects of the action, and the verbal form shows a permanent continuous state.

The second reason, Schneiders points out, is the attempt to translate v. 23 as equivalent of the version of Matthew 16:19; 18:18.<sup>91</sup> The interpretation of John 20:23 and Matthew 16:19; 18:18 have been associated from the third century (Tertullian)<sup>92</sup> because of their “similar syntactical patterns”.<sup>93</sup> By so doing, it leads to two grammatical errors. First, the mistranslation of the verb κρατέω (hold fast) while making it synonymous to δέω (bind). John uses ἀφίημι (forgive) and κρατέω (hold fast), whereas Matthew uses δέω (bind) and λύω (loose), which some scholars understand as forgiving sins.<sup>94</sup> Matthew's verse is in the reverse sequence of John's terms to forgive and retain. Second, the mistranslation provides a direct and indirect object to v. 23b which are not apparent in John 20:23. Theologically what is pertinent is that the Johannine texts are not to be read through a synoptic lens

<sup>90</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s)”, 1-29.

<sup>91</sup> For the history of interpretation of Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23 from Tertullian to Augustine, Cf. Appendix A.

<sup>92</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 31. Hays gives a comprehensive history of interpretation of John and Matthew logia.

<sup>93</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 30.

<sup>94</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 383; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 2:1044–5; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:636 (iii); Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, 348; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 369; Ernst Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (trans. Robert W. Funk; 2 vols.; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2:21; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SP 1; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 248, 269; Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 547–8; Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, 575; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew* (3 vols.; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001–2007), 2:454; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 750; Adolf Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Johannes: Wie er spricht, denkt und glaubt; Ein Kommentar zum vierten Evangelium* (3d ed.; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1960), 360; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (trans. David E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 371.

“unless there are actual literary contacts, which, in this case, are non-existent”.<sup>95</sup> Further, the Matthean texts are concerned with the legal obligations of δέω (bind) and λύω (loose) within an ecclesial jurisdiction,<sup>96</sup> whereas John 20:23 focuses on the theology of divine pardon as reflected in the terms forgive and forgiven.

Schneiders concludes that the first clause has an object (sin), whereas the second clause does not. It is rather the person who is held fast. According to the syntactical and grammatical issues of v.23, the verb κρατέω has broken the rules. Often κρατέω is accompanied by an object that is either an objective genitive, τινων which is the case here or an accusative which is absent in v.23. In a normal grammatical and syntactical form, κρατέω means to take hold of or to clasp such as in Matthew 9:25 with the presence of objective genitive; or Matthew 28:9 as feet with the accusative meaning to embrace; or Hebrews 4:14 with objective genitive as to confession of faith meaning hold fast; or Hebrews 6:18 as to hope, with objective genitive meaning hold firmly.

Schneiders points out that κρατέω has no object in v. 23 and nowhere else either in Biblical, nor secular or ancient Greek κρατέω can possibly mean “retaining something interior to someone else”.<sup>97</sup> Schneiders suggests an alternative reading of v. 23. For Schneider, taking the reading of John 20:23 as it is and following the use of parallelism of the Fourth Gospel as well as the proper syntax and grammar, v.23 would mean “that the disciples are commissioned by the risen Jesus to make effective throughout time his once-for-all salvific liberation of humanity from the sin of the world, that is, from humanity's refusal of God's totally gratuitous self-bestowing love”.<sup>98</sup> Schneiders insists that the rich theological and coherent significance of v.23 is for the Church to welcome members through baptism at the example of Jesus who gathered his disciples regardless of their infidelity and

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<sup>95</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s)”, 27.

<sup>96</sup> Matthew's use of δέω / λύω which are equivalent to Hebrew כּאָד and כּאָד (Hiphil) and Aramaic כּאָד and כּאָד. Because the verbs כּאָד and כּאָד can also denote forgiveness, some scholars understand Matthew's binding and loosing as synonymous with forgiving sins. Grammatically the verb λύω only signifies forgiveness when it has sin as an object, which is not the case in the Matthean logion. Matthew's sayings instead accord with rabbinic usage and denote the disciples' authority to decide what constitutes permitted and prohibited behaviour. Accordingly, there is no connotation of forgiveness, for nobody sins when doing that which is permitted. Although Matthew's notion of permission and prohibition could have extended to persons who were allowed and disallowed into the church, neither would such a formulation connote forgiveness because Matthew only has in mind expulsion of sinners from the church.

<sup>97</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s) in the Fourth Gospel”, 29.

<sup>98</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s) in the Fourth Gospel”, 29.

weaknesses. Such a community will maintain its members through a continual communion, just as Jesus forgives their sins and reflects the peace that the world cannot give.

Cadbury stresses that John 20:23 as well as Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 are conditional, using the perfect tense in the apodosis.<sup>99</sup> It is grammatically correct to say ‘if you forgive the sins, at that moment they are forgiven and remain so’, and ‘if you retain the sins at that moment, they are retained and remain so’; this indicates the sense of the perfect tense.

Schneiders translates the Greek particle ἅν by ‘whomsoever’. Schneiders also rejects the possibility of ἀφιέναι (to release or to let go) having κρατεῖν (to hold fast) as its antonym. The above are the differences on which Schneiders and Cadbury base their arguments. Schneiders’ argument, which is based on ordinary Greek syntax and grammar as well as John’s use of parallelism, is sound.

Both Cadbury and Schneiders make strong cases from the Greek grammar. Their conclusions differ, based on the meaning they give to κρατέω in John 20:23b. Cadbury, who emphasises the parallel with Matthew 18:18, supplies the object ‘sins’, so that the saying is an antithetical parallel with v. 23a. This results in the traditional two-fold meaning of the commission, namely that the disciples are to *remit* and *retain* sins. Schneiders does not supply ‘sins’ as the object of κρατέω, and instead translates the two-fold phrase as synonymous parallelism: “Of whomever you forgive the sins, they (the sins) are forgiven to them; whomever you hold fast [or embrace], they are held fast.” She states:

Theologically, and particularly in the context of John’s Gospel, it is hardly conceivable that Jesus, sent to take away the sin of the world, commissioned his disciples to perpetuate sin by the refusal of forgiveness or that the retention of sins in some people could reflect the universal reconciliation effected by Jesus.<sup>100</sup> Schneiders’ theological position bring light into the recent theological debates namely the presence of the resurrected Jesus and his representatives in the world. That fact is that when believers accept Jesus and believe that he is the son of God. their sins are forgiven. The second fact is that whoever acknowledges his/her sins and asks for forgiveness will receive Jesus’ forgiveness through the commission

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<sup>99</sup> Cadbury, “The Meaning of John 20:23...”, 252; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 366–7; Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2:1024; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:638; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 612.

<sup>100</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s)”, 28.

of his representative. This is a theological fact; Jesus sends his disciples to forgive and retain sins (John 20:23). The disciples do not per se retain sins. On the contrary the person seeking for forgiveness has the freedom to choose either remaining living in sins or otherwise.

This argument is strong, but perhaps does not do justice to the theme of judgement and even condemnation that John's Gospel also shows (John 3:17-21; 12:47-49). The Gospel of John is not only about the Light of the World bringing universal forgiveness, but also about the shadows that the coming of the Light casts, for which there will be both realised and future judgement.

The parallelism of the two clauses does suggest that sins are the object of the second one as well as the first one, contra Schneiders. Perhaps therefore κρατέω refers not to holding fast to the person, but *restraining* (holding fast) the sins. This could then mean that the disciples are commissioned to pronounce forgiveness and, for those sins that need ongoing restraining, they are commissioned to restrain them as well – not eschatologically, but here and now. An example of this might be in dealing with perpetrators of abuse; the penitent abuser may be forgiven, but the sins may need restraint, so that they do not continue.

Be that as it may, it is clear that the disciples are invested with the authority to pronounce forgiveness of sins based on the exegetical study of the text. The scholarly debate raises some ongoing theological problems. In the context where ἀφίημι and κρατέω are in the perfect tense,<sup>101</sup> as argued by Cadbury, the perfect tense portrays a past action of which the result is ongoing in the present. Thus, the sins are already forgiven. One can only forgive what has been already fixed by God.<sup>102</sup> This interpretation brings more questions about

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. In *Codex Sinaiticus; Codex Alexandrinus; Codex Bezae*) and in a few uncials and critical editions of the Greek New Testament (*Westcott and Hort; Nestle's Greek New Testament*),

<sup>102</sup> Mantey, "The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense", 243–9; Mantey, "Evidence That the Perfect", *JETS* 16 (1973): 129–38; Mantey, "Distorted Translations in John 20:23" *RevExp* 78 (1981): 409–16. See also a preponderance of evangelical scholars: R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 627; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1992), 422; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 678; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew*, 334; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 430; Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 2:1207; Keener, "Exegetical Insight" in William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003a), 121; Morris, *Gospel according to John*, 749–50. Stelian Tofană, *Introducere în studiul Noului Testament: Evangheliile după Luca și Ioan. Problemasinoptică* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2001), 332; Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek. Byzantine Textform* (Southborough: Chilton

forgiveness of sins. If sins are already forgiven by God, those sins no longer exist. The Johannine theology of forgiveness of sins occurs in the present (realised eschatology). If we admit that we are sinners, then God forgives our sins (1 John 1:9). Further, Jesus the Lamb of God forgives the sin of the world. Notice that sin is in singular.<sup>103</sup> John 20:23 is concerned with pronouncing the forgiveness of sins. Brodie makes a parallel of the removal of sins in this verse with the removal of blindness in chapter 9: “The removal of sins opens the way to salvation”.<sup>104</sup> The disciples are invited to pronounce the taking away of the sins of the world, in contrast with Jesus, who takes away the sin (in singular) of the world (John 1:29).<sup>105</sup> A person sins in the present and not in the past. There is no sin without a past, but there is a past with sin. The disciples have authority to pronounce that God forgives both past and present sins consciously committed by someone who acknowledges and asks God’s forgiveness for sins. The issue of retaining sins has raised various possible readings. Schneiders suggests that the entrance of Jesus into a locked room. This entrance indicates the fact that Jesus had a resurrected body which was qualitatively distinct from his historical body

### **2.2.1 Section summary**

The pericope of John 20:19-23 establishes the divine relationship of God the Father, Jesus, the Son, the Holy Spirit with the disciples. There is a continuity of mission, authority, and Spirit to forgive sins. The Fourth Gospel shows Jesus the Son transmitting his divine power to his disciples for the salvation of the world.

*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you* (v. 21). Over forty times throughout the Gospel, Jesus is said to have been sent by God, and now that will become the characteristic of his disciples also. The Son has a role in the sending of the Paraclete (14:16; 15:26; 16:7), and he plays a role in the sending of the disciples. The Son, like the Father, sends. Mission is at the heart of discipleship.

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Book Publishing, 2005), 245; Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Renașterea, 2009), 1581.

<sup>103</sup> Schneiders, “The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s),” 1-29 especially 27.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 569.

<sup>105</sup> William R. Farmer (ed) et al, *The International Biblical Commentary*, 1499.

## 2.3 Exegesis of John 20:19-23 by four selected Biblical scholars

### 2.3.1 Section introduction

As set out in the Introduction to this thesis, four Johannine scholars whose work has been influential in the Australian context have been selected for particular study: Edwyn Clement Hoskyns<sup>106</sup> (1884–1937), Rudolf Karl Bultmann<sup>107</sup> (1884–1976), Raymond Edward Brown<sup>108</sup> (1928–1998), and Charles Kingsley Barrett<sup>109</sup> (1917– 2011). These four exegetes are among the most well-respected and influential New Testament scholars, and are affiliated with the denominational spectrum of this study (Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Methodist, which in the Australian context is now the Uniting Church in Australia). Although the scholars do not represent the most recent wave of scholarship, they form a bridge of scholarly trends in Johannine studies that spans the 20th and 21st centuries. These four scholars are Johannine specialists and have paved the way for more recent exegetical and hermeneutical studies. They share common ground and also differ in their exegetical and hermeneutical approaches to John 20:19-23. The noted Australian Johannine scholar Francis Moloney has expressed appreciation for the way in which the four selected biblical scholars have contributed in the study of Johannine scholarship.<sup>110</sup>

The four scholars will be presented in chronological order to note any development or discontinuity in theological interpretation. Hoskyns was a contemporary of Bultmann and possibly a mentor to Barrett. Brown seems to be chronologically in between the three biblical scholars and familiar with their writings. Their exegetical work will be considered in the following order: Edwyn Clement Hoskyns; Rudolf Karl Bultmann; Raymond Edwards Brown; and Charles Kingsley Barrett.

The main question in this section is how these scholars critically understand God's forgiveness of sins through John 20:19-23.

### 2.3.2 Edwyn Clement Hoskyns (1884–1937)

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<sup>106</sup> Hoskyns and Davey, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>107</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 382, 689.

<sup>108</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1044.

<sup>109</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to Saint John*.

<sup>110</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 20-13.



### **2.3.2.1 Section overview**

Hoskyns connects this scene with the inauguration of the mission of the Son of God to be performed by the disciples through the gift of the Spirit. This is their apostolic commissioning and consecration. The disciples are enabled through their transformation and recreation to “undertake the contest with sin”.<sup>111</sup> The work of the Spirit in them is defined as the remission and retention of sins, and Hoskyns sees this as the essential nature of the activity of the Church. Hoskyns relates this pericope closely to Luke 24:36-49 and insists that the disciples are sent to proclaim the message of salvation, which is the mission of the risen Lord.<sup>112</sup>

#### **John 20:19-22**

Jesus suddenly appears in the midst of the disciples and pronounces the peace which he alone can give.<sup>113</sup> Two themes in relation to forgiveness of sins stand out, namely the disciples as “Apostles” and the gift of the Spirit. In v.21, the disciples “are made Apostles of the Son of God; as the Father has sent the Son, so the Son sends His disciples (Luke xxiv.47,48; Acts i.8; Matthew xxviii.19, 20; Mark xvi.15)”<sup>114</sup> to forgive sins. Although the Fourth Gospel does not use the term apostles, the disciples are Apostles for Hoskyns because they are sent.

Hoskyns declines to make a distinction between the commission given to the Church as a whole or to the apostles.

Hoskyns understands that the relation Father/Son and Son/disciples is the defining characteristic which perpetuates the mission of Christ. Nevertheless, for Hoskyns, “the distinction between Jesus and his disciples is carefully preserved”. Jesus did “not say *our Father and our God* in speaking with Mary about his ascension, since what Jesus is by nature, His disciples are by grace”.<sup>115</sup> The disciples needed a profound spiritual

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<sup>111</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>112</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>113</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 544.

<sup>114</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 544.

<sup>115</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 543. Augustine of Hippo, “Nature and Grace” (*De natura et gratia*) in St. Augustine’s *Anti-Pelagian Writings: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (NPNF, New York: The Christian Literature company, 1887) Vol.5.

transformation in order to contest with sins. For this to happen, the disciples need to be equipped with the Holy Spirit.

With regard to the gift of the Spirit, Hoskyns refutes several views he considers incorrect. For our purposes, of interest is his emphasis that the authority to remit or retain sins is not “a particular gift, but rather defines the work of salvation, and is the characteristic function of the Church in its complete activity”.<sup>116</sup> In this way he expands the meaning of these actions to make them equivalent to the mission of the church as a whole. In order to connect this scene and Pentecost in Acts, he sees the mission of God being inaugurated here, but not actually begun. Hoskyns insists that the mission of the apostles is outside of the Fourth Gospel.

Hoskyns sums up the two pivotal elements of forgiveness of sins in two words, namely consecration and insufflation. The former denotes the Holy Spirit sanctifying the disciples in preparation for the mission to forgive sins. The disciples are consecrated by the words “receive the Holy Spirit”. The breathing or insufflation signifies the solemn inauguration of the mission, and gift of the Spirit by which they [the disciples] are empowered to remit and retain sins is “a new creative act of God”.<sup>117</sup> The disciples are re-created to forgive and retain sins.<sup>118</sup>

The Holy Spirit empowers, consecrates and creates anew. The disciples are not the same and will not go back to their prior status. They are now invested with divine authority and the power of God to drive out evil and sins.<sup>119</sup> Their actions are led by the breath they have received from the risen Lord.

For Hoskyns the ministry and the church are two sides of the same coin.<sup>120</sup> Since the Church and the ministry are equivalent, then the community of the Apostles constitutes the Church<sup>121</sup> and the ministry for proclaiming forgiveness of sins begins with Pentecost.

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<sup>116</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 547.

<sup>117</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 544.

<sup>118</sup> Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, “Gen. 1-3 and St. John’s Gospel,” *JTS* 21 [1920]: 215-16.

<sup>119</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 544.

<sup>120</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>121</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545-546.

Briefly, for Hoskyns the mission to forgive sins is entrusted to the apostles, which is first and foremost – but not limited to – the historical Twelve.

### **John 20:23**

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”.

For Hoskyns, verse 23 is the evidence for claiming that Jesus grants to the disciples the authority to remit and retain sins. The disciples are appointed judges who can forgive and retain sins in the world. “The apostolic retention of sins is not a merely the absence of formal forgiveness, but a positive and effective declaration”.<sup>122</sup> By the disciples’ proclamation of forgiveness of sins, people are confronted with two choices: either to believe in their words or to reject their teachings. In this way, the disciples perpetuate the discriminatory role of the Son of God because “they declare that both unbelievers and apostates stand under the judgement of God and their sins remain”.<sup>123</sup> Those who believe are forgiven and unbelievers are condemned.

With regard to remission and retention of sins, he sees these as effectual judicial sentences, conveying the judgement of God. This means that the use of the verbs ἀφιέναι and κρατεῖν is effective and declaratory. Although an Anglican, he accepts the traditional Catholic exegesis that the sacrament of penance is inaugurated here for sins committed after conversion, but states that the principle established here is “susceptible of applications wider and more various” than the evangelist was able to make. In this way he leaves open the possibility of other interpretations.

Briefly, Hoskyns sees forgiveness of sins based on faith. Those who believe in Jesus their sins are forgiven, whereas the opposite is also true. This implies discriminatory judgement on the part of people.

### **2.3.2.2 Summary**

One might describe Hoskyns’ understanding of the forgiveness of sins in this passage as traditional sacramental ecclesial theology. It has a priestly focus, in the use of terms such

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<sup>122</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>123</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

as consecration, and the sacrament of penance. Forgiveness of sins in this pericope can refer to “conversion and baptism”,<sup>124</sup> to the sacrament of penance, or possibly to other analogous actions. For Hoskyns the disciples were consecrated to forgive and retain sins in Jesus’ name. Sins are forgiven when people accept the teaching of the Apostles, and the disciples effectively declare the forgiveness of sins. Faith is the key in order for one to be forgiven. Seven themes pertaining to forgiveness of sins are possible topics for discussion, namely, disciples, peace, apostles, God, faith, Father/Son relation, and judgement.

### **2.3.3 Rudolf Karl Bultmann (1884–1976)**

#### **2.3.3.1 Section overview**

For Bultmann, John 20:19-23 is the depiction of the event when the disciples’ eyes are opened to perceive what they already possess—the peace that Jesus gives them (John 14:27).<sup>125</sup> This pericope is a variant of Matthew 28:16-20 and Luke 24: 36-49 “and in both, the miracle of the appearance of Jesus and his demonstrative self–presentation (vv. 19f.) are reported in the manner of popular legends”.<sup>126</sup> Central to the passage are three themes: peace as a fulfilment of John 14:18,<sup>127</sup> the commissioning, in which the Lord Jesus is handing over to the disciples “the charge of their calling”,<sup>128</sup> and the disciples who represent the community. Bultmann states that “it is self-evident that it is not a special apostolic authority that is imparted here, but that the community as such is equipped with this authority; for as in chs. 13-16 the μαθηταί represent the community”.<sup>129</sup>

#### **John 20:19-22**

Bultmann gives particular attention to the sources and editorial activity implicit in John 20. He sees John 20:19-23 as a variant of Luke 24:36-49 and Matthew 28:16-20. He compares the commissioning of the disciples in 15:18-16:11, and notes how differently their commissioning in verse 23 is. This he puts down to the likelihood that vv. 19-20 and 23 are

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<sup>124</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>125</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 692.

<sup>126</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 690.

<sup>127</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 690.

<sup>128</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 690. Bultmann constantly refers to *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* for support. = History of the Synoptic Tradition, 285f.

<sup>129</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

taken from a different source, while verses 21-22 are Johannine editorial work.<sup>130</sup> In assigning verse 23 to a source, the meaning of ἀφιέναι and κρατεῖν are moved out of the ambit of Johannine theology, and placed in the synoptic tradition.<sup>131</sup> As we have seen above, this has direct implications for how we interpret their meaning.

The risen Lord greets the disciples with the words 'Peace be with you', which is the customary prayer for blessing. The disciples (the eleven) are not named as in Luke 24: 33 or Matthew 28: 16. Bultmann argues that the reason for the disciples to "meet behind locked doors"<sup>132</sup> is not that they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, but "essentially it is because by this means the coming of Jesus is shown to be a miracle, and thus from the first his form is characterised as divine".<sup>133</sup>

Bultmann suggests that John 20:21 is an addition from the evangelist. The repeated εἰρήνη points back to the farewell scene, "the hour of departure"<sup>134</sup> (John 14:27). The peace that Jesus gives to the disciples has already occurred at the hour. This scene emphasises the identity which the disciples possess already during Jesus' ministry, which is now revealed and recognised.<sup>135</sup> "Easter is precisely the hour when their eyes are opened for which already they possess; and vv. 19-23 are no more than the depiction of this event".<sup>136</sup>

Earlier on, Bultmann has argued that the wound in his side points to Jesus as the true Pascal Lamb, of whom no bone was broken.<sup>137</sup> This is unique to John who differs from the synoptics on the timing of Jesus' crucifixion, which coincides with the slaughtering of the lamb at midday.<sup>138</sup> The sacrificial imagery is of interest in this study of the forgiveness of sins; although the Passover lambs in Exodus 12:46 are not the sacrificial lambs of the Temple, nevertheless as the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29), Jesus is shown to replace the sacrificial cult of the Temple with regard to the forgiveness

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<sup>130</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 690.

<sup>131</sup> Bultmann refers his work *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* for support, *The Gospel of John*, 689.

<sup>132</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 690.

<sup>133</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 690-691.

<sup>134</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 692.

<sup>135</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 692.

<sup>136</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 692.

<sup>137</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 677.

<sup>138</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 677.

of sins. Jesus is now the bringer of salvation.<sup>139</sup> This gives the context in which Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away sin, commissions the disciples to pronounce forgiveness of sins.

The risen Lord blesses his disciple and commissions them in this passage as he did in the prayer of John 17:18. The community of John is called to remain in the world and yet live a holy life. “The community is marked off the world”<sup>140</sup> by the revelation of Jesus. The holiness of the community is distinct from its community structure and its efforts to live a particular way of life. This holiness is not obtained by natural causes. The holiness of the community is based on the word of Jesus and “its continual realisation of its world-annulling way of life”.<sup>141</sup>

For Bultmann the breathing on the disciples in John 20:22 actualises the promise of the farewell discourse, bestowing the Spirit upon his disciples,<sup>142</sup> echoing the beginning of life in Adam<sup>143</sup> (Genesis 2:7; Wisdom 15:11; 4 Esr. 3:5; Ezekiel 37: 5-10) and commissioning the disciples by consecrating them into the life of the Son. The breath of Jesus is vital to the mission of the disciples, because it is life-giving and marks a new beginning. The disciples have been called and schooled by Jesus. They were promised that their joy will be complete when they receive the Holy Spirit (John 15:11, 16:20-22). Now the exulted Lord bestows on them the Holy Spirit through whom they are consecrated and commissioned into the world. The Holy Spirit will continue to accompany them in the world. Like in John 16:8-11, the Spirit accompanies the disciples, as an ἐλέγχειν (to bring conviction and/or reproof).<sup>144</sup> This is relevant to the theme of remitting or retaining sins.

Now that the disciples are consecrated and commissioned by the Son, they have been vested with the authority of the Holy Spirit to forgive and retain sins. This authority, like that of the Son, comes with consequences. The disciples, like the Son who sends them to

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<sup>139</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 677.

<sup>140</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 509.

<sup>141</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 509.

<sup>142</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 692.

<sup>143</sup> Bultmann emphasises the importance of life in all areas of life. For the ancient rite of exorcism during baptism cf. Franz Joseph Dölger, *Der Exorzismus im altchristlichen Taufritual* (Stud. Z. Gesch. Und Kultur des Alter. III 1/2, 1909), 118ff; Bonwetsch Hippolytus Achelis, “Canon. Hippolytus”, in *Texte und Untersuchungen. VI 4* (Leipzig, 1891), 93; Leonhard Bauer, *Volksleben im Lande der Bibel* (Leipzig: H. G. Wallmann), 1903;

<sup>144</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

forgive and retain sins, become the sign of κρίσις – judgement or contradiction in the world.<sup>145</sup> The authority of the mission they carry made them a continued symbols' of Jesus judgement to the world (John 3:19; 5:27; 9:39). Not that the disciples are judging the world, but the world is judged because of their presence. When one is faced with the choice to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and son of God or reject him, one faces a judgement of either life or death. For Bultmann, the role of the disciples is not limited to the twelve historical members, but it extends to all believers in Christ. Therefore, this role of the disciples is by no means a transfer of apostolic authority, but rather the Lord Jesus equipping the whole community with authority to forgive and retain sins. As in chapters 13–16, the μαθηταί represent the whole community of believers.

Briefly, Bultmann describes forgiveness of sins in four themes: disciples, consecration, commission, and the Holy Spirit.

### **John 20:23**

The term “forgiveness of sins” sounds strange to Johannine language. For Bultmann John 20:23 comes from the source; presumably Luke 24:47, which speaks about ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν as a key element of the kerygma.<sup>146</sup> Bultmann insists that John 20:23 is a variant of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, but not directly dependent on the Matthean tradition, so from another source.<sup>147</sup> The difference between the Fourth Gospel and Matthew’s Gospel is the use of the terms “bind” and “loose” (terms are foreign to Johannine theology); these are substituted by ἀφιέναι and κρατεῖν in the Gospel of John.<sup>148</sup>

In the context of Johannine theology, the forgiveness of sins should be “interpreted in the sense conveyed by the Evangelist”.<sup>149</sup> For Bultmann the context to forgive and retain sins is pneumatological. This means the disciples received the charge of their calling when the risen Lord breathed on them. The authority to forgive is transferred to them through the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Bultmann states that “the judgement that took place in the

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<sup>145</sup> Bultmann sets this out in his essay on ‘The “Krisis” of the World’, from *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1955), 33-49, 56-69.

<sup>146</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

<sup>147</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

<sup>148</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

<sup>149</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

coming of Jesus (3.19; 5.27; 9.39) is further achieved in the activity of the disciples".<sup>150</sup> For this reason, the power to forgive and retain sins is given to the entire community of the disciples rather than the twelve only.<sup>151</sup> Bultmann considers it unlikely that the sense of this is limited to discipline within the community, as it is connected with the missionary command.<sup>152</sup>

Briefly, Bultmann's concept of forgiveness of sins in John 20:23 rests on pneumatological relation which Jesus bestowed on the community of the disciples. The disciples continue the 'Krisis' of the coming of the Son by enacting the proclamation of forgiveness and judgement.

Bultmann's interpretation of this passage is shaped by his distinctive existential ('Krisis') approach to the passage, but certain Lutheran emphases are visible. There is no interest in special apostolic authority or the sacramental priestly tradition of penance; this commissioning is for the community as a whole to perform, and they are equipped to do so by the Holy Spirit. His reference point is not the traditions of the church, relating to patristic interpretation or the Councils, but Johannine theology and also the synoptic tradition. For Bultmann, the story is a symbolic representation of the fulfilment of the promise in John 14:18, and emphasises that the Risen Lord and Crucified are one.<sup>153</sup> In the forgiving and retaining of sins, the realised grace and judgement of the Risen Crucified One continues.

### **2.3.3.2 Summary**

For Bultmann, forgiveness of sins in this pericope is pneumatological and exercised by all disciples. Six themes in relation to God's forgiveness of sins emerged, namely: disciples, peace, paschal lamb, consecration, commission and Holy Spirit.

## **2.3.4 Raymond Edward Brown (1928–1998)**

### **2.3.4.1 Section overview**

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<sup>150</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

<sup>151</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

<sup>152</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

<sup>153</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 691.



Brown argues that forgiveness of sins as portrayed in John 20:19-23 is the divine power “to isolate, repel and negate evil and sin given to Jesus in his mission by the Father and given in turn by Jesus through the Spirit to those whom he commissions”.<sup>154</sup> Brown states that various Christian communities have legitimately specified the manner and agency whereby this power is exercised, and affirms that the assurance that the power has been granted is demonstrable exegetically, but not the manner of its exercise.<sup>155</sup> In the following brief summary of some key points, only those that relate to the forgiveness of sins are noted.

### **John 20:19-22**

The disciples are in hiding, as they are fearful of the Jewish authorities, who may consider them to dangerous or indeed sinful. They may be accused of complicity in stealing the body of Jesus (cf. Matthew 28:13) or, as Brown notes, “the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, 26, reports a search for the disciples on the ground that they were evil doers and had tried to burn the Temple”.<sup>156</sup> The irony of fearful gathering of those accused of wrong-doing being invested with God’s own power to forgive or retain sins is patent.

Jesus greets the disciples with ‘Peace’. Peace is more than an ordinary greeting *shalom* or its use in plural *šālōm ’ālēkem*.<sup>157</sup> Brown suggests that the meaning of peace is eschatological and declaratory. “Jesus’ words are not a wish but “a statement of fact” and “a formula of revelation.”<sup>158</sup> In Johannine theology the gift of peace that the risen Lord gives to the disciples is the fulfilment of the Last discourse as reflected in John 14:27-28. The gift of Christ’s peace satisfies the disciples because they are now in the presence of the Risen Lord. The essence of the greeting is the “presence of Jesus and the gift of divine sonship that is the basis of Christian peace”.<sup>159</sup> This peace sets the tone for the rest of this pericope.

Brown remarks that “[the peace] will come only after the world has been conquered, John 15:33”.<sup>160</sup> Peace and joy are the terms that bring about the eschatological time of blessings

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<sup>154</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1044.

<sup>154</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1044.

<sup>155</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1045.

<sup>156</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1020.

<sup>157</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 969. Cf. Luke 24:36.

<sup>158</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1021. The case here is a declaration. It does not need the verb “be”.

<sup>159</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1035.

<sup>160</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 653.

and harmony in human life. It is a Jewish concept of perfect joy and harmony occasioned by the “divine presence”.<sup>161</sup> In Jewish thought, peace and joy are the signs of the eschatological period when God’s intervention would have brought about harmony in human life and in the world. John sees this period realised, as Jesus returns to pour forth his Spirit upon humanity.

Brown insists that in “Johannine language ‘peace’, ‘truth’, ‘light’, ‘life’, and ‘joy’ are figurative terms that reflecting different facets of the great gift that Jesus has brought from the Father to [humanity]”.<sup>162</sup> Against this background, Brown continues, “peace is my gift to you is another way of saying ‘I give them eternal life John 10:28a”. Consequently, “the peace” of which Jesus refers in John 10:28 has the exact meaning of “my joy” in John 15:11 and 17:13.<sup>163</sup>

Jesus shows them his wounds in his hands and his side. The wounds may show “a continuity between the resurrection and the crucifixion”.<sup>164</sup> By showing his wounds, the risen Lord identifies himself as the same person who was crucified and now ready to offer the gift of his ascension. Once the disciples are convinced that this is the risen Lord who stands before them, then they rejoice. The theme of joy comes after the disciples have seen the wounds and identified the Lord.<sup>165</sup> It is in a context of peace and joy that the disciples are commissioned. Brown gives exegetical attention to the wounds of Jesus, as they are important to Christian – and particularly Roman Catholic – piety.<sup>166</sup> Devotion to the five wounds of the Crucified Lord (cf. Luke 24:39) has become a focus of both piety and art.

The Fourth Gospel identifies the people present in the locked behind doors as the disciples. Who are these disciples of Jesus? The answer to this question points to those to whom the risen Lord granted the divine power to forgive sins.<sup>167</sup> Scholars of all backgrounds debate

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<sup>161</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1035.

<sup>162</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 973.

<sup>163</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 653.

<sup>164</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1033.

<sup>165</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1033.

<sup>166</sup> In 1919, Edward Shillito wrote a poem entitled "*Jesus of the Scars*." This is an example of devotion to the wounds of the crucified Jesus.

<sup>167</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1033-1034. “They had pieced my hand and feet”.

this question. Some argue for all followers of Jesus while others restrict the number to the Twelve (although minus Judas).

Brown notes that the Evangelist and the pre-Gospel sources speak about the Eleven. Brown states that “at least in the primitive form of the story, it [disciples] means the Eleven”.<sup>168</sup> This is a fact well established by all the Gospels.<sup>169</sup> There is a likelihood of other people being present in the room (Luke 24:33) “the Eleven gathered together, and those who were with them”. The fact that the Evangelist did not list the names of the disciples present at this occasion stimulates more research. However, “it cannot be used to argue that only the Eleven were present, for an earlier understanding of ‘apostle’ did not confer that term to the Twelve.”<sup>170</sup> Brown asks whether the Eleven could represent all Christians and automatically becomes the recipients of God’s forgiveness of sins.

Verse 21 suggests that the Eleven cannot represent all the Christians. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” This is the only time the Fourth Gospel designated the Twelve as apostles.<sup>171</sup> Brown notes that; “in vs. 21 John joins the common Gospel tradition that the risen Jesus constituted apostles by entrusting a salvific mission to those to whom he appeared”.<sup>172</sup> The Evangelist is speaking of the apostolic mission. Jesus is sending the Eleven (Thomas was not there at this occasion in addition to Judas). Scholars argue for and against the Eleven. Those who argue against the Eleven see this mission be granted to all Christians. The question is, were all disciples sent? The answer is no. Were all disciples of Jesus apostles? Again, the answer is no. One might argue that the Fourth Gospel does not promote the Eleven. And so, their role is irrelevant. This is untrue because “the characteristically Johannine outlook does not demote the Twelve, but rather turns these chosen disciples into representatives of all the Christians who would believe in Jesus on their word”.<sup>173</sup> Brown argues that there is nothing in John’s Gospel that downplays the role

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<sup>168</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1067.

<sup>169</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1034; Luke 24:33; Matthew 18:16; Marcan Appendix 16:14.

<sup>170</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1022. The Synoptics note the appearance of the risen Lord to the Eleven (Matthew 28:16 Luke 24:33; Marcan Appendix 16:14). In 1 Corinthians 14:5 Paul confirms that Jesus appeared first to Cephas and then to the ‘Twelve’ (although Eleven, because Judas had committed suicide already).

<sup>171</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1036.

<sup>172</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1036.

<sup>173</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1034.

of the Twelve and the rest due to them. The Johannine Jesus addresses the Twelve in John 6: 67-71 with no sign of discontent. In John 6:70 the conversation between Jesus and the Twelve shows that a special attachment to Jesus is expected of them. John 20:24 distinguishes the Twelve from the larger group and from those who will believe in Jesus on their behalf (John 20:28). On these occasions they are distinguished from the larger group of disciples. What is at stake in the Fourth Gospel is to determine when the Evangelist speaks of the Twelve as in their historical role intimate friends of Jesus and when they are in their religious capacity as representative of all Christians.

In verse 22 the Fourth Gospel defines the apostolic mission in terms of “the Father having sent the Son”.<sup>174</sup> According Brown, for the Fourth Gospel, this paradigm is the yardstick for all Christians. If verse 21 restricted the apostolic mission to the Twelve, verse 22 extends the apostolic mission to all Christians. Verse 22 echoes the creation of humanity in Genesis 2:7. In verse 22, Jesus is recreating the children of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. “Certainly, this re-creation, this new begetting, this gift of the Spirit is meant for all Christians”.<sup>175</sup> Brown argues that one might reject verse 22 because it is an additional text of the Evangelist. Or again disagree with the theological impetus of the Father-Son model of the mission for all Christians. The issue remains unresolved until one listens to “verse 23, which is a modified form of an ancient saying of Jesus.

### **John 20:23**

This verse has been distorted and divisive among both scholars and laity. Brown suggests a moderate position, namely to search for the meaning which the Evangelist attached to verse 23 when it was originally written. Such a position will resolve the issue of who has the power to forgive in this verse. Some scholars interpret this verse based on the understanding that Jesus granted the power to forgive to the Twelve only. Others reject this interpretation and claim that the power to forgive sins has been granted to all Christians. And others are in between the two interpretations. The first interpretation is supported by the Roman Catholic Church, although not all scholars are in favour of it. It claims that the power to forgive sins after baptism is passed on through priestly ordination.

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<sup>174</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1034.

<sup>175</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1035.

The second group of scholars takes a Protestant position and claims that the power to forgive sins is actualised in admitting people to baptism and preaching God's forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. The third group of scholars share both positions.

Brown remarks that "the disciples can forgive and hold men's [sic] sins because Jesus has breathed the Holy Spirit upon them".<sup>176</sup> According to Brown, the breathing forth of the Spirit is the highest deed that Jesus performed in all his post resurrection appearances to his disciples. Brown concurred with Dodd who wrote that the breathing of the Holy Spirit on the disciples is "the ultimate climax of the personal relations between Jesus and his disciples".<sup>177</sup> To breathe recalls the Septuagint (LXX) creation scene in Genesis 2:7 that reads: "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being". Here the Gospel emphasises creation, the life-giving Spirit activity of God. As God created humanity, so the risen Lord recreates his disciples with his Spirit. This verse concludes the theological concept of creation already introduced to the Gospel in the Prologue. The theme of creation in this passage cannot be emphasised enough because it is in the action of recreating that Jesus through the Holy Spirit forgives sins.<sup>178</sup> Verse 22 recalls the creation story in Genesis 2:7 and was an addition of the Evangelist. This presents a possibility that the evangelist is limiting the mission to forgive sins to a restricted group rather than the vast majority of Christians.

Nevertheless, Brown does not find this in the text. The salvific mission is feasible only if it follows the Father sending of the Son paradigm which serves as the epitome for the Son sending of the disciples' model. As the Father has been present to the Son during his mission, so does the Son to the disciples' mission. Whoever sees the disciples should be able to see Jesus who sent them. Such a relation echoes the word of Jesus "whoever sees me, is seeing Him who sent me" (John 12:45) or again "whoever sees me, see the Father who sent me" (John 7 45). The permanent presence of the Son in the mission of the disciples is vital for them to produce fruit. This apostolic mission is accessible through the

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<sup>176</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1043.

<sup>177</sup> Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953), 227.

<sup>178</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1037.

Holy Spirit whom the Father sends in Jesus's name and remains with the Son who breathes on the disciples.

For Brown, the gift of the Spirit in John 20:22 is "the high point of the post-resurrectional activity of Jesus".<sup>179</sup> Some scholars understand the breath in this pericope in the light of the interpretation of the Near Eastern beliefs. In the ancient Near East Interpretation, the breath has power to change a person. It influences the being of the whole person. Other scholars argue that the breathing reflects the "later practice of ordination by insufflation".<sup>180</sup> Brown notes that the breath of a holy man in the Near-Eastern belief carries a supernatural power either to heal or destroy a person's life.

In the Fourth Gospel, "breathing is connected with the power to forgive sins"<sup>181</sup> which for some Christian Churches it is bestowed on someone at the time of priestly ordination. For example; in the Roman Catholic Church or Orthodox Churches and to a degree in the Anglican churches. With this line of thought, some scholars suggest that the Gospel of John is the model of the early form of Christian ordination rite.<sup>182</sup> Other theologians argue that the breathing echoes the Trinitarian movement, which means the Holy Spirit proceeded by spiration and that the Son had a role to play both in the mission and in the procession of the Holy Spirit.<sup>183</sup> The insufflation in verse 22 accompanied by the words "receive a Holy Spirit"<sup>184</sup> is equivalent to the Spirit as wind spoken by Jesus in John 3:8.<sup>185</sup> This concept

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<sup>179</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1037; Idem, "The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 13 [1967]: 113-32; idem, "The Paraclete in Light of Modern Research," *SE* 4 [1968]: 158-65; idem, "review of *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, by George Johnston, *CBQ* 3 [1971]: 268-70; idem, "review of *The Johannine Paraclete in the Church Fathers: A Study in the History of Exegesis*, by Anthony Casarella, *CBQ* 48 [1986]: 738-39).

<sup>180</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1023; an example of insufflation and apostolic succession is seen in the ordination of Ethiopian head of Church. There was a practice of the Coptic church of Alexandria. The Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria used to fill a skin bag with holy breath and send it to Ethiopia where it was let loose on the head of the person who was consecrated as head of the Church of Ethiopia, the *Abuna* cf. Looft Levonian, *The Expositor*, 8<sup>th</sup> Series, 22 (1921), 149-154. Jesus breathing on his disciples gave more weight to this practice, which demonstrated apostolic succession.

<sup>181</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1023.

<sup>182</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1023, cf. Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1964), 51-73.

<sup>183</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1023. Brown relates this to the patristic discussions as to whether the procession of the Holy Spirit comes only from the Father.

<sup>184</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1030.

<sup>185</sup> Dodd, *Tradition*, 144. Dodd previous view on the subject was that insufflation was a language of evangelical cf. 430.

shows that verse 22 may well be the expansion of the primitive narrative.<sup>186</sup> Brown argues that a key role of the Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel is to forgive sins, pointing out that the symbolism of the giving of the Holy Spirit concerns the new creation, a creation that wipes out evil, for the Holy Spirit consecrates people and gives them the power to make others holy in turn.<sup>187</sup>

The theme of recreation is central to v. 22 because it relates Jesus to God the creator of the universe, while at the sometimes representing Jesus as re-creating his disciples. The first creation was in Adam and the second creation in the Holy Spirit, who eradicates sins. The Holy Spirit whom the risen Lord breathed on the disciples is the connection between the disciples and Jesus and enables the disciple to act as Christ and forgive sins as Christ command them in v. 23. Forgiveness of sins in John v 23 is then Christocentric as demonstrated in the Community of 1 John 2: 1-2.<sup>188</sup>

Brown gives the following answer to the question how God forgives sins in verse 23. First Brown calls the passage of 1 John 2:1-2: "Jesus Christ our intercessor with the Father 'is an expiation for our sins and not only for our sins but also for the whole world'".<sup>189</sup> Then Brown admits that the forgiveness in this sense is far removed from the material world. Second, Brown answers that God forgives through the Paraclete/Spirit which is the Spirit whom Jesus sent to the disciples.<sup>190</sup> The Paraclete/Spirit whom the Father will send and who is now being sent by the risen Lord will transform the disciples, make them holy, and establishing the same relation Father has with the Son so that the disciples in having a sacred relation with the Son, they can then forgive like the Son. To this end, the disciples

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<sup>186</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1030.

<sup>187</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1037.

<sup>188</sup> "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world".

<sup>189</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1043.

<sup>190</sup> Brown makes a distinction between the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete and the Spirit. "The Paraclete does not have some of the basic functions of the Holy Spirit such as baptismal regeneration, re-creation, and forgiveness of sins (John 3:5, 20:22-23), are never predicated of the Paraclete" cf. p. 1140). However, John 14:26 identifies the Holy spirit as the Paraclete. This is an exception and not an editorial error cf. Brown 1140. The Paraclete seems to be the Spirit of Jesus because everything which is said about Jesus is equally said about the Paraclete. The Fourth Gospel calls "the Paraclete as the Holy Spirit in a very special role namely, as the personal presence of Jesus in the Christian while Jesus is with the Father" cf. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1139. The Paraclete understanding of the Fourth Gospel is consistent with what the NT identifies with the Holy Spirit.

become the organ of forgiveness through the Holy Spirit. The third response of Brown is based on faith. Those who believe are forgiven and those who do not believe are judged and condemned (John 14:17; 15: 8).

The disciples are the subjects of forgiveness and judgement in the world. To this end, like Jesus, the disciples continue to discriminate in the world. The fourth answer of Brown is based on Johannine theology, namely “the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit that cleanses men [sic] and begets them to new life (cf. John 1:3 and 3:5)”.<sup>191</sup> The last answer of Brown is informed by the Qumran community. The community is responsible to admit or reject people who seek to join their way of life. This is equivalent to baptism in Christian community. The concept of John’s eschatology explains the Qumran system of forgiveness of sins and the ecclesial forgiveness of sins based on the Spirit that cleanses and begets life. The disciples who are sent by the risen Lord receive the Holy Spirit who purifies, consecrates and enables them to forgive peoples’ sins and make them holy.<sup>192</sup> Brown traces this concept from the Qumran community where the supervisor (*m<sup>e</sup>baqqēr*) welcomes new members into the community through a rite of passage in which they are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and continued to live a life of forgiveness.<sup>193</sup> “Just as a father takes pity upon his sons, and he is to bring them back all that have strayed: ‘he shall loosen all the fetters that blind them so that no one should be oppressed or broken in his congregation’”.<sup>194</sup>

Brown sees the model of the Qumran community as the basis to understand the structure of forgiveness of sins within the ecclesial community which both welcomes members in baptism and continues to sanctify all members by the creator Spirit. In John 20:22-23, Brown, like Barrett, Hoskyns and Dodd, understands the forgiveness of sins as the creator

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<sup>191</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1043.

<sup>192</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1043.

<sup>193</sup> 1 QS iii 7-8; The etymology of *m<sup>e</sup>baqqēr* is *episkopos* or bishop in English. The ritual of forgiveness continues in the Qumran community with the *m<sup>e</sup>baqqēr* granting forgiveness of sins to members of the community (CD xiii 9-10)

<sup>194</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1043; Brown notes that Dupont-Sommer considers the ritual to be a duty of the supervisor to release the members of the community from the bondage of Belial so that they can enjoy the spiritual benefits and free their consciences from the weight of sin cf. André Dupont-Sommer, *The Essence Writings from Qumran* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1962), 157; E. Cothenet argues that the supervisor did not absolve the sins of other members of the Qumran community but rather allows them to receive divine forgiveness due to his paternal role within the community which needed fraternal justice cf. Édouard Cothenet, in *Les Textes de Qumran*, ed. Jean Carmignac (Paris: Letouzey, 1963), II, 201.



Spirit cleansing one at baptism and through approved ecclesial rites within a given the Church. Forgiveness of sins happens at baptism, but does not exhaust the text of John 20:19-23.<sup>195</sup>

While v. 22 should be understood in relation to v. 21, v. 23 partly is connected to v. 29 which supplies a continuity of forgiveness of sins witness by the disciples to future Christians. The Thomas scene establishes the connection from the “eye witness disciples to the many Christians who believe without having seen”.<sup>196</sup> It is the Holy Spirit which Jesus gives to the disciples in the action of breathing (v.22) and in turn received by all baptised Christians that is at the centre of forgiveness of sins of all believers. John’s community attests to this communal forgiveness in 1 John 1:7-9 emphasising one’s confession and acknowledgement of sins to God receives divine pardon.<sup>197</sup> However, Brown speaks of venial sins to be forgiven through prayers which reiterates the teaching of the Fathers of the Church especially Augustine. God forgives a sinner directly through communal prayers as in 1 John 12-17 and one can pray directly to God for forgiveness of sins. One can pray for the forgiveness of sins of another that are not mortal, based on this verse.<sup>198</sup>

### **John 20:23**

Brown suggest a theological view from Dodd on forgiveness of sins.<sup>199</sup> How does God forgive sins? Brown suggests that verse 23 should be understood in association with verse 21 and 22. “The Johannine realized eschatology and dualism offer background for understanding the forgiveness and holding of sins in 20:23”.<sup>200</sup> The power to forgive sins lies in the Father sending the Son and now the Son sending the disciples as he was sent by the Father. The disciples can only forgive and hold sins based on the action and obedience to the command of the risen Lord who sends them. To interpret this passage, one needs to

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<sup>195</sup> Charles H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 348; Charles H. Dodd, “Some Johannine ‘Herrenworte’ with parallels in the synoptic Gospels”, *New Testament Studies* 2(1955-1956), 85-86. A discussion of 20: 23, reprinted in *Tradition*, 347-349; Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII*, 1044.

<sup>196</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1044.

<sup>197</sup> 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”.

<sup>198</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1044.

<sup>199</sup> Dodd, *Tradition*, 347-349.

<sup>200</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1043.

understand what Jesus means by judgement in John 9:39-41. Jesus comes to judge the world, which opens the eyes of the blind and allows others to reject the gift of salvation and remain in sins. John 3: 17-21 describes the judgement in discriminatory terms of good and evil. This is paradoxically the reason the Father sent the Son, who causes joy for some who believe in him (John 17: 20) and hatred for others (John 17:14). The disciples are sent into the world (John 14:18) to continue the discriminatory process between beliefs and sinful life. The presence of the disciples confronts people with two choices of judgement namely, to accept the forgiveness of sins or reject it. The verbs “are forgiven” and “are held” are circumlocutions telling about the action of God.

Brown discusses the problem of the meaning, extent and exercise of the power to forgive sins described in John 20:23, and states that it is “probably impossible to settle this dispute on purely exegetical grounds.”<sup>201</sup> He notes that post-biblical concerns shape our presuppositions, and skilfully declines to allow this to determine the exegetical meaning of the passage.

As a Roman Catholic scholar writing in the era when the Catholic Church has turned away from denominationally determined biblical interpretation, Brown engages with ideas and scholars from various traditions. He seeks to orient his interpretation according to the earliest recoverable meaning of the text – which he sees as pertaining to sins committed before baptism.<sup>202</sup> He shapes the meaning according to the themes of Johannine theology, and includes the theology of 1 John 1:7-9, 2:12, 5:16-17 (which introduces the distinction between venial and mortal sins). For Brown, forgiveness in penance is implied by John 20:23, but the power is a much larger one than this: the power to isolate, repel and negate evil and sin. The text does not provide exegetical proof for the specifics of how this is to be practised, only the assurance of its reality and efficacy.

#### **2.3.4.2 Section summary**

Brown understands forgiveness of sins in John 20:19-23 as both a declaratory and effective power to isolate, repel and negate sins. A power of forgiveness of sins given to the Church by the risen Lord to achieve salvation. John did not give the details on how the power to

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<sup>201</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1041.

<sup>202</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1042.

forgive sins should be exercised within a given ecclesial structure. The lack of details leads to early and current differences between scholars and various Churches on how to forgive sins.

Seven themes emerged in Brown's discussion of the passage, namely: disciples, the Twelve, peace, Father / Son relation, God, faith, and discriminatory judgement.

### **2.3.5 Charles Kingsley Barrett (1917–2011)**

#### **2.3.5.1 Section overview**

C.K. Barrett sees John 20:19-31 as saying all that needs to be said to effect the transition from the life of Jesus to the history of the church.<sup>203</sup> John's concern is for the future: the life, witness, and authority of the church.<sup>204</sup> Barrett argues that forgiveness of sins is a mission that the risen Lord bestows on the disciples: "It is the mission of Jesus himself which, through the Spirit, is perpetuated in the mission of the church; and the church by its faith is related to Christ as Christ is to God."<sup>205</sup>

Barrett discusses John 20: 19-23 together with the following pericope, in which Jesus meets Thomas, who had been absent when Jesus appeared among them on the day of resurrection. Barrett observes that there are many elements in these two accounts that emphasise a liturgical setting. The timing is the Lord's Day, there is a blessing given, the Holy Spirit descends on the worshippers and the absolution is pronounced. Christ himself is present, suggesting the Eucharist and the spoken word of God, and he is confessed as Lord and God. Verse 29, that follows immediately afterwards, explicitly extends the horizon of thought to include all Christians as they meet under the authority of the word of God.<sup>206</sup>

Barrett addresses many of the same discussions as the other scholars, although he is more reticent to identify sources than Bultmann and Brown. Barrett expresses his respect for the commentaries, monographs and articles of various scholars, including Hoskyns, Brown and Bultmann, who died a week after he completed the manuscript of his second edition.

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<sup>203</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 567.

<sup>204</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 567.

<sup>205</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 567.

<sup>206</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 573. Also cited by Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1019-1020.

Barrett states “I do not believe that John intended to supply us with historically verifiable information regarding the life and teaching of Jesus, and that historical traditions of great worth can be disentangled from his interpretative comments”.<sup>207</sup>

Nevertheless, Barrett gives attention to the question of who was present – the inner or outer circle of Jesus’ followers. The section is given the title ‘Jesus appears to the Eleven’, though only the Ten were present on the day of resurrection.<sup>208</sup> He states that it is impossible to settle the question of who was present with certainty. However, he offers a lengthy quotation from Hort which discusses the Twelve as representing the whole ecclesia of the future.<sup>209</sup> Barrett notes that the Lukan parallel suggests that there were Twelve and others (τοὺς ἕνδεκα καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς Luke 24:33). John mentions twice the Twelve as the inner group of the disciples of Jesus (John 6:67-71 and 20:24). Unlike the Synoptics, John does not name them, except the seven in John 21:2. Although it is rare that Jesus speaks to the Twelve (eleven minus Judas) in John, it is most likely that in this pericope the risen Lord was chiefly addressing the twelve as representative of the apostolic church.<sup>210</sup>

### **John 20:19-22**

Barrett narrates the event of the first appearance of the Risen Lord to his gathered disciples with a focus on the upcoming apostolic Church through his life and witness of the authority of the Spirit.<sup>211</sup> On Easter Sunday, Peter and John already have been to the empty tomb after Mary’s announcement of the absence of the body of Jesus. John believed immediately, while Peter remained quiet (John 20:1-18). Although the two disciples witnessed the empty tomb, they remained fearful behind locked doors. In the evening of that same day, the risen Jesus appears among the disciples and wished them peace. He showed them his wounds and they rejoiced. The fear and doubt are overcome.

The Risen Lord greets the disciples with εἰρήνη (peace), the ordinary Jewish greeting which means “May all be well with you”.<sup>212</sup> The εἰρήνη in the resurrection event signifies a special

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<sup>207</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, Preface, vii.

<sup>208</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568.

<sup>209</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568. F.J. A. Hort, *Christian Ecclesia*, (London: MacMillan & Co, 1914) 33.

<sup>210</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568.

<sup>211</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 567.

<sup>212</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568.

gift of the Lord.<sup>213</sup> A similar meaning of εἰρήνη could be found in the writings of Philo, *Mos.* 1, 304.<sup>214</sup> At other times εἰρήνη means the “absence of fear and perturbation of heart; that is the gift of Christ alone”.<sup>215</sup> However, the εἰρήνη that the risen Lord imparts to the disciple is equal to the peace in John 14:27; 16: 33; 21, and 26.

Barrett notes that “in many Old Testament passages “peace” had acquired more than a conventional meaning”.<sup>216</sup> An example in point is found in Psalm 29:11 “The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace”. Another example is Isaiah 57:19; “creating praise on their lips. Peace, peace, to those far and near, says the Lord. And I will heal them”; Numbers 6:26; Psalm 28:11; Isaiah 54:13; Ezekiel 37:26; Romans 1:7; 5:1; and 14:17 are other examples of similar meaning. In the Johannine context, peace signifies a special gift of the Lord.<sup>217</sup>

In brief, we see the themes of disciples, the Twelve and peace emerging in this discussion.

Barrett points out that Jesus’ wounds and blood make a theological point.<sup>218</sup> Barrett considers it possible that Jesus was not nailed to the cross by tied up with ropes on the cross on the ground of prior accounts of the crucifixion.<sup>219</sup> Any references to the wounds of Jesus as a result of nailing has emerged for two reasons, namely the body of Jesus was convincing evidence that he was not substituted by another body and the sacrificial meaning of blood that has a theological significance of death and resurrection.<sup>220</sup> This is relevant to a discussion of the forgiveness of sins, as it evokes sacrificial imagery, and reminds the reader of the way in which Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

The pattern “as the Father has sent me so I send...” is significant to Barrett in terms of forgiving sins.<sup>221</sup> The two verbs ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω (send) are used interchangeably in

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<sup>213</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 468.

<sup>214</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 468.

<sup>215</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 468.

<sup>216</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 468; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 653.

<sup>217</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 468.

<sup>218</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

<sup>219</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

<sup>220</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

<sup>221</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

the Fourth Gospel.<sup>222</sup> Barrett draws attention to the use of πέμπειν in the sentence ὁ πέμψας με (πατήρ) which is employed for sending the Paraclete in John 14:26; 15:26, and 16:7. The instances where the Risen Lord speaks of sending his disciples are in John 4:38 and 17:18 with the use of ἀποστέλλειν, whereas in John 13:16 and 20 it is πέμπειν.

In the study of John 20:21 the pattern καθώς... καί remains the same, equally the meaning of ἀποστέλλειν and πέμπειν (John 13:20 and 17:18 are the closest parallel to John 20:21). Thus, the Father sends the Son and the Son sends the “apostles”.<sup>223</sup> What is significant in this structure is the parallelism rather than contrast, Barrett insists. In view of the generally synonymous use of the words ἀποστέλλειν and πέμπειν and the construction of this sentence (καθώς... καί...), it does not seem possible to distinguish between two kinds of sending, one in which the person sent is a delegate with transferred authority (ἀποστέλλειν), and one in which this is not so (πέμπειν).<sup>224</sup>

The Father sending the Son does not diminish the Son, although John has a hierarchical notion in the relation of Jesus and the Father. Nevertheless, the Son was entirely dependent on and obedient to the Father, and so too, the Church is commissioned only in virtue of the fact that Jesus sanctified it, breathed the Spirit into it and enabled it to be obedient to the Father. He states: “The life and mission of the church are meaningless if they are detached from this historical and theological context.”<sup>225</sup> This is relevant to the forgiveness and retaining of sins, as only the church that is obedient to the risen Christ has the authority to carry out this commission. The disciples continue the mission of forgiving sins only if they depend on Jesus as Jesus depends on the Father.

Briefly, Barrett sees the relation between Father/ Son significant theme for the Son sending the disciples to forgive sins. God is present in the person of the Risen Christ in the world.

By the action of breathing, John selects the highest act of God creating the world and humankind to illustrate Jesus recreating his disciples for a new mission, namely to forgive sins. In this verse the God John presents in the Risen Lord is the God of creation as depicted

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<sup>222</sup> Examples of the use of ἀποστέλλειν are in John 3:17,34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8,18, 21, 23, and 25. The use of πέμπειν is in found in John 4:34; 5:23f., 30, 37; 6:38f., 44; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16,18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44f., 49; 13:20, 14:24; 15:21 and 16:5.

<sup>223</sup> Apostles is used not as a technical term but for convenient as Barrett notes cf. John 13:16.

<sup>224</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

<sup>225</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

in Genesis 2:7, Ezekiel 37:9; and Wisdom 15:11. For Barrett, there is no question to harmonise the Spirit in John 20:22 and the Spirit in Acts 2:4. The Spirit in John 20:22 is the one promised to the disciples in John 7:39 and 16:7 to be bestowed on them after the glorification.<sup>226</sup> Once this Spirit is given, the Church is ready for its mission. To respond to Bultmann who qualifies the Spirit in John 20:22 with the Spirit in the Last discourses Barrett notes that, the Spirit in this context is personal as suggested by the name Paraclete whereas in the Last Discourses the Spirit is “quasi-material”.<sup>227</sup> The breathing of the Holy Spirit means that the Risen Lord is transmitting and crystallising himself into his disciples and remaining in them in the form of the Holy Spirit.<sup>228</sup> It is not recreation in material bodily sense. This Spirit is adequate and complete. “It is probable that to the first Christians the resurrection of Jesus and his appearances to them, his exaltation (however that was understood), and the gift of the Spirit appeared as one experience, which only later come to be described in separate elements and incidents”.<sup>229</sup>

Briefly, for Barrett the relation of Father and Son is a permanent model of the relation of Son and the Church, without which the Church would not have its mission nor its existence.<sup>230</sup>

### **John 20:23**

For Barrett v. 23 should be read as “If you forgive anyone’s sins, [they are forgiven], if you retain anyone’s sins [they are retained]”.<sup>231</sup> Barrett agrees with Brown and Dodd that Johannine pericope is from another tradition or source, and so it is difficult to identify or verify the intention of the evangelist.<sup>232</sup> John 20:23 is independent of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18.

Using the terms of J. A. Emerton based on Isaiah 22:22, Barrett suggests that the forgiveness of sins could be possibly understood by the fact of the Church accepting or

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<sup>226</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 570.

<sup>227</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 570.

<sup>228</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 567.

<sup>229</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 570

<sup>230</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 567.

<sup>231</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 567.

<sup>232</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 567 and 571; Dodd, *Tradition*, 347; Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament* (Grands Rapids, William B Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 130.

rejecting (open or shut the door) people to the sacrament of baptism. But forgiveness of sins is not limited to baptism. It rather continues through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Like Brown, Barrett refers to the healing of the blind man's faith as central for forgiveness of sins (John 9:1-12).<sup>233</sup> Those who do not believe, their sins are retained (John 16:8-11).<sup>234</sup> Faith is significant in the forgiveness of sins. Here Barrett reiterates the theological discrimination, emphasising the words of Jesus who came for judgement. Those who claim to see, Jesus could only say to them "your sin remains" whereas those who are blind, their sins are forgiven (their sight is restored). For Barrett, those who do not believe in Jesus remain in their sins. "This is both a statement of fact and a punishment".<sup>235</sup> It follows that sins forgiven are *truly* forgiven and sins retained are *truly* retained. Like Brown, Barrett understands the meaning of ἀφιέναι as "to release or to let go" and κρατεῖν as the antonym of ἀφιέναι, "to hold fast".

Barrett, as a scholar in the Methodist tradition, does not focus on the authority of individuals (whether priest or others) to forgive sins, but sees this as vested in the church more broadly. The church must show apostolic obedience to its Lord, or it may become merely a human institution. The communal worshipping life of the church is the place where the authority is vested and experienced.

Briefly, Barrett suggests that faith is key to forgiveness of sins. Jesus comes into the world for judgement. Those who believe in him and in the words of his disciples, their sins are forgiven. Those who do not believe, the judgement is upon themselves and their sins remain.

### **2.3.5.2 Section summary**

Barrett sees worshipping life of the church symbolised in John 20:19-23. He acknowledges baptism as one of the ways in which God forgives sins. The authority to forgive sins has been entrusted to the apostolic church whose condition is to remain in obedience to the Son as the Son is to the Father. Seven themes emerged in this pericope in regards to God's

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<sup>233</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 571.

<sup>234</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 571.

<sup>235</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 571.



forgiveness of sins: namely disciples, the Twelve, peace, Father/Son relation, God, faith, and discriminatory judgement.

## 2.4 Similarities and differences

Having summarised some of the work and key themes of the four selected scholars, I will now compare and contrast them.

For Hoskyns, the authority to remit or retain sins is not a particular gift, but rather defines the work of salvation, and is the characteristic function of the Church in its complete activity. For Hoskyns the mission to forgive sins is entrusted to the apostles, which is first and foremost—but not limited to—the historical Twelve. Though an Anglican, he accepts the traditional Catholic exegesis that the sacrament of penance is inaugurated here for sins committed after conversion, but states that the principle established here is “susceptible of applications wider and more various” than the evangelist was able to make. In this way he leaves open the possibility of other interpretations. Hoskyns’ understanding of the forgiveness of sins in this passage has a priestly focus, in the use of terms such as consecration, and the sacrament of penance. Forgiveness of sins in this pericope can refer to “conversion and baptism”,<sup>236</sup> to the sacrament of penance, or possibly to other analogous actions. We might describe Hoskyns’ position as a traditional sacramental ecclesial theology.

By contrast, for Bultmann, Jesus is shown to replace the sacrificial cult of the Temple with regard to the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is now the bringer of salvation. This gives the context in which Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away sin, commissions the disciples to pronounce forgiveness of sins. The emphasis rests on the community of the church, rather than on any individual. The role of the disciples is not limited to the twelve historical members, but it extends to all believers in Christ. Bultmann states that “the judgement that took place in the coming of Jesus (3.19; 5.27; 9.39) is further achieved in the activity of the disciples”. While the purpose of the disciples is not to judge the world, nevertheless, the world is judged because of their presence. The disciples continue the ‘Krisis’ of the coming of the Son by enacting the proclamation of forgiveness and judgement. Bultmann’s

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<sup>236</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

interpretation of this passage is shaped by his distinctive existential ('Krisis') approach to the passage. Certain Lutheran emphases are visible. There is no interest in special apostolic authority or the sacramental priestly tradition of penance; this commissioning is for the community as a whole to perform, and they are equipped to do so by the Holy Spirit. We could describe this position as an existentialist and ecclesial *Krisis* theology.

As a recent Roman Catholic scholar who engages with scholarship across denominational bounds, Brown seeks to orient his interpretation according to the earliest recoverable meaning of the text. In order to do so, he gives particular focus to the themes of Johannine theology. By including the theology of 1 John 1:7-9, 2:12, 5:16-17, which introduces the distinction between venial and mortal sins, he sees forgiveness in penance implied by John 20:23. Nevertheless Brown understands the authority invested in the church to forgive or retain sins as a power which is a much larger one than this: it is the power to isolate, repel and negate evil and sin. The text does not provide exegetical proof for the specifics of how this is to be practised, only the assurance of its reality and efficacy. We might describe Brown's position as a progressive Catholic and ecumenical theology.

As a scholar in the Methodist tradition, Barrett does not focus on the authority of individuals to forgive sins, but sees this as vested in the church more broadly. The Church must show apostolic obedience to its Lord, or it may become merely a human institution. The communal worshipping life of the Church is the place where the authority is vested and experienced. Barrett sees worshipping life of the Church symbolised in John 20:19-23. He acknowledges baptism as one of the ways in which God forgives sins. In keeping with the holiness traditions of Methodism, the authority to forgive sins has been entrusted only to a Church that remains in obedience to the Son as the Son is to the Father. We might describe this as a scholarly evangelical position. Certainly, Barrett emphasises forgiveness of sins in this pericope from historical and contextual meaning of the evangelist rather than from his own denominational inclination. Sins are forgiven from and by the Church although Barrett did not specifically attribute this authority to any person but the Church in the simple divine mission of Jesus from the Father and to the disciples.

**Table 2.2: Themes for the forgiveness of sins in John 20:19-23**

THEMES	HOSKYNS	BULTMANN	BROWN	BARRETT
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Peace	√	√	√	√
Twelve	√	√	√	√
Disciples	√	√	√	√
God	√	√	√	√
Father/Son relation	√	x	√	√
Faith	√	√	√	√
Discrimination & Judgement	√	x	√	√

## 2.5 Chapter conclusion

This section has examined the text of John 20:19-23, first exegetically and then comparatively. The main question was how the four selected Biblical scholars understand forgiveness of sins from their analysis of the passage. Similarities and differences among them have been drawn. There is consensus that the risen Lord empowered the disciples to forgive sins, and very little significant disagreement between them, though there are differences in emphasis, which at times show some denominational affiliation. For these four scholars, the meaning of God's forgiveness of sins in the light of John 20:19-23 is in the relation Father–Son and Son–disciples. The difference is whether divine forgiveness is an apostolic or communal mission. The answer has not been—and cannot be—established simply by exegesis.

## Chapter 3:

### Methodology and Methods

#### 3.1 Chapter overview

Katrina Eddles-Hirsch notes, “phenomenology is a philosophy, a foundation for qualitative research, as well as a research method in its own right”.<sup>1</sup> This study employed a qualitative research based on a phenomenological methodology.<sup>2</sup> The method used was in-depth interviews. The philosophical knowledge that grounded the rationale of the thesis was relativist<sup>3</sup> worldview approach to answer the research question. The philosophical paradigm was pragmatic. Below are the reasons and procedures taken to answer the research question; how do lay people understand God’s forgiveness of sins in John 20:19-23.

#### 3.2 Rationale for choice of relativism’s philosophical knowledge of reality

Two dominant worldviews of philosophy characterise how one perceives truth and reality. Realism and idealism are the philosophical parameters that shape one’s position and way of thinking. In other words, in the context of empirical research, there are two major philosophical positions concerning how truth and reality are accessed. These two world views contradict each other and their ontological and epistemological beliefs about reality differ greatly. One is called Realism and the other is named Relativism.<sup>4</sup> Joseph Fletcher

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<sup>1</sup> Katrina Eddles-Hirsch, Phenomenology and educational research. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 3 (8), (2015): 251-260.

<sup>2</sup> Not to be confused with phenomenological method. Cf. John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: choosing Among Five Approaches* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Sage, 2013), 76, 104-106; Max van Manen, *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 177.

<sup>3</sup> Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic inquiry* (London: Sage Publication, 1985), 35, 37, 39. Lincoln and Guba give criteria for a relativist research approach. 1) It must produce “multiple constructed realities that can be studied historically; inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers, 2) the primary data consists of people as instruments for data collection, 3) the knower and the known are inseparable” who interact in a “natural setting”, 4) “every act of observation influences what is seen”, and 5) central to the context is the meaning that participants bring to the research because they have a significant role in the outcome of the research”.

<sup>4</sup> Martyn Hammersley et al., *What is Qualitative Research* (London / New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, [1988] 2012), 440; What is Realism, and Why Should Qualitative Research Care? Realism vs Relativism in Philosophy of Science (Some Comments on Tarski’s Theory of Truth) “, *Philosophical Logic in Poland*, 337-361; J.

notes that “realism is focused mainly on behaviour, and the empirical research is the ‘cornerstone of the scientific method’”.<sup>5</sup> This definition helps to understand the difference between the two opposing worldviews. One is subjective while the other is objective.<sup>6</sup>

Realism is the philosophy that is based on empirical absolute truth that is objective.<sup>7</sup> This means the truth can only be obtained through scientific measurements. It is measurable, law bound, and can be generalised. This way of thinking is sometimes called etic approach.<sup>8</sup> The etic approach has been accused of not paying attention to human behaviour, feelings, and mental status. Sometime Realism is also called Positivism in that it represents scientific fact.

By contrast, Relativism is the philosophical view that accepts that reality is subjective, individually constructed and differs from the perspective one individual to the next.<sup>9</sup> Reality emerges when consciousness engages with objects which are already impregnated with meaning.<sup>10</sup> Human five senses and the consciousness are fundamental key factors to mediate the realities. The realities are constructed by the expressions of the language, but the phenomena remain unchanged.<sup>11</sup> In other words, reality is constructed through the

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Ajdukiewicz, “Das Weltbild und die Begriffsapparatur”, *Erkenntnis* 4,(1934) 259-287. Ajdukiewicz argues that relativism and realism are two opposing world which complement each other.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (1996), 409.

<sup>6</sup> Kristin S. Shrader-Frechette, *Risk and Rationality: Philosophical Foundations for Populist Reforms* (California: University of California Press, 1991), 8; Shrader-Frechette made a point in distinguishing naïve positivism and cultural relativism when remarks; “at the left hand of the spectrum are the cultural relativists, such as anthropologist Mary Douglas and political scientist Aaron Wildavsky. They believe that ‘risks are social constructs’ that ‘any form of life can justify [...] at the other naïve positivists, end of the spectrum are engineers such as Chauncey Starr and Christopher Whipple. They maintain that risk evaluation is objective in the sense that different risks may be evaluated according to the same rule – for example, a rule stipulating that risks below a certain level of probability are insignificant”.

<sup>7</sup> It is palpable reality regardless of human perceptions cf. Simon Blackburn, *Truth: A guide* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2005). He argues for quasi-realism which rejects ethical sentences because they are based on emotional attitudes.

<sup>8</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 96; Lung-Tan Lu, Etic or Emic? Measuring Culture in international business Research, vol 5, No 5, (May 2012); Etic approach is a research approach that explains social realities from the outsider’s view whereas emic is from the perspective within a particular group... for the difference between etic and emic approach cf. House R. J., Hanges P. J., Javidan M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V., *Globe, Cultures, Leadership, and Organisations: Globe Study of 62 Societies* (CA: Sage, 2004), 19; Kotta Conrad, *Mirror for Humanity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 47.

<sup>9</sup> Guba & Lincoln, “Competing paradigms in qualitative research”, In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (London: Sage, 1994), 105-117 especially 108.

<sup>10</sup> Michael J. Crotty, *The foundations of social research* (London: Sage, 1998), 43.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Frowe, Language and educational research. *Journal of Philosophy and Education*, 35 (2) 2001, 175-186 especially 185.

relationship between the external world and the consciousness via language.<sup>12</sup> The focus is on relational concept that seeks for the meaning. This philosophical worldview believes that knowledge is contextual, dynamic and includes subjective meanings that one brings to the world. As the truth is perceived subjectively, the multiple realities include personal experiences and contexts.<sup>13</sup> In brief, relativism and realism are two contrasting foundational philosophical positions which ontological and epistemological perspectives are interpreted and understood differently.<sup>14</sup>

I have chosen relativism as the philosophical frame of this study because it enables me to accept peoples' realities of their world. The concept is in full agreement with the philosophy that understands respondents as experiencing the subjective realities of God's forgiveness of sins. By adapting relativism as a guideline of thinking in this research, I was able to interact with respondents in their natural environment and to listen directly to their various multiple realities of the understanding of God's forgiveness of sins.

### **3.3 Philosophical paradigm and procedures for phenomenological research<sup>15</sup>**

The philosophical paradigm of this study was pragmatism. Before I focus on what is pragmatist, a word or two on paradigm is in place. Guba defines paradigm as "basic set of beliefs that guide actions".<sup>16</sup> The paradigms are connected to philosophical assumptions. In phenomenology a variety of paradigms are used. For example, pragmatist, social constructivism, postpositivist, post-modern perspective and others. In this research

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<sup>12</sup> Crotty encapsulates the meaning of both ontological and epistemological interpretive with the illustration of a tree. From epistemological philosophical perspective, meaning is constructed and thus a tree is not a tree without human being giving it the attributes of tree and call it a tree cf. Michael J. Crotty, *The foundations of social research*, 43. From ontological philosophical view, meaning is relative. Thus, reality is a personal construction through consciousness. Consciousness is always consciousness of something cf. Michael J. Crotty, *The foundations*, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Grix, "Introducing Students to the Generic Terminology of Social Research". *Politics*, volume 22, issue 3 (2012); Jonathan Grix, *The foundations of research* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 83;

<sup>14</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 80; Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Cf. Gilbert Harman argues for a relativistic philosophy of morality (Gilbert Harman and J. J. Thomson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Richard Rorty stands for relativistic view of epistemic justification (Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and Crispin Wright argues for a relativistic view of judgement and taste (Crispin Wright, "Institutionalism, Realism and Rhubarb", Chapter in the above volume).

<sup>15</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 80.

<sup>16</sup> Egon G. Guba, *The Paradigm Dialog* (London / Newbury Park: Sage Publication, 1990, 17.

philosophy means “abstract ideas and beliefs that inform the study”.<sup>17</sup> There are four philosophical assumptions namely, ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological. These philosophical assumptions are combined with the interpretive frameworks known as paradigms.

Denzin and Lincoln argued that “pragmatism seeks first of all to link theory and praxis”.<sup>18</sup> For Denzin and Lincoln Pragmatic paradigm focuses on “the people’s milieu and capture the experiences of a phenomenon in terms of social, historical, and environmental factor that exerts a role on both the subject and object of inquiry”.<sup>19</sup> The pragmatic paradigm is focused on multiple subjective realities. The reality is what is useful and practical, and what works.<sup>20</sup> “Pragmatists do not see the world as absolute unity”<sup>21</sup> but rather emphasise “what works”.<sup>22</sup> In other words, pragmatists are concerned with finding a practical solution to the problem.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, Pragmatists are flexible to adapt various methods of philosophical approaches.<sup>24</sup> For pragmatists the use of various methods, focus on the problem and the solution to answer the research question is important.<sup>25</sup> As John Walsham notes that no single reality could be experienced and duplicated in the same way by more than one person.<sup>26</sup> Realities are multifaceted. The researcher decides the course of actions

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<sup>17</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Brewer, “Naturalism,” in Miller RL, 95; cf. Creswell makes useful comment on pragmatism, Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 299.

<sup>19</sup> Denzin & Lincoln, (eds)., *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 95.

<sup>20</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 28; Patton, *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. In this book Patton navigate through all necessary process for a qualitative research. Examples and illustrations are demonstrated from the design of the research, data collection to analyzing, interpreting and reporting the data. Patton enhances a new approach that is informed by practice and theory vice versa. Strategies for selecting themes, observational methods in the fieldworks and various philosophical frameworks are explored to enhance a credible quality research. In chapter 4, Patton argues for qualitative research based on practical actions.

<sup>24</sup> Denzin & Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> The example of pragmatic approach employed by Richard R. Osmer, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat and many others. Cf. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 101; Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology, An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Geoff Walsham, *Doing interpretive research* (Chichester: Wiley, 1993), 5; Walsham, “Doing interpretive research” *European Journal of Information system* (2006) 15, 320-330.

that suits best to answer the research question. This means the researchers have freedom to choose techniques and procedures that “best meet their needs and purposes”.<sup>27</sup>

In this study I used ontological and epistemological philosophical assumptions combined with the pragmatic paradigm to answer the research question.

### **3.4 Procedure for conducting phenomenological research**

“A key characteristic of phenomenological research is its rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated”.<sup>28</sup> Here is the Creswell’s adaptation of Moustakas’ procedure for conducting phenomenological research:

1. The problem: The researcher asks questions whether the research problem is worth phenomenological study. The phenomenon of interest to be studied should be common to respondents and one of which several people share experiences. The aim of determining and examining the problem is that at the end of the study one seeks either to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon or to develop policies or improve practices. To this end, the description of the phenomenon is oriented toward the “how” of the ways respondents experience the phenomenon under study rather than anticipating the answers based on one’s preconceived perceptions of the phenomenon.
2. Identification of the phenomenon: the researcher identifies the phenomenon.
3. Recognising philosophical assumptions: the researcher comprehensively specifies the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology. Select topic that expressed the lived experience of people with “conscious” and oriented toward an object. Because the topic is subjective, the researcher must be prepared to put aside all assumptions and preconceived concepts of the topic. This process is called bracketing or *epoché*. By so doing, the researcher will fully listen and describe how respondents understand and experience the phenomenon from their subjective views.

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<sup>27</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Eddles-Hirsch, Phenomenology and Educational, 251-260; Annette Sofie Davidsen, Phenomenological Approaches in Psychology and Health Sciences. *Qual Res Psychol.* 10 (3), (2013): 318-339



4. Phenomenological data collection: data collection from respondents who have experienced the phenomenon. Generally phenomenological data collection consists of multiple in-depth interviews with individuals between 5 and 25.<sup>29</sup>
5. Research questions: the researcher ask two broad questions to respondents, namely, what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What situation or context has influenced your experiences of the phenomenon? In addition to the two questions, other open ended questions are asked depending on the situations. But the two questions are essential for data gathering as well as for the textual and structural and description of the experiences. The questions are useful as they are the means to understanding respondents' common experience of the phenomenon.
6. Phenomenological data analysis: Phenomenological data analysis examines the answers from the questions, goes through the interview transcripts, highlight significant statements, words, quotes, and sentences that clarify and provide great understanding of respondents' understanding of the phenomenon from their subjective perceived realities. This step is called *horizontalization* because it focuses on the reality of what is new in the data. Is there any new information from the process of analysing the words of respondents? *Horizontalization* leads to *clusters of meaning* which are grouped and compartmentalised into themes.
7. Textual description: The themes and significant quotes are selected to describe the experience of respondents in the form of a report. The report will also reflect the context and settings that influenced the way they have experienced the phenomenon. This is called structural description or imaginative variation. The imaginative variation is the phenomenological research process that enables the researcher to create themes from the transcripts based on textual description obtained through the process of phenomenological reduction. In addition to imaginative variation, the research must also write her or his own experience that has influence respondents' experiences. John Creswell notes that he would shorten

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<sup>29</sup> Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry, 82.

Moustakas's procedures by inserting the personal statement in the methods or place this at the beginning of the phenomenology.<sup>30</sup>

8. Descriptive report: the phenomenological study culminates with a descriptive report explaining the *essence* of what individuals have experienced and how they have understood it.<sup>31</sup> The descriptive message is based on peoples' perceived realities.<sup>32</sup> Moustakas insists that the researcher's conclusion never been an exhaustive reality of the essences but rather present a phenomenon in that context.<sup>33</sup>

In this study, a modified Moustakas' 1994 phenomenological approach based on Creswell's adaptation is employed in dialogue with pragmatic philosophical paradigm.<sup>34</sup>

### **3.5 Methodology and methods**

#### **3.5.1 Methodology**

The selection of a phenomenological methodology is based on the purpose of the study which is consistent with the subjective understanding of God's forgiveness of sins from a lay perspective. This study employed a phenomenological methodology. The key to phenomenological research methodology is a focus on people's interpretation of their experiences in their own context of life.<sup>35</sup> John Creswell noted that "a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals for their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon".<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Max van Manen insisted that the essence of phenomenology is to "grasp of the very nature of the thing".<sup>37</sup> "The phenomenon being

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<sup>30</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 82.

<sup>31</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 81

<sup>32</sup> Manen, *Researching lived Experience*, 177; Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 80; 327-345.

<sup>35</sup> Ary et al., 8.

<sup>36</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 76; John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 101. He focuses on the "searching for the meaning and process of interpreting"; Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology, An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Manen, *Researching lived Experience*, 177; Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research*, 41.

studied is not measured or defined through the lens of its accepted reality; rather an understanding is sought of how the participants make sense of their everyday world”.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.5.1.1 Phenomenological methodology framework**

The term phenomenology derives from the Greek word *phainein* meaning to appear. Immanuel Kant was the first philosopher to use this term in 1764 because it refers to constructivist philosophy which focuses on human cognitive phenomena. The study of phenomenology traced its origin in the philosophical discipline and has been developed throughout the history of research. Phenomenology is more about the descriptive and analytical experience of everyday life of people. As a methodological frame work, phenomenology is concerned with peoples’ understanding of their own world from their perceived realities.

To look at phenomenology as a methodology is to consider that phenomenology is a qualitative inquiry that is concerned with peoples’ lived experience and the understanding of the meaning they bring to the world.<sup>39</sup> Langdrige described phenomenology as a study on “things in their appearing”.<sup>40</sup> This means that the process emerges naturally and is based on multiple realities. How phenomenology is philosophically grounded in gaining knowledge is central to this study.

The following are some of the features of phenomenology that informed my choice: first, phenomenology focuses on a single phenomenon such as the concept of grief or the loving relationship. Second, an exploration of a phenomenon by a group of people who had firsthand experience of the phenomenon is significant. The group however, might “vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15”.<sup>41</sup> Third, a discussion on philosophical undergird peoples’ lived experience that includes both the subjective and objective experience of the phenomenon is considered. This perspective rejects “the subjective-objective perspective”<sup>42</sup> and places “phenomenology on a continuum between qualitative and

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<sup>38</sup> Eddles-Hirsch, *Phenomenology and Educational*, 251.

<sup>39</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22-23.

<sup>40</sup> Darren Langdrige, *Phenomenology and Critical Social Psychology: Directions and Debates in theory and Research* (Pearson Education Ltd, 2007), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 78.

<sup>42</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 78.

quantitative research”.<sup>43</sup> Fourth, the researcher is required to bracket all prior knowledge of phenomenon, so no prejudices interfere with the study of the new phenomenon. Although this technique does not erase one’s prior knowledge of the phenomenon, it assists the researcher to proceed to the study with a clear mind. Fifth, phenomenology requires the collection of data mainly through individual interviews (although occasionally data is collected through “poems, observations, and documents”).<sup>44</sup> Sixth, the data analysis follows a logical sequence of events as they happened. An exploration of what and how people experienced the phenomenon is explained in details manner. Seventh, phenomenology as a study culminates with a report that describes the essence of peoples’ experience of the phenomenon. In other words, the research in phenomenological methodology follows a set of tasks from the data collection to coding, sorting categories, and themes, and finally to reporting the findings. Unlike quantitative research, the findings describe the meanings of respondents’ lived experiences.

The goal of phenomenology is to understand the phenomenon under study from the perspective of those involved.<sup>45</sup> The research is interested in the how question of the phenomenon.<sup>46</sup> Sharan B. Merriam argued that the defining characteristic of qualitative research is to *understanding* how participants describe experiences in their lives step by step than jump to a conclusion which leads to “meaning-making”<sup>47</sup> than listening to the description of the interpretation of participants’ experiences. This is the essential goal of phenomenology as Creswell rightly noted; “a phenomenology ends with a descriptive passage that discusses the *essence* of the experience for individuals incorporating ‘what’ they have experienced and ‘how’; they experienced it”.<sup>48</sup> Phenomenology is about

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<sup>43</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 78.

<sup>44</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 79.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan A Smith, Maria Jarman & Mike Osborn, “Doing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis,” in Michael Murray, Kerry Chamberlain, editors. *Qualitative Health Psychology: Theories and Methods* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 218-240; Jane Sutton, Zubin Austin, “Qualitative Research: Data Collection, Analysis, and Management”, *The Canadian Journal of Hospital pharmacy* 68, 3, (2015): 226-231.

<sup>46</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation: Revised and Expanded from Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 79; Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 22-23.

personal feelings, lived experience, beliefs, perceptions and experiences of a given phenomenon.<sup>49</sup>

In brief, I selected phenomenology as a methodology of this research because it gave a clear and precise logical guideline of collecting and analysing data that suited to answer my research question. Phenomenological methodology helped to select the four mainline Christian denominations and the four churches within the Adelaide city. The choice of the four congregations lies in their close proximity to each other, although St Peter's Anglican Cathedral was further away from the churches of the other three Christian denominations.

Why do I pick up this philosophical view of gaining knowledge? The reason is knowledge is conditional and context specific. It is not something I can take tape measure and measure it. It is not out in the real world. It exists in peoples' experiences. And so that is why I had to go to the people in their context. That's is why I am using qualitative methodology, namely phenomenology.

### **3.5.1.2 Current differing phenomenological views**

The fact that phenomenology covers a broad array of qualitative inquiry, it stimulates on going debates. Phenomenology can be employed in three ways; namely as a philosophical position, as a methodological approach, and as a method in a given research. As a philosophy, phenomenology takes positivist view from Edmund Husserl perspective whereas it stands within the postpositivist worldview according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). From Martin Heidegger's view point, phenomenology veered into more interpretivist position whereas from Dager, phenomenology takes a constructivist philosophical worldview.<sup>50</sup> Despite differing philosophical positions and veracity of approaches, the methodological phenomenology is still having a "blurred boundaries"<sup>51</sup> of

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<sup>49</sup> John Brewer, "Naturalism," in Miller RL, Brewer J.D. editors. *The A-Z of Social Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 147-159; cf. Michael Gill, "The Possibilities of Phenomenology for Organizational Research", *Organizational Research Methods* 17, 2, (2014): 118-137.

<sup>50</sup> Maura, Dowling, "From Husserl to van Manen: A review of different phenomenological approaches", *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 44 (2007): 135; Racher and Robinson, 2003

<sup>51</sup> Maura, Dowling, "From Husserl to van Manen". 135.

methods.<sup>52</sup> From this background, it is evident that the style of approach taken by researchers will differ from the purpose of each study.

Furthermore, phenomenology has different methodological postures. The three main approaches are transcendental phenomenology as advanced by Husserl (1858–1938), heuristic phenomenology founded by Heidegger (1889–1976), and existential phenomenology as articulated by Merleau-Ponty. Although they differ in their style, they are similar in four main steps namely, description, reduction, imaginative variation and essences.<sup>53</sup> These four main postures or steps within the methodological process determine whether the research is descriptive or interpretive.

Only a slight difference is evident between descriptive methodology and interpretive methodology yet it is a very important aspect of phenomenology. The task of phenomenology as shown by Husserl, is largely descriptive<sup>54</sup> and “does not rule out phases where interpretation takes place”.<sup>55</sup> The process of describing and that of interpreting are similar. The major distinction is that descriptive phenomenology includes noetic actions whereas interpretive phenomenology usually does not.<sup>56</sup> In descriptive phenomenology, the researcher remains “naïve”<sup>57</sup> or adopt “a correct attitude”<sup>58</sup> while describing the phenomenon under study. In other words, the researcher describes the phenomenon without interference to the wording of participants. For this reason, Giorgi notes that; “description is the use of language to articulate the intentional objects of experience”.<sup>59</sup> In the process of describing, the researcher acknowledges “that there is a ‘given’ that needs to be described precisely as it appears, and nothing is to be added to it nor subtracted from it”.<sup>60</sup> On the contrary, “interpretation is polyvalent word” and is “the adoption of a non-

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<sup>52</sup> Maura, Dowling, “From Husserl to van Manen”. 135. Husserl defines method as “a systematically regulated progress from one bit of knowledge to another”, Edmund Husserl, *Logic Investigations* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), 66; Maurice, Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962)

<sup>53</sup> (Moustakas, 1994). Several authors (Bryman, 2001; Merriam, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logic Investigations* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970),309-311.

<sup>55</sup> Amedeo Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method”, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 43 (2012): 6 3-12 pge 6.

<sup>56</sup> Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method”, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method”, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method”, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method”, 6.

<sup>60</sup> Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method”, 6.

given factor to help account for what is given in experience”.<sup>61</sup> This is evident in Pembroke’s article who argues that the researcher understands a phenomenon under investigation with his or her own “foreknowledge”<sup>62</sup> of the phenomenon within its cultural and historical context.

On the one hand, those who support the interpretive phenomenology argue that epoché “is misguided and ultimately illusionary”.<sup>63</sup> However, a fusion of understanding between research and participants is necessary for a rich understanding of the phenomenon.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, those who argue for the phenomenological descriptive methodology, follow the position advocated by Husserl, namely bracketing. In this sense, the researcher engages in the study of the phenomenon with open minded and an expectation a “specific expression”<sup>65</sup> of participants’ language.

In this study, bracketing and reflexivity are employed.<sup>66</sup> I am aware of the discussions by some scholars<sup>67</sup> who reject bracketing based on the difficulty for one to completely abandon one’s own preconceived ideas on a phenomenon under investigation. For example, van Manen notes that, “if we simply try to forget or ignore what we already ‘know’, we might find that the presupposition persistently creep back into our reflections”.<sup>68</sup> However, bracketing is the best approach for this type of research to capture the specific words and meanings given to them by participants. Further, Neil Pembroke argues that “phenomenology is both a philosophical stance and a research methodology. The aim of its proponents, in the most general terms, is to approach an entity on its own

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<sup>61</sup> Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method”, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Neil Pembroke, “Sacred Love Negotiations: A Qualitative Approach to Equality and Mutuality and Negotiating Around Needs in Marriage and Family Life in the Experience of Australian Mainline Christians”, *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 15, no. 2 (2011): 149-172. Page 158.

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (London: SCM, 1962).

<sup>63</sup> Pembroke, “Sacred Love Negotiations”, 157.

<sup>64</sup> Pembroke, “Sacred Love Negotiations”, 178; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Trans. G. Barden & J. Cumming, New York (Seabury Press, 1975),

<sup>65</sup> Giorgi, “The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method”, 8.

<sup>66</sup> See Steve response....

<sup>67</sup> Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience* (State University of New York Press: New York, 1990), for example, For instance, Fielden (2003) utilises Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology informed by van Manen’s (1997) and Benner’s (1985) (among other Benner work) to explore and interpret the lived experience of family members after losing a someone.

<sup>68</sup> van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 47; Cohen, M.Z. & Omery, A., “Schools of phenomenology”, in *Implications for Research Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*. Morse, J.M. ed. (Thousand Oak: Sage Publications1994), 106.

terms”.<sup>69</sup> In this study a combination of interpretive phenomenology and descriptive phenomenology is employed. Interpretive phenomenology serves to interpret the descriptions of respondents whereas descriptions are to clarify the concept as explained by respondents. In terms of phenomenological methodology both hermeneutics and transcendental approaches are vital because they connect the four exegetes and the 48 respondents, the former from a hermeneutic stance, the latter from descriptive analysis.

### **3.5.2 Methods**

There are different approaches to phenomenological methods, namely, transcendental, hermeneutic, and existential.<sup>70</sup> Transcendental phenomenology focuses on two aspects of human being, namely intentionality and the essence.<sup>71</sup> It makes a separation between self and conscience. For Husserl the founder of transcendental phenomenology, intentionality represents conscience of the researcher. The consciousness in turn can describe phenomena both from inside and outside human mind. Thus, *noema* and *noesis*. While the *noema* represents the outside world *noesis* represents the subjective experience. For this reason, transcendental phenomenology uses descriptive approach. In contrast, Heidegger the father of hermeneutic phenomenology understands people from their natural development and their own perceived realities. Hermeneutic phenomenology employs interpretive and descriptive approach to understand how people see the world by focusing on what Max van Manen calls “an abiding concern”.<sup>72</sup> The researcher then needs to make an interpretation from the different meanings deduced from the participants’ lifeworld experiences by “turning to a phenomenon” of their interest. Existential phenomenology argues that there is no separation between consciousness and self. This perception

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<sup>69</sup> Pembroke, “Sacred Love Negotiations”, 157.

<sup>70</sup> Three main phenomenological approaches namely, existential phenomenology advanced by Merleau Ponty (1908-1961), transcendental phenomenology founded by Husserl (1858- 1938), and heuristic phenomenology founded by Heidegger (1889-1976). All these approaches are concerned with four philosophical concepts, namely description of the phenomenon, the reduction of data, the imaginative variation, and the essence of the phenomenon of study cf. Eddles-Hirsch, *Phenomenology and educational research*, 252.

<sup>71</sup> Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research*, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Max van Manen, *Researching lived Experience: Human Science for an action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 177; Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research*, 31; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 79.



presupposes the transcendental reduction process, whereby the researcher is expected to bracket personal prejudices and presuppositions.

### **3.5.2.1 Specific methods in this study**

In this study I employed transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology because the focus of the description and interpretation of God's forgiveness of sins is first and foremost based on the wording of respondents and the meaning of divine forgiveness of sins as understood in their world. The combine phenomenological methods best articulate respondents' description, experience and interpretation of forgiveness of sins based on John 20:19-23. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher is concerned with the description and interpretation from participants' perceived reality of the phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology assisted me to describe the understanding of the forgiveness of sins from lay people's perspectives based on their own words. The hermeneutic phenomenology is also significant because it assists me to link the description of the lay peoples understanding of God's forgiveness of sins to the interpretation of John 20:19-23 by the four selected Biblical scholars.

### **3.5.2.2 Choice of specific method**

The specific method employed in this study was individual interviews with some open-ended questions. Patton states: "good questions in qualitative interviews should be open ended, neutral, sensitive, and clear to the interviewees".<sup>73</sup> An open-ended question allows respondents to describe their feelings and stimulates discussions while promoting objective responses.

Katrina Eddles-Hirsch remarks: "In a phenomenological study, the in-depth interview transcript forms the basis of the data. It is through the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated that the researcher is able to uncover the invariant structures or essences of the phenomenon being investigated".<sup>74</sup> The in-depth interview is the core of the data and the key to phenomenological study. The interviews helped me to come face-to-face with respondents in their own world. The individual interviews were

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *How to use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, MQ 1987, 108-143.

<sup>74</sup> Eddles-Hirsch, "Phenomenology and Educational Research", 254.

appropriate to explore issues, describe situations, and interpret the meaning respondents gave to their understanding of God's forgiveness of sins. This is in contrast to interpretive phenomenology in which the researcher interprets the respondents' descriptions from a professional viewpoint.<sup>75</sup>

In this research, I selected in-depth interviews as the best method not only because it is consistent with the philosophical methodology of gaining knowledge through various realities, but more importantly it enabled me to go to various denominations and congregations to meet people in their natural environment. In so doing, I was confronted with subjective truth. In this way I was able to interact, explore and interpret the meaning of lived experience of divine forgiveness of sins as understood and described by various respondents from the selected congregations. Their specific knowledge was not something which could be measured by a tape measure.

While speaking about the method in this study, it is worth mentioning the contribution of Jeff Astley to this type of research. Astley is considered as a pioneer in the method of empirical research that consists of a conversation between 'ordinary' and professional theology. Astley argues that ordinary theology "is the church's front line, it is truly a warts, and all theology open to the alley; And whatever we make of it theologically, speaking statistically ordinary theology is the theology of God's church".<sup>76</sup> In other words, ordinary theology is a theology of lay folk learned through personal faith and discussion in the pews, prayer groups or the streets; the non-officially academic theology which is deeply imbedded in the discussion for God and by Christians.

For Astley the language of lay people expresses their reflection of God in their historical context of life.<sup>77</sup> Ordinary theology deserves a key role in the Church. The language, and grammar of ordinary folk expressed their distinctive mark that broaden their theology beyond limit of dogmas.<sup>78</sup> Ordinary theology is not be discarded nor neglected by formal and normative theology. On the contrary Astley argues that Ordinary theology should be

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<sup>75</sup> Giorgi, "The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method", 7-8.

<sup>76</sup> Jeff Astley and Francis J. Leslie, *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian believing and the Church* (London / New York: Routledge, 2016), 67; Jeff, Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening, and Learning in Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 162.

<sup>77</sup> Astley and Leslie, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 162.

<sup>78</sup> Astley and Leslie, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 69.

taken seriously by elites, theologians, practitioners, Church ministers and researchers. For Astley, ordinary theology is central to faith discussion and challenges the authenticity of theology. As Nicola Slee notes, in commenting on Astley's distinct characteristics of ordinary theology that ordinary theology is the "place where Christian belief is tested out in daily life and debated vigorously" and "the place where God is continuing to speak a vital word, progressively, elucidating and continually re-contextualizing the Christian revelation (thus challenging any notions of orthodoxy as fixed and unchanging)".<sup>79</sup> God's people are opened to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in the world. They live and reflect on their faith in a changing world. As such, Astley suggests that lay people should be the practical theologians to be consulted for any changes whether doctrinal or spiritual concerning their faith. With this background, ordinary theology requires careful study both as an empirical research and practical theology because of its distinctive approach and characteristics.

In his recent book "*Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening, and Learning in Theology*".<sup>80</sup> Astley echoes his argument expressed already in his 2002 edition and other publications in theology and philosophy namely, a careful study of ordinary theology in dialogue with ecclesial and academic theology that includes empirical and theological reflections. His study of ordinary theology is in line with the aspirations of Edward Farley, John Cobb, Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson who promote a theology of lay people which is a fundamental aspect of every Christian believer. In Chapter 5, Astley argues that ordinary theology is at the core of Christian faith and development. He goes on to explain the significance of ordinary peoples' understanding of God in their context although they are not engaged in academic theology.<sup>81</sup> In the first two chapters, Astley sets out the grounds of his argument namely, his understanding of the community of Christians, the common folk as the body of Christ, the new religion of learning and growing faith. In Chapter 4, Astley focuses on the uniqueness of ordinary theology and its distinctive characteristics, its value in the Church and relation to academic theology. In Chapter 4, Astley suggests the

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<sup>79</sup> Nicola, Slee, "Jeff Astley, Looking, Listening and learning in Theology" *Journal of Adult Theological Education (JATE)* (2004): 205-211.

<sup>80</sup> Astley and Leslie, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*.

<sup>81</sup> Astley and Leslie, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 1.

ways in which empirical and conceptual approaches could be employed to study ordinary theology.<sup>82</sup>

With his many experiences in working with Churches and a wealth expertise in empirical studies, educational research, philosophical and theological academic background, Astley argues that the role of lay people theology should be increasingly be respected and scrutinised by the professional theologians. For Astley, ordinary theology has the potential to retrace the traditional concept of the 'consensus of the faithful'. Ordinary theology can help the Church to relive the *consensus fedelium*, as proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council in the document *Lumen Gentium* 12. He argues that a strain if not a paradox is created when theology identifies as 'Christian doctrine' or a 'doctrine of the church' beliefs that many ordinary Christians do not share".<sup>83</sup>

Astley has paved a way to deepen awareness and the education of ordinary theology which has a significant connection to this study. "if we ignore the learning context of a person's Christian theology, we shall not be able adequately to understand or describe it".<sup>84</sup> This sentiment echoes the need for espouse theology which is located and informed by faith. The 48 respondents in this study brought their theological understanding of God's forgiveness of sins from their perspective and experience. To this end, Astley's persistence for "serious" acknowledgement of ordinary theology is met by "looking and listening" to lay peoples' beliefs in terms of God's forgiveness of sins.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *How Faith Grows: Faith Development and Christian Education*, London: National Society/Church House Publishing, 1991 (x + 102pp); *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002 (ix + 199pp); Contributor and Editor, with Leslie J. Francis) *Children, Churches and Christian Learning*, London: SPCK, 2002 (298pp); *Exploring God-Talk: Using Language in Religion*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004 (143pp); *Christ of the Everyday*, London: SPCK, 2007 (xiv+146pp); Author, with Ann Christie) *Taking Ordinary Theology Seriously*, Cambridge: Grove Books, 2007 (28pp); Ordinary theology as lay theology : listening to and learning from lay perspectives, Astley, Jeff (2014) *Ordinary theology as lay theology : listening to and learning from lay perspectives*. INTAMS Review: journal for the study of marriage and spirituality, 20 (2). pp. 182-189. Ordinary theology exists in time, place and context of the church's development of faith.

<sup>83</sup> Astley and Leslie, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 67, 158.

<sup>84</sup> Astley and Leslie, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Astley and Leslie, *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, 103.

### **3.5.2.3 Specific research question**

In a medical journal, Patton states: “good questions in qualitative interviews should be open ended, neutral, sensitive, and clear to the interviewees”.<sup>86</sup> An open-ended question allows respondents to describe their feelings and stimulates discussions while promoting objective responses.

The key research question that guided this research is as follows: From your faith perspective, how do you understand God’s forgiveness of your sins? Explain please.

### **3.5.2.4 Supplemental probes used in individual interviews**

The research question was supplemented by probes. These probes were instrumental to delve deep into each respondent’s response to describe to the very best of their ability understanding of God’s forgiveness of sins. The 13 supplemental probes were as follows:

1. What is the meaning of the passage of John 20:19-23?
2. How do you understand by the word of Jesus to his disciples in John chapter 20 verse 23? “If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any they are retained?”
3. Is there a particular moment or a particular word or gesture (sign) of a pastor through which you have experienced the pardon of Jesus? What is that word (s) or gesture (s)?
4. Does sin encourage you to pray? Or does sin prevent you from going to church? Explain.
5. Is there a time when you recall sins and ask for forgiveness as a Christian community?
6. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins, in your opinion? Look in verse 22 “Receive the Holy Spirit”?

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<sup>86</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *How to use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (London: Sage, 1987) 108-143; Nicky Britten, “Qualitative Research: Qualitative Interviews” in *Medical Research*, BMJ 22 July 1995.

7. In the context of your Church community, to whom do you go for the forgiveness of your sins? If you go to anybody, why? If you do not go, again explain why?
8. Who are the disciples to whom Jesus imparted the ministry of forgiveness of sins? Are there still people with that authority, and if so, who are these disciples in your community?
9. Does forgiveness of sins come through the priest / pastor of the Church? Can you elaborate on your understanding?
10. Has anything unexpected such as a moment of peace, joy and revelation ever happened to you during confession and absolution in the Christian community that has helped you to understand forgiveness of sins in a profound way?
11. Are there any changes or suggestions would you like to see in the liturgy of forgiveness of sins?
12. Is there any time you needed a pastor (priest / ordained minister) for the grace of forgiveness of your sins?
13. Do you have anything that you would like your Church to implement in the understanding of Jesus' forgiveness of sins based on this Gospel?

### ***3.5.2.5 Recruitment of respondents and decision about the number of respondents***

#### *3.5.2.5.1 Recruitment of respondents*

The selection of respondents was a purposeful targeted lay people of denominations that teach God's forgiveness of sins and congregants who have an understanding or experience of God's forgiveness of sins. Respondents were recruited based on their understanding of God's forgiveness of sins in John 20:19-23. Lay people who attended one of the selected congregations were freely invited to share their experience and understanding of the forgiveness of sins.

In total 48 respondents willingly took part in the research and consented to their input being voice recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this study (refer to Appendices C and D).

I designed a semi-directed in-depth qualitative interview which I chose to limit to four denominations in the city of Adelaide for the following reasons:

1. I chose to limit my research to a specific local of urban Adelaide. Having looked around the city of Adelaide and its surrounding suburbs, I then decided to select the four mainline Christian Denominations because of their large organisations that have an organised documented and long history of biblical study, and pastoral ministry in relation to forgiveness of sins. (the Lutheran Church was born because of the controversy on indulgences and other theological issues. The Anglican Church although separated from the Roman Catholic church first because of Henry VIII political ambition, their theological position on forgiveness of sins has also veered from the roman Catholic Church. The Uniting Church as a new spiritual home for both Ordained Persons and lay people Protestants background has its own theological perspective in that context. Briefly, I could have easily chosen small churches such as the Church of the Nazarene. But what would be the point for such insignificant number of people? This could be a reason for father research. For the moment, I am more interested in main Churches in Australia who have common beliefs but split on doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues especially on the teaching of forgiveness of sins with a hope of reconciliation from forgiveness of sins viewpoint.
2. The selection of the four mainline Christian Denominations draw on the Biblical passage of John 20:19-23. This includes a liturgical calendar of Biblical readings for week days and Sundays which shapes the preaching across the four congregations.
3. The four congregations within the four mainline Christian Denominations were selected based on purposive sampling.<sup>87</sup> Purposive sampling is a non-probability method of sampling. In this method, the researcher based on personal sound judgement chooses some member of a population as a representative to answer the research question.<sup>88</sup> For this reason, the purposive sampling is also called subjective sampling, or judgement sampling, or selective sampling.<sup>89</sup> I chose the

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<sup>87</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 331.

<sup>88</sup> Ken Black, *Business Statistics: Contemporary Decision Making*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Danvers: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 225.

<sup>89</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 154-155, 296.

four congregations primarily because they were handy and located in more or less seven minutes' walking distance of each other (although St Peters is bit further from the other three) and represent the four mainline Christian Denominations. The reason could also be convenient choice. The four mainline Christian Denominations were the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Uniting Church of Australia. The congregations were St Peter's Anglican Cathedral, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cathedral and Pilgrim Uniting Church.

#### *3.5.2.4.2 Decision about the number of respondents*

Having decided to select the four mainline Christian denominations, I then determined to select one congregation from each. I arbitrarily did something unusual in limiting the number of respondents to 12 people from each congregation. This decision was made based on the data saturation principle. Data saturation occurs when the researcher arrives to a point in the research that none of the respondents brings new information to the research question.<sup>90</sup> All respondents' answers to the research question are repetitive.<sup>91</sup> In phenomenology, Creswell notes that a heterogeneous group of 10 to 15 individual is sufficient. Based on this source, I choose to limit to 12 individuals per each of the four congregations which amount to 48 given the limit of a PhD.<sup>92</sup>

#### **3.5.2.5 Data collection, sites and recording, transcription and data analysis**

##### *3.5.2.5.1 Data collection*

A phenomenological data collection "involves typically interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon".<sup>93</sup> In the following section, I am going to lay down how data was collected, name the sites, recording of interviews, writing of transcripts, and the analysis of data.

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<sup>90</sup> Clive Seale, *The Quality of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage Publications Ltd; 1999), 87-105.

<sup>91</sup> Seale, "The Quality of Qualitative Research", 87-105.

<sup>92</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 157; I am aware of research beyond PhD that have used up to 325 individuals for interviews cf. 1 (Dukes, 1984) to 325 (Polkinghorne, 1989). (Dukes 1984) recommends studying 3 to 10 subjects, and one phenomenology, Reimen (1986), studies 10 individuals".

<sup>93</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 79.



As soon as I received the ethical approval to conduct research in the four mainline Christian Denominations, I approached the person in charge of the four congregations of my choice (Pilgrim Uniting Church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St Peter's Anglican Cathedral, St Francis Xavier Catholic Cathedral) both by phone and email. I first phoned the congregations and requested to speak to the ordained person in charge of the congregation. This initial telephonic conversation was followed by emails to confirm our conversations on the phone and request an appointment for me to introduce myself face-to-face to the persons in charge of each congregation. In the email, I sent the copy of the ethics committee approval and the Introduction Letter signed by my principal supervisor. In addition, a Letter of Introduction from the Flinders University was sent to each congregation and signed by this study's principal supervisor (refer to Appendices A–C).

It took some time for the pastoral committee of each congregation to allow me to interview voluntary members who wished to be part of the study. Once the congregations were satisfied with the Introduction Letter, Information sheet, Consent Form (which allowed the preservation of respondents' confidentiality, the anonymity of respondents in this study was assured by the attribution of a number and the prefix of each denomination), and the Flyer for respondents, they wrote to me inviting me to begin the contact with the members informing them of what the research was about.

I was introduced to each Congregation by the Ordained Person at the end of every Church Service on week end. I spoke of the significance of respondents' role in the research for three minutes in each Church Service. This was followed by conversation promoting the research either with individual or groups of people, mostly family at the rear of the Church where four piles of research information materials were placed on a table. The reason to speak to individuals was that I was approached to explain the research study. This form of conversation happened to small groups such as husband and wife, or two friends, or a family. I had an opportunity to present briefly the aim of the research and took questions from the floor. The talks were occasioned by the Ordained Person and it was informal over cup of tea. Here I was asked questions by the group. I spent about six weeks promoting the research project and bringing awareness to the people. In this period, I attended Churches Services of all the four congregations. During the Church Service, I spoke for three minutes at the end of each service and availed myself at the exit door for people who show interest

for one- on- one conversation or in small group of two or three people, for example, husband and wife, or a family. At this stage, copies of the Information Form, Consent Form and Flyer (Appendices D, E) were distributed to potential respondents.

#### *3.5.2.5.2 Site of the research*

The individual interviews took place at three locations namely Bethlehem Lutheran library, St Peter's Anglican Cathedral at the parish office, and at Flinders in the City, 182 Victoria Square (refer to Appendix C). Respondents came from the four congregations listed below.

#### *3.5.2.5.3 Choice of four congregations*

I chose four congregations primarily because they were geographically handy and represent four mainline Christian denominations. I decided based on my best understanding of theory of this type of research to interview a specific limited number of people in each congregation. The selected congregations are described below in alphabetical order:

1. Bethlehem Lutheran Church,
2. St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cathedral,
3. St Peter's Anglican Cathedral,
4. Pilgrim Uniting Church.

### ***Bethlehem Lutheran Church***

#### **1. Location and membership**

The Bethlehem Lutheran Church is situated at 170 Flinders Street Adelaide. It is one of the churches that belong to the Lutheran Church of Australia. It began with migrants from Germany on 23 June 1872 and now houses various nationalities. From the 2006 Annual General Meeting Report, Bethlehem Lutheran Church consisted of 976 official membership, 663 confirmed members and an average of 345 attendance members.

#### **2. Worship service**

There are three Worshipping Services every Sunday, at 9 am, 11 am, and 7 pm. The 9 am worship is a traditional service that includes a children's homily and sang hymns led by the choir and accompanied by the organ. At 11 am, a contemporary service occurs with band,

music, songs from the “All Together” song books (hymns and songs collected by Robin Mann) and a children’s liturgy is celebrated. In the evening at 7 pm, the congregation gathers to worship in traditional manner with selected Lutheran hymns and the use of the Bethlehem’s Service Order Booklet. The evening Sunday worship concludes with a light supper in the church hall. The NRSV is used for all the scripture readings at all the Worship Services.

### 3. Brief history and theology of the forgiveness of sins

Like any other Lutheran Church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church draws her teaching from the Book of the Concord. The Book of Concord is the defining expression of the doctrines of Lutherans.

The Bethlehem Lutheran Church practises both individual and communal confession of sins. Although Luther disagreed with the former on the ground of Psalm 19:12 and his conviction that enumeration of all sins is almost impossible to human beings and unnecessary for salvation,<sup>94</sup> he nevertheless advised it for those whose conscience is disturbed. The fact that God’s forgiveness of sins is not only preached but applied in the everyday life of the church, makes Bethlehem Lutheran and its members a suitable community to participate to this research. Their understanding of God’s forgiveness of sins and their physical placement in the heart of the city of Adelaide made them suitable for the *terroir* method used by this research and one of the best churches to be selected to achieve the purpose of this study.

Like the Anglican Church, Martin Luther had theological struggles with the sacrament of reconciliation. In the Small Catechism Luther wrote; “confession has two parts: the one is that we confess our sins; the other is that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, as from God Himself [...]”.<sup>95</sup> Luther did not intend to completely eliminate the practice of individual confession. He acknowledged the importance of confession to a

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<sup>94</sup> Paul T. McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions-A Readers Edition of the Book of Concord* - 2nd edition

<sup>95</sup> “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession”, in *The Book of Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord based on the Translation by William Hermann Theodore Dau, Gerhard Friedrich Bente, Revised, Updated, and Annotated by Paul Timothy McCain, Robert Cleveland Baker, Gene Edward Veith, Edward Andrew Engelbrecht* (St. Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 466-467; Text adapted from *Luther’s Large Catechism: A Contemporary Translation With Study Questions*, tr. F. Samuel Janzow (St Louis: CPH, 1978), 122-127).

pastor and discouraged the recitation of one's all sins.<sup>96</sup> Most importantly Luther advised his congregants to confess to God and to one another (AC XI, XII, and XXV; SA III [III] and VIII).<sup>97</sup> It is not clear whether Luther is referring to the text of John under study. The power of the keys<sup>98</sup> is not mentioned anywhere in the Gospel of John. Most likely he is explaining the text of Matthew 16:19 in Smalcald Articles.<sup>99</sup> Nonetheless, the book of Concord insists that: "At no point did the Lutheran Church ever reject private confession and absolution. Rather, the Lutherans commended it as a very beneficial practice".<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Luther defended private confession in the Babylonian Captivity of the Church emphasizing that the individual confession is a healing for the troubled consciences although it is not biblical.<sup>101</sup> "As to the current practice of private confession, I am heartily in favour of it, even though it cannot be proved from the scriptures. It is useful even necessary, and I will not have it abolished. Indeed, I rejoice that it exists in the Church of Christ, for it is a cure without equal for distressed consciences".<sup>102</sup>

## **St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cathedral**

### **1. Location and membership**

Several churches are attached to the Cathedral which is located in the vicinity of the city. St Francis Xavier Cathedral was consecrated on 11 July 1858. It is the oldest Roman Catholic Cathedral in Australia and is situated at 39 Wakefield Street, Victoria Square. It is a spiritual home for approximately 844 people. Church attendance on Saturday at the 6.00 pm Virgil Mass is 276. On Sunday about 76 people attend the 7.00 am Mass, 137 attend the 9.00 am

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<sup>96</sup> Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert C. Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand and others, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis Fortress Press, 2000), 86.

<sup>97</sup> Luther, "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession", in *The Book of Concordia*, 367.

<sup>98</sup> The power of the keys refers to Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew 16:19. This giving of the key has been understood as disciplined exercised in Matthew's community or the power to either forgive or not forgive.

<sup>99</sup> Martin Luther, "Smalcald Articles", in *The Book of Concordia: The Lutheran confessions: A reader's Edition of the Book of Concord based on the Translation by William Hermann Theodore Dau, Gerhard Friedrich Bente, Revised, Updated, and Annotated by Paul Timothy McCain, Robert Cleveland Baker, Gene Edward Veith, Edward Andrew Engelbrecht* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 306; cf. AC XI and XXV; SC V; LC V, An Exhortation to Confession).

<sup>100</sup> Luther, "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession", in *The Book of Concordia*, 18; Luther, "The Small Catechism", in *The Book of Concord: The Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert C. Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand and others, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis Fortress Press, 2000), 359.

<sup>101</sup> Mary Jane Haemig, *The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 233.

<sup>102</sup> Luther, "The Small Catechism," in *The Book of Concord*, 86.

Mass, 355 attend the 11.00 am Mass, and 276 attend the 6.00 pm Mass. The number of attendees at 2:30 pm mass was not given. The total number of attendees at the weekend Worship Services is an average of 1753 people.

## 2. Worship services

St Francis Xavier Cathedral has six Worship Services called Holy Mass on weekend. Saturday at 6 pm is called Virgil Mass. On Sunday there are five Worship Services. At 7 am a non-sung Mass is said, at 9 am another non-sung Mass is said. At 11 am, a solemn sung Mass is said usually with the Archbishop as the main celebrant. At 2:30 pm an African mass is said. And finally, at 6 pm a last sung Mass is said that concludes the week end. The Jerusalem Bible is used for all the scripture readings at all the Worship Services.

## 3. Brief history and theology of the forgiveness of sins

The book of Catechism of the Catholic Church, the code of the Canon Law, and the Book of Rites emphasise the importance of God's forgiveness of one's sins. Three rites of forgiveness of sins are prescribed for use. The most common rite is confession to a priest.

The Book of Catechism reads: "Individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession".<sup>103</sup> The Church refers to John 20:19-23 as the Biblical ground for the Church authority to forgive sins. This aspect of divine forgiveness of sins made St Francis Xavier Cathedral and its people the best choice to achieve the purpose of this study.

### ***St Peter's Anglican Cathedral***

#### 1. Location and membership

St Peter's Anglican Church is a part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. This church is situated at 27 King William Road North Adelaide, corner of Pennington Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia. The first part of the church was consecrated in 1878. It is a spiritual home for all Anglicans of the Adelaide diocese. However, as a parish, St Peter's Cathedral houses between 300 and 385 members.

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<sup>103</sup> Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Homebush: St Paul, 1994), 1484 cf. Code of Canon Law 960; Order of Priest, 31.

## 2. Worship services

The church consists of three main worshipping services on Sunday. At 8 am approximately 35–45 people gathered for the Eucharist using the Book of Common Prayer. At 10:30 am the congregation of about 250 people sung the Eucharist in contemporary worship with the use of the Prayer Book of Australia. In the evening at 6 pm between seventy to ninety people worship the Lord in Evensong to end the day either by using the Book of Common Prayer or the Prayer Book of Australia. The NRSV is used for all the scripture readings at all the Worship Services

## 3. Brief history and theology of the forgiveness of sins

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church were established in 1563 and defined the doctrine of the Church of England “as it related to Calvinistic doctrine and Roman Catholic practice”.<sup>104</sup> As Jeffrey P. Greenman noted that; “the Anglican Communion always must be understood as a confessional tradition with irreducible and irreplaceable theological convictions that reflect Reformation properties”.<sup>105</sup> In this sense the Articles and the Book of Common Prayer become the standard normative statements of the doctrine of the Anglican Church.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, Oliver O’Donovan pointed out that the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles are “foundation of Anglican theology”.<sup>107</sup> From this viewpoint, St Peter’s Cathedral is in communion with the Anglican Communion from its insertion. The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion acknowledge God forgiveness of sins within the ecclesial body. While Article 25 distinguishes Baptism and the Eucharist from the rest of the sacraments because the former was Biblical, and the latter instituted by Jesus, Article 16 acknowledges the value of divine forgiveness of sins in the Church.

St Peter’s doctrinal teaching is based on the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion which recognises divine forgiveness of sins. This is one of the reasons St Peter’s Anglican Cathedral has been chosen as an appropriate field for this research. The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion are the lens through which the doctrines of the Church of England are

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<sup>104</sup> Frank Leslie Cross & Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1997), 1622.

<sup>105</sup> Jeffrey P. Greenman, “Anglican Evangelicals on Personal and Social Ethics”. *ATR* 94 (2) 182. [179-205].

<sup>106</sup> Greenman, “Anglican Evangelicals on Personal and Social Ethics”, 182

<sup>107</sup> Oliver O’Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1986), 9.

lived against the backdrop of the controversies of the English Reformation. The understanding of the formal teaching of God's forgiveness of sins at St Peter's Cathedral contributed to achieve the purpose of this study.

### ***Pilgrim Uniting Church***

#### **1. Location and membership**

The Pilgrim Church consisted of hundred and forty-nine members.<sup>108</sup> The Stow Congregational Church and the Methodist church in Pirie Street merged in 1969 to become the Union Church in the city of Adelaide. The Pilgrim Uniting Church is a relatively new Christian denomination specific to Australia. Although new, it is bringing together older perspective. In 1975 the Union Church in the city became the Pilgrim church and subsequently at the dawn of the Uniting Church in 1977, it joined the Uniting Church of Australia.<sup>109</sup> It is not clear when it changed its name from Pilgrim Church to Uniting Pilgrim Church. It is most probable that the name Pilgrim Uniting was effective at the inauguration of Uniting Church of Australia of soon after.

#### **2. Worship services**

There are four worshipping services on Sunday. The first worship service is the celebration of the Eucharist that begins at 8 am and concludes with breakfast in the church hall. The second service is at 9:30 am. It is a service that is opened to contemporary music and mostly attracted young people. The third service is at 11 am. A traditional worship rooted in the Congregational and Wesleyan spirituality led by choir and organ music. The fourth is at 3pm a service led by Chinese community. The NRSV is used for all the scripture readings at all the Worship Services.

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<sup>108</sup> Church current census of member belonging and attending the services at the Pilgrim Uniting Church in the city of Adelaide.

<sup>109</sup> The Uniting Church Assembly, Constitution and Regulations: The Uniting Church in Australia 2012 edition: 222 Pitt St, Sydney Australia.

### 3. Brief history and theology of the forgiveness of sins

The basic doctrine of the Uniting Church could be summarised in her statement pronounced at her inaugural in 1971. The Uniting Church pledged beliefs in the Bible and the Credo both Nicene and Apostles Creed. Her rich theological ongoing search is defined by the spiritual life inherited from John Wesley, the Savoy Declaration of 1658, and Scot confession of Faith from the Reformed theology of the 1647.<sup>110</sup>

The Uniting Church being a Church funded on three churches namely, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, and the Congregational, emphasises the teaching of the Reformers with differing tones.<sup>111</sup> God's forgiveness of sins is preached and professed in the Creed. The Uniting Church members agree that God forgives sins in the Church and anyone can forgive sins based on common priesthood. The Worshiping Service of the Uniting Church reserves a place for one's forgiveness of sins in the part called "Gathering as God's people"<sup>112</sup> and clearly states; "Confession and Declaration of Forgiveness".<sup>113</sup>

How does Uniting Church relate to this study? Forgiveness of sins is mentioned in the Bible and the Creeds which are fundamental to the Uniting Church.<sup>114</sup> How is forgiveness of sins expressed in the Church? The answer to this question is perplexed. However, the Apostles' Creed reads: "We believe in the forgiveness of sins". It is not clear whether the Uniting Church believes in the forgiveness of past, present, or future sins. Graham Hughes argued that there is confusion and ambiguity in terms of communication to know whether God is forgiving through the role of the presider minister or people are speaking to God at the moment of confession and absolution.<sup>115</sup> His views are from liturgical worship perspective and iconicity ground. To support his argument, Hughes pointed out to the liturgical service

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<sup>110</sup> Paragraph 10 of the uniting church Constitution "Reformation Witnesses" cf. The Uniting Church Assembly, Constitution and Regulations: The Uniting Church in Australia 2012 edition: 222 Pitt St, Sydney Australia.

<sup>111</sup> Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2; The Statement of the Uniting Church and view on forgiveness of sins.

<sup>112</sup> Uniting Church in Australia 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly (Melbourne, Box Hill Town Hall) July 8-14, 2018.

[www.assembly.uca.org.au](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au) accessed 21 March 2017.

<sup>113</sup> Uniting Church in Australia 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly

<sup>114</sup> Paragraph 5 of the Uniting Church Constitution "The Biblical Witness" and article 9 "the Creeds" cf. The Uniting Church Assembly, Constitution and Regulations: The Uniting Church in Australia 2012 edition: 222 Pitt St, Sydney Australia.

<sup>115</sup> Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning* 163.



observed in two instances where ambiguity was acknowledged.<sup>116</sup> Are sins forgiven on the Cross or at the gathered worshipping liturgy? Nevertheless, the Search Worship Book edited by Keith Pearson and associates although not officially endorsed by the Uniting Church of Australia suggested that the reading of John 20:19-29 which comprises the pericope under study and Matthew 27:45-54 are chosen Biblical texts for “call to worship” after a “prayer of confession and absolution”.<sup>117</sup>

The Pilgrim Uniting Pew Bulletin of October 16, 2016 in the prayer of confession states: “Take heart and believe that God is steadfast in love and grace. Our sins are forgiven, and God is with us always. Thanks be to God”.<sup>118</sup> Are sins forgiven on the Cross or at the gathered worshipping community during the liturgy? The ambiguity of how sins are forgiven is a ground for the Pilgrim Uniting Church and its members to be selected for this study. Furthermore, the Pilgrim Uniting Church is a Christian community within the city of Adelaide and confesses divine forgiveness of sins in their liturgy.

### **3.5.3 Transcription of interviews**

All interviews were carried out after signing the consent form to which respondents gave full permission for the study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Respondent were also reminded that they were free to leave or stop the interview as they feel fit. The interviews were not compulsory, and respondents were assured of no punishment or negative feeling about their decision to leave the study if and when it happens. Their congregation would not have resentment toward them for either participating or not participating in the research (refer to Appendices D and E).

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<sup>116</sup> Nichols, Bridget, *Liturgical hermeneutics: interpreting liturgical rites in performance* (Oxford Press, 1994), 71; Rudi Fleischer, “Einführung in die semiotische Gottesdienstanalyse”, in Peter Dürstfeld (Hg.) *Neue Wege der Verkündigung*, Düsseldorf 1983, S. 109-110; Bieritz, “Das Wort im Gottesdienst”, 62; James Empereur, *Worship: Exploring the Sacred* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1987), 153. According to Graham Hughes, the above represent instances where worship as “a communicative event” has been confused. My point is that the assembled community acknowledged God’s forgiveness. However, the meaning and how this divine forgiveness becomes effective in the liturgy and life of the people is confusing. This point is important to understanding the phenomenon of divine forgiveness of sins among the respondents from the Uniting Church.

<sup>117</sup> Ian Allsop [et al.], edited by Keith Pearson, *Search worship book: a guide to ministers and worship committees for using the Search course in services of worship* (Melbourne, 1976), 9.

<sup>118</sup> Uniting Pilgrim Church, Pew Bulletin for Sunday Worship 16 October 2016, Flinders Street Adelaide.

I came very familiar with the data because I transcribed all the interviews. This process assisted me to listen repeatedly to each recorded interview. The listening was helpful to get refreshed of the tones of the voices, the silent, and moments of either joy or sadness as well as bewilderment. As I transcribed the interview, I made use of the *epoché* following the phenomenological approach. I also took notes during the interviews which was a journal of the interviews in conjunction with the horizontal line that informed me whether the meaning was changed of the same as I go through each respondent's interview. The date for the interview was negotiated between the potential respondent and myself. Some dates were easily made while others were not. The reason was either because I was booked for another interview or because the potential respondent was unwell or could no longer attend the interview or because of other unforeseen circumstances.

The recruitment included all members of the four congregations aged 18 years and above. Every respondent was given the Information Sheet, a Flyer, and the Consent Form during the six weeks of consultation with the four congregations. Those who were willing to share their experience of God's forgiveness of sins approached me for clarification about the study and eventually registered for interviews. All respondents freely volunteered to be interviewed and were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time they wished.

All respondents were aged over 18 years. Criteria include only a Christian member belonging to one of the four congregations, willing to spend at least two hours for the research (this include the time for travelling), willing to describe their experience of God's forgiveness of sins, and of sound mind. The study was qualified as a high risk by the Ethics Committee. I then made some arrangements to protect respondents from any unforeseen distress, spiritual or emotional circumstances by providing free services (refer to Appendix C). Interviews were recorded, transcribed and stored on a USB Flash Disk which was stored in my safe box. I obtained permission for recording the interviews from all respondents (refer to Appendix C). During interviews, water, coffee, tea and tissues were available for respondents. At the end of each interview, each respondent received A\$20 as a contribution for their time, travel fares and willingness to take part in the research. It should be mentioned that this amount of money was by no means a payment for participating in the research. The A\$20 was the maximum amount I could obtain from the

funding of the research. On my part as a token for respondents' time and assistance to their transport from their homes to city and back, an amount of A\$20 was given to each respondent after the interview as an appreciation for their time and contribution to research study. Tea, coffee, water and tissues were available to all respondents.

Before the commencement of each interview, the consent form was signed, and each respondent was reminded of the confidentiality of the interview and the right to protect their dignity by keeping their anonymity and destroy the recorded interview when the research is completed. Respondents were also protected from any pain or memories that could have caused them harm through direction to free counselling sessions and spiritual support (refer to Appendix C).

### **3.5.4 Data analysis**

Phenomenological data analysis follows a systematic procedure that begins with the identification of a significant statement to the meaning of the category and themes. Prior to the identification of significant statements, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and read and reread to get a better understanding of each respondent's experience of understanding of God's forgiveness of sins.

Data were processed manually and electronically using NVivo. The latter was used in the first part of data analysis while the former in the second part of data analysis as I was grouping the significant statements. The Nvivo was a process of assigning label to significant words or sentences which then were grouped into categories, and themes according to their associate meaning. Johnny Saldaña observes: "a code in qualitative inquiry is often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and / or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data".<sup>119</sup> The essence of coding is both to reduce data and maintain the core meaning of data from the respondent's perspective of life.<sup>120</sup> Coding begins with assigning label to significant information. These are then sorted with the aim of forming categories and

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<sup>119</sup> Patton, *How to use Qualitative Methods*, 108-143.

<sup>120</sup> Saldaña, *The Coding manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 61.

themes in order to answer the research question. The coding was based on relationships, accuracies, and meanings of words and sentences.

The anonymity of the respondents in this study was assured by the attribution of a number and the prefix of each denomination. Both Informed Consent Documents were approved by the university ethics committee and guaranteed respondents' confidentiality but allowed for publication of the dissertation and future work.

### 3.6 Research design

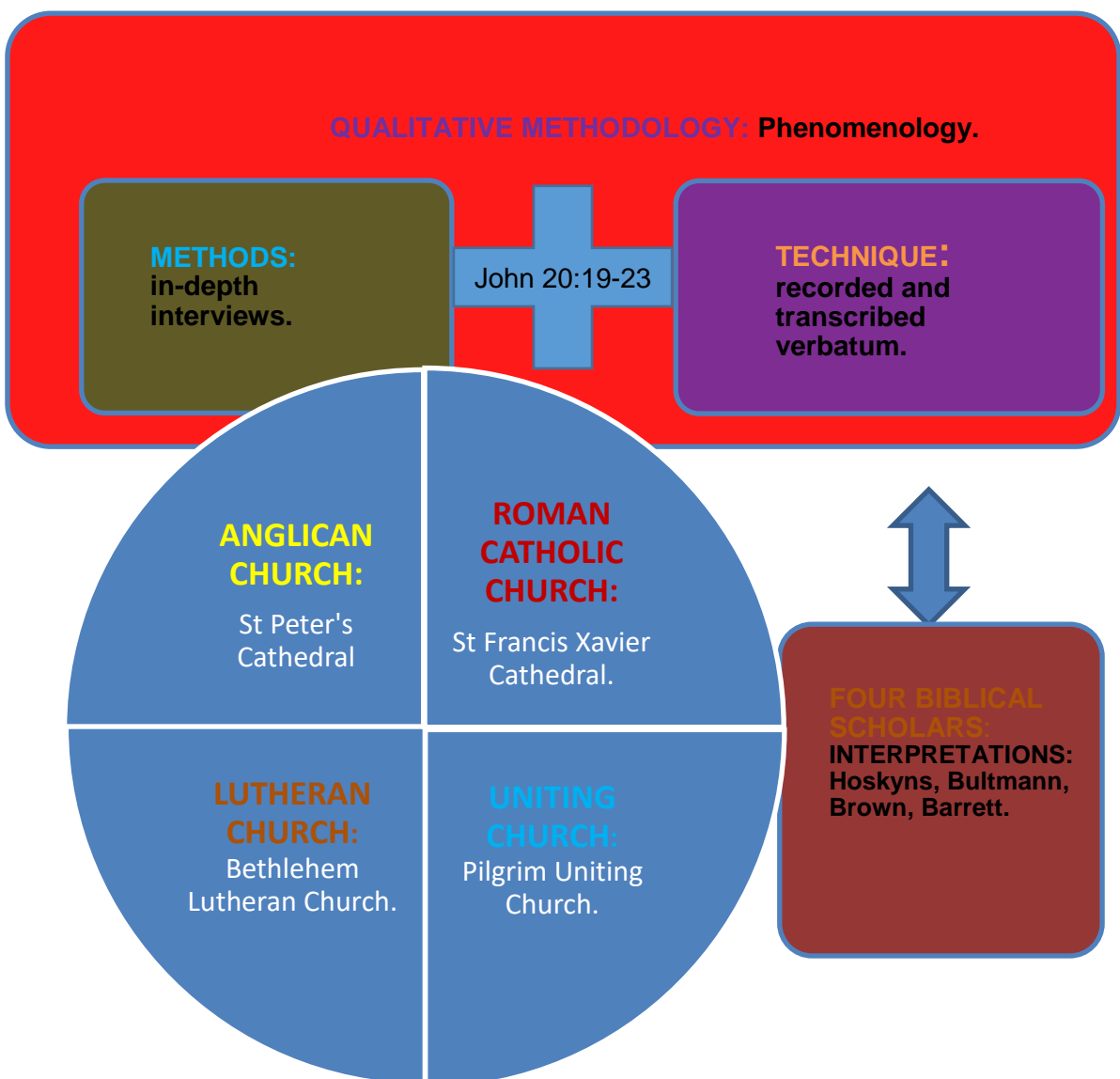


Figure 3.1: Research design

The phenomenological design has assisted me first, to understand how lay people describe their espoused theology, second, to establish similarities and differences among the 48 respondents from the four mainline Christian denominations, lastly to compare espoused theology to formal theology. Merriam has this to say; qualitative research is interested in three things. First, the interpretation of people's experiences, second, the way people construct their world, and finally the meaning people attribute to their experiences.<sup>121</sup>

### **3.7 Quality assurance**

What is quality assurance? This study used five terms suggested by Lincoln and Guba to determine the quality of a qualitative research; namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as the 'naturalist's equivalents' for internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity".<sup>122</sup>

#### **3.7.1 Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba argued that credibility is the most fundamental aspect of qualitative research technique to ensure the true value is evident in a research. Similarly, Ary and associates argue that credibility is concerned with correlation of the truthfulness of the report of findings with respondents' realities.<sup>123</sup> Credibility in qualitative research is achieved through various methods such as member checks, interpretative adequacy, structural corroboration, control of bias, and theoretical adequacy among others.

Lincoln and Guba insist that "member checks"<sup>124</sup> is the best technique for credible research and wrote: "the most crucial technique to establish [credibility]" is through "member checks".<sup>125</sup> In member checking the researcher sends the results of the interpretation of data to the respondents for verification of the interpretation. This method has been

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<sup>121</sup> Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 23.

<sup>122</sup> Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 300; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, (2009), 190-191.

<sup>123</sup> Donald Ary, Lucy Cheser Jacobs & Chris Sorensen, *Introduction to research in education* (Belmont, Calif.; United Kingdom: Wadsworth, 2010), 498.

<sup>124</sup> Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 314.

<sup>125</sup> Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 314; quoted from chapter 8 by Clive Seale, *Quality in Qualitative Research* (reprinted from *Qualitative Inquiry* 5, no 4 (1999): 465- 478 by Sage Publications Inc. Yvonna S. Lincoln & Norman K. Denzin, *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief* (Altamira Press: Oxford, 2003), 172; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 252.

proposed by Lincoln and Guba as a shift<sup>126</sup> from the positivist position that focuses on “single tangible reality”.<sup>127</sup>

In this study to ensure credibility, first, I used member checks approach. This was done in unusual format. Instead of sending the findings to the respondents, it was more accurate to compare the transcribed interviews with the recorded interviews and the notes.<sup>128</sup> Second I used the structural corroboration which encapsulates the “means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs”.<sup>129</sup> Third, the three supervisors check with me whenever, there was a doubt of wording or meaning of sentences.

### **3.7.2 Transferability**

Transferability consists in describing the process of data collection through a details of various steps taken so that the reader or any future researcher can be able to use the same procedure in another context and be able “to determine whether the findings can be transferred ‘because of shared characteristics’”.<sup>130</sup> John W. Creswell suggests that “to make sure that the findings are transferable between the researcher and those being studied, thick description is necessary”.<sup>131</sup> A rich and thick description wrote Eisner “is an effort aimed at interpretation, at getting below the surface to that most enigmatic aspect of the human condition: the construction of meaning”.<sup>132</sup> Transferability consists in the researcher detailing step by step explaining the choice of data collection, of categories and themes in such a way that the reader is persuaded to decide whether the study reflects

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<sup>126</sup> Lincoln and Guba, 314 this is an article by Clive Seale, “Quality in Qualitative Research” 169-184, in Yvonna S. Lincoln & Denzin, *Turning Points in Qualitative Research*, 172.

<sup>127</sup> Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 295; Yvonna S. Lincoln & Denzin, *Turning Points in Qualitative Research*, 172; chapter 8 by Clive Seale, “Quality in Qualitative Research” in Yvonna S. Lincoln & Norman K. Denzin, *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief* (Altamira Press: Oxford, 2003), 172

<sup>128</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 330-331.

<sup>129</sup> Ary, *Introduction to Research in Education*, 498.

<sup>130</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 252; Erlandson et al (1993), 32

<sup>131</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 252. For Creswell, thick description means that the researcher provides details when describing the case or when writing about a theme. For Stake “a description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details”. You describe the context in such a way all detailed are explained. Triangulation is not to be confused with the method of triangulation used in focus group.

<sup>132</sup> Elliot W. Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational* (Teachers College Press: New York, 2017).

transferability.<sup>133</sup> Silverman notes that “transferability is the degree to which findings can be transferred to other contexts.”<sup>134</sup> Second, transferability consists of a thick description of data which means respondents and locations of interviews are included in the report of the study.<sup>134</sup> In this study, I ensure that a thick description is provided by “paint[ing] a picture of the site and participants in the readers’ mind”.<sup>135</sup>

Many strategies are used to measure validity in qualitative research.<sup>136</sup> In this study, I firstly used triangulation to assess the validity of the study at hand. Triangulation consists in evaluating the validity of the research when the researcher makes use “of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence”.<sup>137</sup> In other words, through corroboration, the researcher explains the rationale for the choice of concepts, occurrences or relationships that lead to the emergent themes. As noted by Creswell; “When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings”.<sup>138</sup>

### **3.7.3 Dependability**

As a replacement of reliability or consistency as suggested by Lincoln and Guba. This technique demand peer auditing for comparison of data. I am unable to employ it in this study for lack of peers, time, and resources. On the contrary, I will use the criterion of “reflexivity, which involves the provision of a methodologically self-critical account of how the research was done”.<sup>139</sup> Wolcott argues that “the goal of validation is to identify ‘critical elements and write ‘plausible interpretations from them’”. Dependability is different from reliability in the sense that the results in qualitative research will be subjected to change and instability.

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<sup>133</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 252.

<sup>134</sup> Leonard Bickman & Debra J. Rog, *The Sage Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods* (California, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009) 244.

<sup>135</sup> Bickman & Rog, *The Sage Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*, 244.

<sup>136</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 250.

<sup>137</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 251.

<sup>138</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 251.

<sup>139</sup> Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 314; Yvonna S. Lincoln & Denzin, *Turning Points in Qualitative Research*, 172; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 257;

### **3.7.4 Confirmability**

In a qualitative study such as this the researcher looks for confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data. In both the dependability and confirmability, the naturalistic researcher is prone to establish a thick and rich audition of the research process. In contrast to validity in positivist world, Eisner constructed the credibility of qualitative research based on subjectivist view. Interrater reliability consists of double codes and comparison of the data. I will code the data and leave them for a week or so and then code the code for the next time. After that I will compare the findings. Confirmability is concerned with the objectivity of the research. In other words, to what extent the researcher stays out of the process and free of bias.<sup>140</sup>

In order to ensure validity of this study I first show how I planned to manage my biases. Naturally, it seems unrealistic to suspend completely personal values and beliefs. However, the process of listening carefully to what respondents were saying was paramount and effective. Another technique that assisted to avoid biases is to reread the transcripts and listening to the recorded interviews. Another was a descriptive validity.

I planned to use descriptive validity because it is concerned with the accuracy of the reported descriptive information. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. This ensured the accuracy of the information received.

Another is the interpretive validity focuses on the meaning. As Johnson rightly noted, this validity consists in attesting how consistently respondents' "viewpoints, thoughts, feelings, intentions, and experiences" represent the data.<sup>141</sup> With the probing questions, I was able to understand what meaning respondents gave to their world.

Another strategy employed was peer review approach in which my supervisors were like members checking for clarification of words or sentences from the transcripts. Many an occasion they requested me to go and check, listen and verify a piece of information in the data. Another was reliability: a process through which the research can be conducted in similar way and arrive at the same result.

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<sup>140</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 251.

<sup>141</sup> Burke R. Johnson and Larry Christensen, *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2017), 285.



### **3.8 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I described the plans made to carry out this study within phenomenological methodology. The philosophical thread that governed the research was relativism. The research design was explained. Various methods were used for data collection and analysis to ensure the plausibility, credibility, trustworthiness, authenticity, and defensibility of the research.

## Chapter 4:

### Presentation of Findings

#### 4.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings from the 48 respondents from the four mainline Christian denominations who, having read John 20:19-23, willingly answered the research question: “How do you understand God’s forgiveness of sins?”

Presenting the results of the research is the aim of this chapter. There were six themes that emerged in analysing the verbal responses of 48 respondents from four congregations. The themes were: God, faith, agents of forgiveness, confession and absolution, the Eucharistic Church Service, and anointing and blessing. The last theme appeared only in the Anglican Church and Roman Catholic Church, whereas the first five themes emerged in the Uniting Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Anglican Church. Given the similarities and differences of the themes among the denominations, I present first the results of the Uniting Church followed by the Lutheran Church, then the Anglican Church and finally the Roman Catholic Church, which was the only denomination lacking the theme of the Eucharistic Church Service. By having the theme of the anointing and blessing, the Anglican Church became the only congregation having six themes while the others have five each. Once all themes have been explained, I give a synopsis of the themes to conclude this chapter and introduce the next chapter, which is the discussion of findings.

Before I present the themes, it is important that I briefly mention at this stage the demography of the respondents. The 48 respondents in this research came from various socio-economic and religious backgrounds within the city of Adelaide and its surrounding suburbs. All respondents are members of the Uniting Church, Lutheran Church, Anglican Church or the Roman Catholic Church, namely, the four selected mainline Christian denominations<sup>1</sup> in the city of Adelaide. I purposely chose the city of Adelaide and these four Christian Churches not only for their convenience due to their geographical position

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<sup>1</sup> They are Christian Churches who share a long history, doctrine, and system of organisation that go back as far as before and soon after the Reformation within the context of Australia and particularly Adelaide.

in the city of Adelaide, but also because they participate in the same cultural context as each other.

A random purposeful<sup>2</sup> sample of 48 lay people from four selected Christian congregations who willingly shared their experience of God's forgiveness of sins participated in this study. It is purposeful because I selected specific convenient congregations to answer the purpose of my study. It was randomly done because lay people volunteered to participate in the research. The group was comprised of 30 females and 18 males. There were three males and nine females from the Anglican Church. Both the Uniting Church and the Lutheran Church had eight females and four males, whereas the Roman Catholic had seven males and five females.

The age of respondents varied between 20 and 82. Five respondents were aged between 20 and 29, eight respondents were aged between 40 and 59, 31 respondents were aged between 60 and 79, and finally four respondents were aged between 80 and 82. The interviews lasted between 23 minutes to one hour and nine minutes.

In analysing the data, I identified five themes that included twenty-one categories. Below each theme and category is explained and supported by some respondents' quotations. I now turn to the themes of each denomination.

## **4.2 Twelve respondents from the Uniting Church**

### **4.2.1 Theme 1: God**

God is the source of forgiveness of sins. All respondents say that forgiveness of sins comes from God. This theme combines six categories, namely God's forgiveness, signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, assurance of forgiveness, no intermediary role, and unmediated. The forgiveness of sins is understood as available to respondents through either the Holy Spirit or Jesus. There is no intermediary between God and the respondent except Jesus. Forgiveness of sins has conditions: one must ask for it and obtain it through words of assurance or signs of forgiveness, both in the Church and in daily life.

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<sup>2</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 158.

#### **4.2.1.1 God's forgiveness**

All respondents insisted that forgiveness comes from God. God is the source of forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit has been given for that purpose and Jesus died to redeem all people.

1. "I understand that God is a person who forgives everybody their sins, and this is a free gift. So, doesn't matter what I've done – God forgives" [U5].
2. "To me, the Holy Spirit is the bit that says, 'they are forgiven' as opposed to just saying a series of words: 'Forgive sins!' or 'I forgive you'. Without the Holy Spirit, it just becomes a series of words. But, this passage says, you say it and it would be so. It's because of the Spirit, it would be so. It would be gone. It would be over, done and dusted. The Holy Spirit makes it real" [U4].
3. "We don't see Jesus these days. We don't see the Father. The Holy Spirit is a personal thing. In this context, He's empowering them, giving them the power to forgive sins" [U3].
4. "God is God. Of course, you're going to think about Jesus' death. Why he died? He has died to redeem us all" [U11].

Summary: For each of these respondents, forgiveness comes from God

#### **4.2.1.2 Signs of forgiveness**

This category represents words, images or gestures that are signs of God's forgiveness in the life and experience of respondents.

1. "Shalom is a word, I think the empty cross is another sign. Christ was resurrected to new life" [U5].
2. "The sign is we are at peace with God. Jesus died for me. The sins are forgiven because he had done the work. Look at my hands, look at my feet, this is how I died" [U11].
3. "Of course, you're going to think about Jesus' death. Why he died. He has died to redeem us all" [U11].
4. "It's also in the presence. In every encounter with our Minister. Embracing the smile and hug" [U10].

Summary: Images include shalom, the empty cross, peace, Jesus' hands and feet, Jesus' death which redeems us are revelatory signs of forgiveness.

#### **4.2.1.3 A plea for forgiveness**

A plea for forgiveness is a category that expressed an individual or communal request for God's forgiveness of sins. Most respondents pray to God and seek forgiveness for individual or communal failures. While a plea for forgiveness happens often during Church within the community prayers, it is also a personal duty for one to ask forgiveness for personal and structural sins.

1. "I think the church gets its knickers in a knot around sexual behaviour. But we have to pray a bit more about basic selfishness. And the sin of accumulating for ourselves, not caring about the whole community. I sincerely pray for the sins of accumulation. I guess I will focus more on love than on the environment for example" [U2].
2. "As the Uniting Church, we have apologised, asked forgiveness to Aboriginal people, with a written preamble. Every Sunday we acknowledge the Aboriginal people and pray for justice" [U5].
3. "In my notion, there are no particular officers who have this task of as it were sharing out God's forgiveness. I believe this is for everybody at the level of their own reading of Scripture and their own prayer life. In our Church, it is up to individuals to seek forgiveness from the Lord" [U1].
4. "In prayer, I can say please help me to make it right with that person. But I don't need to go and see or go on about it. Because I don't need an intermediary" [U7].

Summary: for these respondents a plea for forgiveness is both at communal and personal level. An example of the former is the apology to aboriginal people and writing the preamble to the Uniting Church constitution. The latter includes praying to make things right about the sins of accumulation and selfishness.

#### **4.2.1.4 Conditional forgiveness**

Most respondents believed that God forgives sins. They have an expectation that they need to show that they are willing to change, to repent and to be sorry for the sins committed.

1. "Jesus forgives my sins if I am contrite" [U2].
2. "But I think God wants me to realise that I have done something not right and to ask for forgiveness" [U5].
3. "When people do things, they should not do, they are sorry for them. They have to be sorry and ask sorry for the things they have done. It should be that way. They have to be sorry" [U8].
4. "This is the concept of 'you have received forgiveness only when you forgive others. A person who seeks forgiveness of sins must also forgive others. God forgives us and expects us to do the same" [U12].

Summary: the first respondent expresses the need for Jesus to forgive sins when one is contrite. The second respondent emphasises the need to ask for forgiveness after one realises that one has done something wrong. The third respondent asks for sorry for the sins to be forgiven whereas the last respondent sees God forgiving sins when one forgives other in the same way God expect people to do.

#### **4.2.1.5 Assurance of forgiveness**

Certain words such as "move on" or "let go" are associated by the respondents with the forgiveness of sins. The words could be heard from ones' conscience or from someone else. When the person decides to forgive him or herself, this is the point he or she is assured of forgiveness of sins.

1. "When you think about the worse things that have happened to you. And for me that's being sexually abused by some... kids when I was a child. I can make it clear by my behaviour when we meet that I don't hold a grudge. Sometimes I think that is all I can do" [U2].
2. "Put all behind you and move on to new life. Basic reunion. We are pilgrim people on the way to the promised goal of reconciliation and renewal of the all creation" [U5].
3. "You can move on with your life. You've got to be able to forgive yourself" [U12].
4. "I have to remind myself that I have to let it go. And ask God to reinforce that fact that I have let it go and not to do it again because if I keep holding onto it, the sin will continue to be there. So I had to let it go" [U3].

Summary: For these respondents, forgiveness of sins may be associated with words, but is more clearly connected with the respondents' own attitude; they assured by moving on, by not holding on to the sin and putting things behind them.

#### ***4.2.1.6 Forgiveness mediated only by Jesus and the Holy Spirit***

All Uniting Church respondents believed that God's forgiveness of sins is not mediated by anyone other than Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This belief was passed on to them by their church. The teaching of their church encouraged them to believe that no one but Jesus and the Holy Spirit make it possible for them to speak to God.

1. "The Protestant response is, there is no one between you and God" [U7].
2. "But I don't think that anyone in the Uniting Church has the authority to forgive sins. That is against who we say we are. So, I don't believe that I need special people who have received God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit works in the world always" [U5].
3. "That's similar to another question. I don't think so. Because of the Protestant assumption that we have a direct relationship with God. It doesn't need to be mediated. It's a faith of all believers and Jesus as our only mediator and advocate" [U10].
4. "I think from what I've said before. You can tell. I don't see things that way. I believe in our particular Protestant kind of church where our government is the priesthood of all believers. It's not the duty of anybody in particular to receive confession or to forgive sins. It isn't done like that" [U1].

Summary: For all these respondents the Protestant teaching is that no intermediary but Jesus and the Holy Spirit are necessary to have access to God's forgiveness of sins.

#### **4.2.1.7 Section summary: the theme of God**

For the Uniting Church respondents, God is the source of forgiveness of sins. All respondents say that forgiveness of sins comes from God. This theme combines six categories, namely God's forgiveness, signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, assurance of forgiveness, no intermediary role, and unmediated. The forgiveness of sins is understood as available to respondents through either the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The only intermediary between God and the respondent is Jesus. Forgiveness of sins has conditions: one must ask for it and obtain it through words of assurance or signs of forgiveness both in Church and daily life. While an intermediary is not required, forgiveness required personal endeavour by the respondent.

#### **4.2.2 Theme 2: Faith**

Respondents' faith is central to God's forgiveness of their sins. This theme consists of one category, namely gratitude to God. This theme reflects the central place faith takes in relation to the forgiveness of sins. Their faith is in a gracious God, to whom they turn in gratitude.

##### **4.2.2.1 Gratitude to God**

This category refers to the respondents' appreciation and belief in a gracious God. The grace of God reaches the respondents at any time, even in the most unexpected situations.

1. "The people you meet on a particular day, the person whom you meet quite by accident. You might be the only person in that workplace who can help that person because of your special understanding. I am prepared to believe those things are not actually accidental. I would say that's grace. And maybe grace was a good explanation for the things that happened" [U2].
2. "I understand that God's grace is new every morning. There is always a fresh invitation to start again. It is a source of hope that there is always an openness on God's part toward me despite my weaknesses and inadequacies. [U10].



3. “Well it’s a part of God’s grace that God accepts us as we are regardless. And so, that is the importance of anyone’s journey I think, to come to terms with that (sic)” [U9].
4. “God’s grace is beyond me, I admit to sin and God forgives me through faith” [U6].

Summary: The respondents are grateful to God whose grace has no boundaries.

#### **4.2.2.2 Section summary: the theme of faith**

The theme of faith consists of one category, namely gratitude to God who is gracious. This theme reflects the central place faith takes in relation to forgiveness of sins. Their faith is expressed in four subcategories that display an openness “on God’s part toward them despite their weaknesses and inadequacies”; “*God’s grace is beyond*”, them, and faith in God’s love in all situations, from Church, to social and work situations. The theme focuses on the respondents’ appreciation of God’s grace which has no boundaries. Thus, hope and forgiveness through faith is always available.

#### **4.2.3 Theme 3: Agents of Forgiveness**

The theme of agents of forgiveness of sins consists of four categories. These include that all people are ministers, all Christians, people in the community, and oneself. Anyone can forgive sins although an Ordained Person is the first preference for some respondents. All Christians are called to forgive based on the Holy Spirit they receive at their baptism. All people are ministers of forgiveness in terms of forgiving whenever they are hurt. And finally, self-reliance involves the individual’s ability to forgive oneself through a personal relationship with God.

##### **4.2.3.1 Ordained person**

Most of the respondents considered that an Ordained Person was the most likely person to contact if they really needed to speak about something bad that had happened. They chose a minister because of their theological training, and the trust and discretion placed in his / her role as a leader of the community. The minister is also the first authoritative figure of the Church to forgive in formal sense.

1. "Primarily the forgiveness of sins comes to the priest or leader – because he /she answer the call, was trained, commissioned by the Church" [U9].
2. "I will probably go to the minister or ministers because they also have been given the Holy Spirit in a special ceremony which marked them apart from us. They are recognised as being God's people. And I think I will receive prayer and forgiveness from them although, naturally enough, I will receive prayer and forgiveness from anybody" [U7].
3. "I think ministers have that authority to some extent because they have been ordained" [U5].
4. "In the context of the service, it comes from the minister. It depends on trust as well. I trust that they will respect my confidentiality" [U3].

Summary: Most respondents would go to an Ordained Minister because of their theological training, trust, confidentiality, and their commissioning by the Church.

#### **4.2.3.2 All Christians**

All the Uniting Church respondents believe that all Christians can forgive sins based on the Holy Spirit that one has received at baptism.

1. "And we are a priesthood of all believers. So, any priest or reverend, in our Church we are equal" [U12].
2. "So, there are a couple of very dear friends, I almost treat them more like spiritual advisers, more than the minister. Part of the problem we have in the Uniting Church is that the ministers are not the only people we can call to minister to us" [U6].
3. "I might go to someone who is a mentor, or someone who is the chair of the Church council. They have been given some authority" [U9].
4. "A personal family friend whom I used to visit until he died 5 or 10 years ago at 80" [U2].

Summary: Most respondents go to someone for forgiveness of sins. Examples include a friend, a priest or reverend, a spiritual adviser, or the chair of the council.

#### **4.2.3.3 Section summary: the theme of the agent of forgiveness**

All people can forgive sins.

#### **4.2.4 Theme 4: Confession and Absolution**

Confession and absolution complement each other and include three categories namely, General acknowledgement of sins, confessional prayers for forgiveness, and words of absolution. This theme stands out in the Uniting Church Worship Order for its distinct mark of offering divine forgiveness of sins both in Church and outside the Church. Respondents confess their individual sins to God, say confessional prayers and receive absolution from the Ordained Person including words such as “you are forgiven”.

##### **4.2.4.1 General acknowledgement of sins**

This category is about respondents acknowledging their sins before God in the worship service. This consists of being sorry before God and acknowledging the sins one has committed, hoping that God will forgive them. It is saying to God: this is who we are. We are sorry.

1. “If I treat someone badly, then I need to acknowledge that to God and say, I’m sorry. I need to change my behaviour in the future. I think, it is because you acknowledge your sins. You can only be forgiven when you want to be forgiven” [U7].
2. “I like the structure of it which includes our acknowledgement of sins. I still think the hardest thing is to forgive yourself. And that covers all the range of sins, from arrogance to selfishness and through (sic).” [U8].
3. “It is not always given the liturgical title; ‘Praise of who we are’, which is a recognition of reality for each person” [U12].<sup>3</sup>
4. “Because I like the movement through the welcome to service, maybe a hymn of praise, acknowledgement of sins and our acceptance of grace” [U4].

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<sup>3</sup> This is a prayer that combines music, Bible reading and moment of silence whereby one acknowledges sins, shortcomings, and asks forgiveness from God. It is done at Pilgrim Uniting Church. “You appropriate in the words of the liturgy whatever ... attaches to you.” In terms of what you understand or what message comes through those words that is personal to yourself. Then there is a release. If you like, a liturgical release. In some cases, it’s not the pronouncement that ‘your sins are forgiven’. In some cases, it’s something else. I can’t think about it. Yes, there are some really good liturgies that work along those lines” [U12].

Summary: Most respondents acknowledge their sins before God and are prepared to change their behaviour and say sorry.

#### **4.2.4.2 Confessional prayers for forgiveness**

Confessional prayers for forgiveness can be said by the Ordained Person. They can include silence or congregational responses such as ‘amen’ or other words. These are prayers said during the ‘Calls to Confession of sin’.

1. “To say, ‘you are forgiven’ or ‘we are forgiven’– I believe they are powerful words. Because I believe if we have a prayer of confession early in our worship, in a sense it clears the deck for the rest to receive the rest of the blessings.” [U9].
2. “Your words are given to us, Author of life, so we might be reformed, but we are intent on changing others. Your words are offered to us, so we might be transformed, but we are focused on conforming to our culture. Your words are spoken to lead us into new life, but we hold on to old ways of thinking and doing” [U7].
3. “Forgive us, God of Wonder. Guide us by your steadfast love and show us to be persistent in living out our faith. Amen” [U3].
4. Every Sunday there is a confessional prayer” [U5].

Summary: Most respondents see blessings in confessional prayers for forgiveness. The prayers speak of steadfast love, persistence in faith, receiving blessing from the Author of life, and culminate in the words “you are forgiven”. The prayers show awareness of a need for transformation, and also instruct respondents to observe their own dependence on culture.

#### **4.2.4.3 Absolution**

The absolution is given within the worship service and in conversation with others. It is to remind people that they are forgiven already by God. Absolution is evident in phrases like “it is not your fault”, “your sins are forgiven”, and can be given by anyone.

1. "Pretty complex issue. I think the gift of absolution which actually can be given by the congregation can give the gift to move on. Maybe anyone can give the absolution? I don't think Jesus requires certificates. I don't think God requires a Bachelor of Theology for a fellow Christian to absolve sins. And I think the absolution can come from others" [U2].
2. "It was a colleague who picked up one day that I seemed to be binding myself with this and he gave me the absolution. That was unequivocal. But it was someone who actually understood the pressure and could see both sides. He says 'eh yeah. Are you blaming yourself for that? That was not your fault'" [U12].
3. "My minister cannot say "on behalf of God I forgive your sins". That is not our theology. God has forgiven our sins already. The minister cannot absolve sins. The Code of ethics for ministers sets out the things the minister can and cannot do" [U5].
4. "The words; your sins are forgiven".

Summary: Most respondents wanted to hear the words of absolution that says it is not your fault, although no one has the privilege to say, "on behalf of God I forgive your sins". Respondents need someone who understands who and what they are.

#### **4.2.4.4 Section summary: the theme of confession and absolution**

Confession and absolution complement each other and include three categories namely, General acknowledgement of sins, confessional prayers for forgiveness, and words of absolution. This theme stands out in the Uniting Worship Order for its distinct mark of offering divine forgiveness of sins both in Church and outside the Church. Respondents confess their individual sins to God from the secret of their hearts, say confessional prayers and receive absolution from the Ordained Person. Absolution, namely hearing words such as "you are forgiven" and accepting God's grace, penetrates the respondents' everyday lives. To hear the words of absolution which are the words of blessing, respondents recite the confessional prayers for forgiveness which echo God's faithfulness in steadfast love. The respondents are encouraged to persist in faith, and receive blessings from the Author of life.

#### **4.2.5: Theme 5: Eucharistic Church Service**

This theme encapsulated two categories, namely the Church Service and Service of Communion. Jesus is understood as having offered himself to respondents in the elements of bread and wine shared during the Eucharistic Church Service. In the worship service, respondents sing hymns, say prayers and listen to sermons. They are forgiven their sins in a special way by participating in communion. The Church Service is understood to include funeral services, baptism services, weddings, and other devotional services which do not necessarily include the Service of Holy Communion.

##### **4.2.5.1 Church service**

Church Service is used to refer to the entire worship, rather than specific elements within the service. As U9 notes; “entrance hymn, call to worship, time for confession and absolution followed by the readings. Then prayers as a response to the reading and preparation of communion. Communion, notices and exit”. When respondents worship in a Church service, God forgives their sins. That is the implication.

1. “It includes confession of sins, the prayers, hymns, preaching and climax in the communion and time for peace” [U8].
2. “Well, when I have communion. In the confession part of the service, I hand over my sins. And because I accept that Jesus died for my sins, then my sins are forgiven. So, I go like through cleansing every Sunday when we have a Communion Service, which verified for me that Jesus died for my sins and they are forgiven” [U3].
3. “Sin does not stop me from going to church. It is because I sin that I want to go to Church to have fellowship with others and to participate and receive encouragement to keep going” [U10].
4. “But I find I think really the church I go to across the road here. I think it is good stuff. I give thanks for it every week. I often say to my ministers when I am leaving after the service that this lamb has been feed for today; thank you Lord. And they do; they are sensitive to that. The order of service has this early after the first hymn—there is a period when there is this, a little like the Anglican Church. There is a Prayer Book, we confess our sins and the Lord forgives us” [U1].

Summary: For these respondents, forgiveness of sins in the Church Service is experienced in prayers, hymns, preaching, communion, peace, accepting that Jesus died for them. In the Church Service, they go through cleansing every Sunday when they have communion service, they ask forgiveness and the Lord forgives them, and are fed with hymns, preaching and communion.

#### **4.2.5.2 Service of Holy Communion**

The bread and wine prayed over by the Ordained Person of the community is received as Holy Communion by respondents. The Ordained Person utters the words the “Body of Christ” while holding the bread in front of the respondents and the “Blood of Christ” in similar fashion to which the communicant responds “Amen”.

1. “But there are a lot of times when I feel—it’s having communion. When the minister gives you the bread. Very specifically just little words, the change of words in giving you the bread and gives you a blessing” [U3].
2. “I receive forgiveness in the Body and Blood of Christ. I think it’s more the mystery of bread and wine” [U11].
3. “You make the choice if you want to participate, partake in His representations of Body and Blood” [U1].
4. “I feel a sense of forgiveness when I receive communion in the sacrament”.

Summary: all these respondents experienced forgiveness of sins very specifically when the minister gives them bread and wine—the Body and Blood of Christ, accompanied by some words. In receiving communion, they receive forgiveness.

#### **4.2.6 Summary of the Uniting Church Respondents**

For Uniting Church respondents, central to the forgiveness of sins are five themes: God, faith, the agent of forgiveness, confession and absolution, and the Eucharistic Church Service. The theme of God lists six categories namely, God’s forgiveness, signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, assurance for forgiveness, and unmediated. The core understanding in the category of signs of forgiveness included the empty cross, Jesus’ death, and words such as shalom, Jesus’ hands and feet; these were revelatory signs of forgiveness. The category for plea for forgiveness was for respondents

an intercession for both communal and personal plea to God. The category of conditional forgiveness teaches respondents to be forgiving to each other if they expect God to forgive them their sins. This led to the category of assurance of forgiveness in which respondents were assured of God's forgiveness by moving on and putting all behind them. The category of unmediated included the Protestant affirmation that there is no intermediary role between God and respondents, but Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the only access to God's forgiveness of sins.

### **4.3 Twelve respondents from the Lutheran Church**

I identified five themes and nineteen categories from the Lutheran respondents. The themes are as follows: God, faith, the agent of forgiveness, confession and absolution, and the Eucharistic Church Service. Below each theme is explained and supported by some respondents' quotations, organised into categories.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: God**

God's forgiveness of sins is a forgiveness freely given and yet, according to the respondents' views, with certain conditions. This theme consists of five categories namely, God's forgiveness, signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, and assurance of forgiveness.

##### **4.3.1.1 God's forgiveness**

All respondents understand that God is the one who forgives sins through Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness of sins is the work of the triune God. Jesus' death already has forgiven their sins. In the world, the Holy Spirit is the challenger, the power of God in human beings enabling forgiveness of sins.

1. "Jesus is the one who reconciles us to God the Father. Jesus is also interceding for us on our behalf before God the Father. So, it is in the name and the authority of Jesus that sins are forgiven. God's forgiveness is through Christ. Always through Christ. I look at what he has done and his words" [L1].
2. "It is the action of Christ who redeems me. He died for my sins. His resurrection shows that Jesus frees me from sins. He conquered it. Jesus frees me from sins.



There is no burden of them. I am free of them. It doesn't free me from doing wrong, but it frees me for the past actions. There is no burden of them through Jesus' redeeming action. The consequence of sins is gone. Christ has taken it in the past. The sins are gone" [L9].

3. "The Holy Spirit is to me a part of the Triune God. In this passage the Holy Spirit empowers us, gives us the ability to act in the way to forgive sins and not to retain sins. It's the invisible hand that guides us" [L8].
4. "The Holy Spirit gives power to forgive sins. The Holy Spirit is a challenger. He challenges us how to forgive, shows us a better way to live and convicts us. He gives the power to forgive the sins of others. The Holy Spirit is a part of the Trinity. It is God's Spirit that forgives sins" [L7].

Summary: All these respondents believe that forgiveness of sins is the work of the triune God.

#### **4.3.1.2 Signs of forgiveness**

Signs of forgiveness include words, images or gestures through which the respondents experienced God's forgiveness of sins in their lives. These include Jesus' death on the cross, his death takes away personal sins, and the sign of the cross during preparation of communion.

1. "Jesus died for my sins. By him dying on the cross for me, I don't have to worry about the past acts. I accept that Jesus died on the Cross. His death has taken away the sins of all the world. His death takes away my sins." [L7].
2. "By Jesus going to the cross, He stood in my stead. Jesus takes my burden and makes me free" [L3].
3. "In a Worship Service, on a Sunday it usually the sign of the Cross during the preparation for communion" [L6].
4. "Another sign of God's forgiveness is the cross. The pastor drew my eyes literally to the cross of Christ. In his office, he has a cross on the wall, a crucifix. He pointed to the crucifix and he said; look at the crucifix. Look at what came out of that. Trust in God, he can work good out of your situation, no matter what's happened. Hold on

to the cross. So, the crucifix or the cross was another gesture that stayed with me” [L1].

Summary: For most respondents the signs of forgiveness are: Jesus’ death on the cross, symbolised by the Crucifix, and making the sign of the cross during communion.

#### **4.3.1.3 A plea for forgiveness**

A plea for forgiveness is a category that involves individual or communal requests for God’s forgiveness. The request for forgiveness of sins is not limited to Church Services, but continues into daily activities.

1. “God can forgive our sins basically whenever we ask for it. Obviously when we go to Church, there is always a section of the Church Service for the forgiveness of sins. But also, just like in your daily life you can pray and ask him for particular situation or particular person or something like that. God can do it at that stage as well. So, it really a continuous thing. We can always ask for it. Whenever and wherever we are” [L5].
2. “We have something called the prayer of the Church in our liturgy where we pray for the people in the government. There are times I’ve heard the pastor saying please forgive us for not doing something as a community, such as reaching out to refugees with enough love, that sort of thing. It’s a fairly general broad request for forgiveness and acknowledgement of sin” [L7].
3. “I ask for forgiveness at night in my prayers and at the Church Service. Usually the pastor prays in general for our sins” [L3].
4. “I have felt peace through prayer and the sense of forgiveness, a settling in my own heart, seeking for forgiveness and believing it” [L8].

Summary: The respondents asked for forgiveness of sins in the Church Service, but not limited to the service. In the liturgical prayer of the Church for the world, the community can also acknowledge sin. The service models what individual believers also do in their prayers: seek forgiveness and believe it.

#### **4.3.1.4 Conditional forgiveness**

Conditional forgiveness involved a promise for change or a commitment to improve one's life. This also included a willingness to repent and truly to be sorry for the sins committed. One is forgiven when one commits to not sin again. This shows to God that he/she is determined to repent.

1. "God forgives me as long as I am ready to not sin again. Practise what Jesus asks us to practise in this passage. I see some people who profess to be Christians, who confess on Sunday and resume sinning during the week. To me that's a sort of inconsistency and hypocrisy. It's unacceptable. I think that you aren't only Christian on Sunday. You are Christian 24 hours a day and seven days a week. And you must be actively not sinning" [L8].
2. "I understand God's forgiveness of my sins that if I accept that if I repent of my sins, He will forgive them. I don't know if there is anything deeper than that. And if I believe in Jesus and repent of my sins, they are forgiven. My sins are forgiven" [L6].
3. "If somebody is not sorry for their sins, then that forgiveness is withheld. There is a need to be repentant in order to receive forgiveness of sins. There is need for a repentant heart and that would be a reason for withholding forgiveness. My lay person point of view" [L1].
4. "Without repentance and turning back to Jesus, acknowledging sin and sinfulness, forgiveness may be deferred and may be withheld" [L10].

Summary: Most respondents believed that repentance is the condition for them to receive divine forgiveness of sins. It is to "practise what Jesus asks us to practise in this passage. And you must be actively not sinning." If respondents believe and repent, God forgives them. If somebody is not sorry for their sins, then forgiveness may be withheld.

#### **4.3.1.5 Assurance of forgiveness**

Respondents are assured of God's forgiveness in daily conversation when they have heard words of forgiveness such as "that's okay, stop punishing yourself" from someone else. In the context of the Church, the words are "your sins are forgiven".

1. "When I have confessed my sins and received the forgiveness, it is also a strength that comes to not go back and do it. It's almost a power given to me to not go back and do the same thing. But receiving that word of forgiveness helped me, strengthened me to not go back there. In addition to what I talked about during the Church Service, I've also had a confession time one-on-one with another person in the congregation where I've spoken about what it was that I knew had gone away from God's will. And they gave me a word of forgiveness; 'in the name of Jesus Christ, Jesus forgives your sins'. At that time, I also experienced the strength to not go back and do it again." [L1].
2. "I tend to be a procrastinator in most things I do. I also offer my time quite generously to the congregation I am in. I'm not always good to my word on a timely basis. I will say yes, I will do that, but I don't usually do it in good time. And that frustrates others. It has been at the detrimental of others. But I know my pastor and pastors in the past have not used the words 'you are forgiven', have not cast guilt on me or something like that. But they say that's okay. You get through when you can. If you need a hand, let us know. It's that word of assurance, not a specific incident, but it happens so often" [L6].
3. "Stop beating yourself up. The sins are forgiven. Accept that. It's serious. It's not just words. Take that on board and live. They have been forgiven; stop feeling worthless; stop punishing yourself, which is what people tend to do or rationalise" [L4].
4. "The pastor declared to you that those who believe – their sins are forgiven. That refreshes my experience of forgiveness. The forgiveness does not depend on my feelings, but on God's word. To answer your question, my experience with the bloke in the truck with me. He told me that my sins are forgiven when I believed" [L2].

Summary: The respondents believed that the words of assurance include “that’s okay, stop feeling worthless, stop punishing yourself, and you are forgiven”. Words of assurance are spoken by the pastor, and the respondents believe that ordinary people in everyday life can offer words of assurance and forgiveness.

#### **4.3.1.6 Unmediated forgiveness**

Unmediated stands for one’s ability to forgive oneself, on the understanding that there is no intermediary person between oneself and God, not even Jesus or the Holy Spirit; the person speaks directly to God. This is a conversation between the respondent and God and God only.

1. “I free myself” [L5].
2. “I am self-reliant, not bothering others” [L8].
3. “I always ask God to show me what to do” [L3].
4. “No, I do not go to anyone, I ask forgiveness directly from God” [L9].

Summary: all these respondents are self-reliant, asking forgiveness directly from God and avoiding bothering other people. [L5] uses the words, free myself while [L3] asks God to show what to do and [L9] asks forgiveness directly from God.

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Faith**

The respondents understood that their faith was central to God’s forgiveness of their sins. This theme consisted of three categories, namely belief in God’s forgiveness, gratitude to God, and the sermons. Faith expressed respondents’ trust and reliance on God’s goodness to forgive their sins. Without faith in God, gracious divine forgiveness of sins seemed incomplete. Respondents felt they needed to trust and completely believe that it is God’s gracious gift to forgive sins.

##### **4.3.2.1 Belief in God’s forgiveness**

In this category the respondents believed in God and Jesus to obtain forgiveness of their sins. The grace of forgiveness of sins came to the respondents through faith in God and Jesus.

1. “‘Believe!’ is the summary of forgiveness in my experience. People think that they are safe because they are baptised. I was baptised when I was a child. It doesn’t matter what I do now. It’s really a serious problem. And I know there are people in the Lutheran Church who think that way. They think because they were baptised when they were children then they are safe with God, and it’s a damn heresy. It will take people to hell. Sole condition for salvation is belief. The sole condition for damnation is unbelief. People should be formally being reminded that their forgiveness depends on their belief and their faith in Jesus and nothing else” [L2].
2. “It was completely God’s grace that saved me that he reached out and gave me faith to believe that Jesus died for my sins. So, I believe that Jesus died for my sins. I trust that Jesus could die for my sins, descend into hell, defeat sin, death and the devil and rise again on the third day. Because of this he bought with that my forgiveness of sins, and my eternal life.” [L1].
3. “I have faith in the concept of the forgiveness of sins. I think I tend to very much align with this passage. My faith is in Jesus forgiving my sins. That’s my strong base” [L8].
4. “Confession has become a very important part of my faith. My belief in God and Jesus is my hope for forgiveness of my sins” [L11].

Summary: all these respondents use the word faith to express their belief in God and Jesus as the hope for the forgiveness of their sins. [L1] notes that it is God’s grace and the death of Jesus that save and that brought faith. [L2] emphasises believing as the summary of forgiveness while [L8] and [L11] believe that faith in Jesus forgive their sins.

#### **4.3.2.2 Gratitude to God**

This category refers to the respondents’ appreciation and belief in a gracious God whose grace has no boundaries. Trust in God is a key to the grace of God who forgives the greatest sins one commits. Divine grace covers all sins and brings peace.

1. “I know that’s the tricky one because obviously we can’t, we don’t know the depth of our own sinfulness and sometimes the forgiveness of sins is very generous without focusing on specific sins. So, we rely upon God’s grace to cover those sins. Yeah! It is a tricky one that one” [L10].

2. "There are specific things. But there's also this attitude, this sin housed deep in the person one struggles with every day. So, coming daily ideally, but certainly in the worship service, I am aware that I am not perfect, that God reaches out to me with his grace and forgiveness" [L4].
3. "I have experienced peace that could only have come as a gift from God on a spiritual level" [L1].
4. "It is the grace of God. His good will to me by forgiving my sins. I do not have to worry about the past acts" [L6].
5. "God offers us forgiveness in the Church Service. It is offered to us before we repent" [L4].

Summary: [L4] and [L6] employ the word grace, [L1] explains peace as a gift from God. most respondents believe that it is by God's grace that their sins are forgiven, and that they do not have to worry about the past acts. [L4] notes that forgiveness is offered before we repent. We don't know the depth of our own sinfulness and sometimes the forgiveness of sins is very generous without focusing on specific sins.

#### **4.3.2.3 Sermons**

The category of sermons is understood as an explanation of a biblical passage by the pastor for the growth of the faith of the respondents. The words of the sermons as they touch the person's life are what is experienced as forgiveness.

1. "I mean I can think back a few weeks ago when a sermon that he had preached really touched me. That was on forgiveness. And he described the situation that I'm actually going through at work. Like very similar situation. So, it really kind of touched me; I'm really like very touched. So, effectively, he was saying that part of forgiveness is actually first and foremost getting our heart right with God" [L5].
2. "What we found in the Word of God, what we experienced in worship, what we got out of the sermon increased our faith. God serving me through his Word. So, I need to daily come to him and repent of my sin and get daily forgiveness. It's an ongoing thing through life, and the more maturity there is in the faith walk, and the more of reading God's Word. Without God's Word I wouldn't understand that I need forgiveness and the Gospel to reconcile me back to God." [L1].

3. “We need more sermons on the deep meaning of this Gospel, although they will say we have done this. How do I go about announcing to people that if I forgive the sins of any, even people I do not know, will their sins be forgiven? We need a better teaching of this text and ask for forgiveness of people’s sins” [L6].
4. “God acts through us through many ways. Through the ordained minister, through God’s Word and the sermons. The pastors enable that I suppose. That’s how I do see it. I’m trying to think of a good analogy” [L9].

Summary: all these respondents understand forgiveness of sins coming through sermons that connect with life experience. They say they need more sermons on the deep meaning of this Gospel and that forgiveness is actually first and foremost getting our heart right with God.

#### **4.3.2.4 Section summary: the theme of faith**

Faith in Jesus is the cause for forgiveness of sins.

### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Agents of Forgiveness**

The theme of agents of forgiveness stands for people who are channels of God’s Word of forgiveness of sins. This theme involves two categories: The Ordained Person as a Church official in spiritual matters and the role of all Christians based on their baptism. While the Ordained Person is an agent of forgiveness of sin because of the authority of the Church, all Christians are agents of forgiveness of sins as part of their role in fulfilling their baptismal duty.

#### **4.3.3.1 Ordained person**

The pastor as an Ordained Person in the congregation is regarded as the authoritative figure of the Church to forgive sins in a formal sense. They have been ordained, they are representative of God, have a level of faith and can give sound theological advice.

1. “Well, I suppose, those people have been ordained. Ministers have been given the authority, the office of the keys to forgive sins. The pastor is a representative of God and can speak the words out” [L1].



2. "The pastor is doing it on behalf of God. Not on his special power. So, the pastor is a conduit. Pastors have a level of faith and counselling" [L7].
3. "Personally, I go to my pastor. I turn to the pastor because I don't feel comfortable to turn to other Christians. In my personal opinion I don't think other people can forgive me in official sense. The pastor is knowledgeable and can give me sound theological advice" [L11].
4. "I think I will go only to pastors and not to someone else because they have a level of authority and discretion. It is a more formal avenue to go to a pastor. Other officers of the church are just roles. I don't think they have the training or discretion the pastor has." [L8].

#### **4.3.3.2 All Christians**

1. The Holy Spirit received at baptism is a key factor for all Christians to forgive sins. Surprisingly, this category might include even non-Christians. This is based not on theological understandings but on the social and moral release when another human has been offended and yet is in a position to declare forgiveness of sins to a Christian friend or relative who needs forgiveness of sins from them. "So, I think we are all God's disciples, and a disciple is someone who is learning from God um, yeah, I think as children of God, we've all been given the task as disciples of God to forgive sins" [L1].
2. "In this context everybody. It is an obligation of the whole church. Those who believe have the power to forgive sins. Not principally the minister or the pastor. It is not that I don't trust the pastors. It is more the embarrassment of seeking forgiveness or even explaining my sins or describing my sins to somebody else and the fact that it is not in my upbringing to do that. It is a kind of cultural difference. My German kind of cultural stubbornness" [L6].
3. "I go to the person I have sinned against. The person I have sinned against has the authority to forgive my sins" [L7].
4. "In the Lutheran Church I will use a spiritual adviser, someone I trust, for example my husband" [L12].

Summary: In this understanding, the non-Christian has the authority to forgive when s/he has been offended. This is based not on theological understandings but on the social and moral release when another human has been offended and yet is in a position to declare forgiveness of sins to a Christian friend or relative who needs forgiveness of sins from them.

#### **4.3.3.3 Section summary: the theme of agent of forgiveness**

All people, both baptised and non-baptised, are agents of the forgiveness of sins.

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: Confession and Absolution**

Confession and absolution complement each other. The offer and receipt of divine forgiveness of sins is made in three ways: Private confession, General Confession and Confessional prayers for forgiveness. Private confession is outside the context of the Worship Service. Within the Service, there is the opportunity to confess one's individual sins silently before God in General Confession. There may also be communal confessional prayers, asking for God's forgiveness. The theme combined five categories namely, private confession and absolution, confession, acknowledgement of sins, confessional prayers for forgiveness, and absolution.

##### **4.3.4.1 Private confession and absolution**

Private confession and absolution take place between the Ordained Person and respondents in one-on-one conversation outside of the Worship Service. This practice was not usual for many respondents and has been introduced recently to this community. For these respondents, private confession means a conversation about their sins with the Ordained Person on a one-on-one only. The absolution means that the Ordained Person declares God's forgiveness of sins to the person using assigned sentences such as: "On behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ, I pronounce the words of God: your sins are forgiven".

1. "I also know that in our congregation in one recent time, the current pastor has offered private confession and absolution. That is not a common practice in the Lutheran Church. I haven't accepted that invitation yet. I don't know why. I suspect part of it is a fear of a practice with which Lutherans are not familiar" [L6].

2. "I've accessed private confession with the pastor and I know that the pastor is a confidential person as well. And the pastor will, I know, lead me to the Word of God and give me God's Word. I think the good thing about private confession, there's the opportunity to actually talk with the pastor and go through the different commandments. So, the chance to be able to talk through with the pastor as to how that has separated me from God" [L1].
3. "And I've not been for a long time to a private confession and absolution and I believe that's something I should do because it's a very powerful experience" [L10].
4. "As I said, I have never been to private confession and absolution with a pastor although I have been thinking about it. It would be a good idea because and I don't know how many people do, because it has not been there until pastor (X) arrived. A new tradition if you like, other pastors have never really been keen to do it. I've come to see that it is an important thing to have on offer" [L12].

Summary: most respondents are *not familiar* with private confession and absolution although they say, *it is an important thing to have it on offer*. Those respondents who know about it say that *it's a very powerful experience*, the Ordained Person goes *through the different commandments*, and there is *an opportunity to actually talk with the Ordained Person who is a confidential person*.

#### **4.3.4.2 General confession**

General Confession involves a brief time of general acknowledgement and admission of one's sins before God. It occurs prior to absolution in the Worship Service. It differs from private confession and absolution (as mentioned in 3.4.1 Private confession and absolution) because it is communal confession during the Church Service and no person names sins before anyone but God. It is done in one's inner heart.

1. "When I sin, I separate myself from God. He is Holy, and he opposes sin. The word in the Bible says He opposes sins. That's a very strong word. I want to be in a loving relationship with Him. So, I confess my sins to Him. That's in Psalm 51, v. 2. It's beautiful. It talks about 'I acknowledge my sins and did not hide my iniquity. It says I will confess my transgression to the Lord. And then it says in my Amplified Bible 'and you immediately/you forgive the guilt of my sins'" [L10].

2. "I am human and still a sinner. I reflect on my sins in the Worship Service. Nobody is on another level to anybody else, you know. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Not one of us is righteous in ourselves. It's a great equaliser that we all come together in our confession of our sins" [L1].
3. "Well, I think it's important to be aware of one's own inability to live a perfect life and I'm certainly aware of that when I come to church. What I referred to before, coming before God confessing maybe a particular sin, this could be an attitude. Things like pride, I think is very central attitude. So, there are things like that that I confess" [L12].
4. "Back to the general confession, I would like it to be regularly individualised, so that 'I have sinned' rather than 'we have sinned'. Although yes, we have sinned. We've got that in One John,<sup>4</sup> but I have sinned. And also, we should not always mention the things we do; but the things we fail to do" [L2].

Summary: These respondents confess their sins to God during the General Confession. Some would prefer to use the first person singular form, saying *'I have sinned' rather than 'we have sinned'*.

#### **4.3.4.3 Confessional prayers for forgiveness**

Confessional prayers for forgiveness involve dedicated prayers of confession and absolution, said by both pastors and respondents respectively.

1. "During the confession of sins, a paragraph that says, "I have sinned; I am sorry that I have displeased you, I repent of the evil I have done, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ forgive me and strengthen me in my weakness" [L7].
2. "I like the old Anglican one, 'I have done those things which I ought not to have done, and I have left undone those things which I ought to have done, and there is no health in us'. I really like that because that brings it home. To me, it is not just what I do but mostly what I don't do and speak that is important. It's an old version

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<sup>4</sup> The respondent is referring to 1 John 1:10 (If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us).

from the Book of Common Prayer. It's one of the collects as well. That to me it's one of the very powerful prayers" [L2].

3. "As part of the liturgy as we confess our sins corporately or individually the words of the pastor that says; 'on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you of your sins' and makes a sign of the cross" [L6].

Summary: for all these respondents, the Confessional prayers for forgiveness are meaningful and touched their lives. The sentence such as *I am sorry that I have displeased you, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ forgive me and strengthen me in my weakness*, speak to their being ordinary people. The respondents do not consider these prayers as absolution in theological terms.

#### **4.3.4.4 Absolution**

Absolution involves the words of Jesus that are pronounced by the Ordained Person during the Worship Service. Those words are understood by respondents to make the forgiveness of sins real and genuine. It is one of the roles of the Ordained Person to declare forgiveness of sins following people's confessional prayers. The Ordained Person pronounces the absolution on behalf of Jesus and by His command.

1. "It suits me now than perhaps what it was sometimes ago. Like sometimes ago. In fact, in the Lutheran Church, would better say, 'I forgive you your sins'. Now; 'in the name of Christ and by his command I forgive your sins'. To me, that sits better with me than just a man who was a pastor says, 'I forgive your sins'. That does not sit quite well with me. Jesus and by His command. That suits me okay" [L8].
2. "The Pastor says, 'I pronounce the words of God: your sins are forgiven'. He announces the forgiveness of sins—he is reassuring me that my sins are forgiven" [L6].
3. "Your sins are forgiven. It is serious. You must accept and stop punishing oneself. They are the words of Jesus pronounced by the pastor during the Worship Service" [L4].
4. "The pastor stands and faces the congregation and says, on behalf of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you of your sins if you repent whatever the paragraph goes.

So, he's facing us and making a sign of the cross. I think it is a very powerful moment in the Worship Service. One really has the sense that this is real, this happened. This is genuine" [L12].

5. "So, one would be in the weekly Church Services, where we have our confession of our sin and the pastor does the sign of the cross, and in the name and the authority of Jesus I forgive you your sins" [L1].

Summary: All respondents understand that the Ordained Person pronounces the forgiveness of sins on behalf of Jesus their Lord. This absolution is *serious*, and *sins are forgiven* because of the *words of Jesus pronounced by the Ordained Person* in the Church Service effectively takes away their sins.

#### **4.3.5 Theme 5: Eucharistic Church Service**

This theme encapsulated two categories, the Service of Communion and the Church Service. Jesus is encountered in the eating of the elements of bread and the drinking of wine. This reception is preceded by hymns, prayers and a sermon. Through the Church Service, respondents believe they are reconciled to God.

##### **4.3.5.1 Church service**

Forgiveness of sins is experienced by the respondents through the liturgical celebration in the Church Service. This is a liturgical service without communion, in which lay people worship and their sins are forgiven through devotional prayers. As a person participates in the Church Service, forgiveness of sins is achieved. The respondents enter the Church Service and within the elements of any Church service, respondents experience the forgiveness of their sins.

1. "So, one would be in the weekly Church Services, where we have our confession of our sin and the pastor does the sign of the cross" [L1].
2. "I like formal liturgy because it is clear. You don't have to go to anyone because you have communal confession in the Worship Service" [L9].
3. "The whole Church Service is all about that really" [L3].

Summary: all respondents express their forgiveness of sins in the Church Service. They have confession and the Ordained Person *does the sign of the cross*.

#### **4.3.5.2 Service of Holy Communion**

The bread and wine prayed over by the pastor of the community is received as Holy Communion by respondents. The pastor utters the words “The body of Christ” while holding the bread in front of the respondents and the blood of Christ in similar fashion, to which the receiver responds ‘Amen’.

1. “I get that powerfully from communion, from participating in the Lord’s Supper. When I kneel at the altar for communion and the pastor says—sometimes he is able to say—someone’s name. So, he says ‘(L10), receive the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, receive the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ’. It is the receiving the body and blood for me is when I am experiencing forgiveness” [L10].
2. “The Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ. It forgives. To me it’s symbolic. I grew up in the Uniting Church, I was brought up as a Methodist. I came to the Lutheran Church because I married a Lutheran. And I guess, I still see more of the Methodist ‘sloshing’ into our Church interpretation of the sacrament as symbolic rather than transforming me in their own right. That’s how I interpret it. But to me I feel that sense of forgiveness in the sacrament. It’s receiving the sacrament. It’s more the gesture than the word. It is going through that experience. That gives me that feeling. Not the words. It’s receiving the sacrament. It’s actually receiving the bread and the wine” [L8].
3. “I’m feeling totally cleansed. Yes, at the moment of communion. When I have Holy Communion. They have an introduction in the service during the communion in which our minister grants us forgiveness. I always focus when the minister says something, but communion is the strongest. That’s meaningful to me” [L9].
4. “I go to church and receive God’s grace through communion. We receive God’s grace through the sacraments which is Holy Communion and baptism, and the Word. When I receive the body and blood, that’s when I experience forgiveness. In the Lutheran tradition you go and receive God’s grace through the Communion as God reaches out to you” [12].

Summary: for these respondents, the forgiveness of sin is achieved *powerfully from communion, from participating in the Lord’s Supper*. They *feel cleansed*. This takes place at

*the moment of communion*. They do listen to the Ordained Person, but their experience of forgiveness through communion is the strongest.

#### **4.3.5.3 Section summary: the theme of the Eucharistic service**

For the respondents, participation in the Eucharistic Church Service is a guarantee of forgiveness of sins.

#### **4.3.6 Summary of the Lutheran Church respondents**

The distinctive characteristic of God's forgiveness of sins among Lutheran respondents is twofold. As respondents receive Holy Communion and hear the word of Jesus their sins are forgiven, and this is pronounced by the Ordained Person in the context of the Worship Service. Faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus is the common nexus for respondents that guarantee one's forgiveness of sins. This is possible both in Church at prayer and outside of the Church. The following themes were found: God, faith, the agent of forgiveness, confession and absolution, and the Eucharistic Church Service.

The theme of God shows that the Triune God is the origin of all forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins is validated through the death of Jesus Christ and continued to be relevant in their lives through the Holy Spirit. Six categories were identified under the theme of God, namely God's forgiveness, Signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, assurance of forgiveness and unmediated summed God's forgiveness of sins in words such as "that's okay, stop feeling worthless, stop punishing yourself, and you are forgiven". The belief that empowers every ordinary person to offer forgiveness, to seek for forgiveness and believe it and to practise it is what Jesus asks of them in this passage. The respondents connect this with not actively sinning and also repenting, lest forgiveness be withheld. The three categories under faith were: belief in God's forgiveness, Gratitude to God, and sermons which deepen the theme of faith. The categories under confession and absolution were: agents of confession, confession and absolution, and Eucharistic communion extend the relation of respondents to the broad human family of forgiveness.

#### **4.4 Twelve respondents from the Anglican Church**



I identified six themes and twenty-three categories across all the respondents from the Anglican Church. The six themes were God, Faith, Agent of forgiveness, Confession and Absolution, the Eucharistic Church Service, and anointing blessings. Below, the themes and categories are listed using some of the respondents' quotations.

#### **4.4.1 Theme 1: God**

Forgiveness of sins came from God through the death of Jesus Christ and continued to be relevant today through the Holy Spirit. This theme listed six categories as narrated below. God was the forgiver and origin of all divine forgiveness of sins. Although divine forgiveness of sins was not conditional, the respondents believed that some repentance needed to be shown in order for one to obtain divine forgiveness of sins. The sign of the Cross remains for respondents the evidence of the love and mercy of God.

##### **4.4.1.1 God's forgiveness**

All respondents insisted that forgiveness came from God. Sometimes they used the name Jesus. At other times they named the Holy Spirit when speaking of God. These terms seemed to be significant to respondents because they reflected the way respondents related to God.

1. "As I say, God forgives me in my inner heart. That is the incarnate God within me as I understand it. I think I have got a strong sense that I am in God and God is in me; that sense of reciprocity! I do not see there is a line where God ends there, and I begin here" [A1].
2. "I mean that is the difference between me saying 'oh! I forgive you Charles'. That is another person saying it. But when Jesus forgives our sins, there is that much deeper spirit in there because of His holiness. It is Jesus. Something different than just a person saying it. But the Spirit is something much deeper and transforming. That means they have now become close. They take Jesus with them. It is Jesus forgiving the sins through them, in a way. And I think for us when we have our sins forgiven by Jesus, it is that Spirit coming to us. That deeper feeling" [A9].
3. "Only God can forgive my sins. He is not embodied in anyone. The community is not responsible for my sins. The mission of the Church is to bring people to God for

forgiveness, but it cannot forgive. The mission of God is stopped with the disciples. Once they are dead that is it; that's the end" [A11].

4. "The Holy Spirit is the mechanism by which I'm really physically touched by God. I think of the Holy Spirit as a conduit, as a channel. To me it means to be touched by God –be touched by the Holy Spirit. I see it as the hand of God, the touch of God, the flow of God's love and forgiveness. It's a channel. That's how I see it" [A2].

Summary: for these respondents only God can forgive sins and that forgiveness is communicated through *the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is the *incarnate God* within the respondents, but also *a conduit and a channel* whereby they are really physically touched by God. This is also understood as the presence of Jesus in others and in oneself.

#### **4.4.1.2 Signs of forgiveness**

This category represents words, images or gestures that are signs of God's forgiveness in the life and experience of respondents.

1. "What I was looking at is when Jesus is crucified on the cross, he was crucified to save everybody and to forgive everyone's sins" [A12].
2. "But I think there is something really communal. Like that when there is a priest or whoever is officiating. We forgive each other and cross ourselves, in a communal way we make a sign of the cross. A sign of the cross. I remember a friend of mine said to me 'why do you do that? Bless oneself with a sign of the cross? But you are not a Catholic.' I did not know that Catholics have monopoly on this. It just feels to me like it goes in when I do that. There is a sense of doing something corporate. Doing something like that. I know I am forgiven or pardoned. Sharing the peace is another sign, sometimes it is a sharing of a look, it is that invisible understanding" [A1].
3. "On the Cross Jesus says, 'Father forgive them'. The last words: 'my God why have you forsaken me?—it is finished—into your hand I commend my spirit' and died—to me this is mystery and the embodiment or the pointing toward my faith. It enables me to live with the sins stuck to me, although in a sense they are forgiven but the reality of them, they are there and I am still living with them" [A5].

4. “When the priest stands up there and signs the sign of the cross and says your sins are forgiven. That tells me that through the priest, Jesus forgives me anything that I did wrong. So, it is the sign of the Cross which is important” [A6].

Summary: The signs of forgiveness are focused on Christ’s death. They include seeing Christ on the cross, individuals making the sign of the cross as a communal act, hearing the words of Jesus on the cross and seeing the priest make the sign of the cross and pronounce the forgiveness of sins.

#### **4.4.1.3 A plea for forgiveness**

A plea for forgiveness is a category that expresses individual or communal request for God’s forgiveness.

1. “But here in our Church, we just go as a group to our Worship Service and ask for forgiveness” [A6].
2. “You know I make a mess. It’s like just help me God. Like St Paul who says when I want to do good, I find myself doing the wrong thing. You personally have to ask for it” [A7].
3. “You can have a conversation with God and know if you have faith that as soon as you have said to God or have that conversation and say look, I’ve done these things and they are not so good. You know that you have been forgiven. [...]. You personally have to ask for it and the priest when he does it on Sunday does it in a general form. But it’s up to you to say to God; ‘eh, listen here, I haven’t been good. What can you do about it?’” [A9].
4. “The traditional liturgy on a Sunday is lovely in many ways. It is poetic. It’s got a rhythm about it. There is a something about doing something corporate. Doing something like that. I know I am forgiven or pardoned. It has a good purpose of coming together to front up with all the things we do not get right as individuals, as a community, as a globe. And to seek to do better” [A1].

Summary: all these respondents expressed their need for corporate forgiveness of sins, as well as individual. Their willingness to say to God *you know I make a mess* is necessary for the liturgical expression to be effective.

#### **4.4.1.4 Conditional forgiveness**

Conditional forgiveness involved a promise for change or a commitment to improve one's life. This also included a willingness to repent and truly to be sorry for the sins committed. One is forgiven when one commits to not sin again. This shows to God that he / she is determined to repent.

1. "And it has to be based not in a desire for a good after-life, but an acceptance that Christ's sacrifice requires us to mend our sinful life to the best of our ability" [A11].
2. "I am generally sorry for my sins and want to change. My belief is that it's always there. Forgiveness is always there. If you repent in your heart, you are forgiven. I like that. This is one of the things that drew me to change from the Catholic Church to the Anglican Church [A2].
3. "If I regret that it happened, in that sense I am sorry, I can see that God will say something like 'alright, then we will forget about it'" [A5].
4. "It is not as simple as coming up and saying your sins are forgiven. It implies some actions. There is some sort of action involved in that forgiveness of sins. I do not know exactly what it is. This is probably the first time I've ever thought a lot about it, but I think that in having that second bit attached to it, qualifies the first bit. Forgiveness is not just unconditional" [A10].
5. "You personally have to ask for it" [A7].

Summary: all these respondents believe that God's forgiveness is granted if one says *sorry* and one's repentance should not be *a desire for a good after-life* but based on the sacrifice of Christ that *requires* respondents *to mend* their *sinful life* to the *best of their ability*.

#### **4.4.1.5 Experiences of forgiveness**

Respondents are aware of God's forgiveness of their sins in their lives either through a personal conviction or in conversation with others.

1. "The things that have happened in my life and the choices that I've made have led to horrendous situations, and over and over again I've known that I am forgiven" [A7].

2. "Because forgiveness is a funny word, we don't go around using that word. I think we choose to move on. Today, we say; look, I've moved on, don't think about it anymore. I move on" [A 8].
3. "Not in a church but on a ship, I was assured of God's power, protection or forgiveness. Whatever you call it. When I was returning from England to Australia on a ship. The sea was very rough between Cape Town and Fremantle and it was quite frightening. I was really frightened and think that I was not going to return home. I went up as far as I could and prayed desperately. I said, 'please God, stop this season and let me get home quickly'. An amazing feeling of peace came over me. The next morning was all calm and that brought me much closer to Jesus. That is the main thing that I can think of" [A6].

Summary: the respondents described their experience of forgiveness in various ways, including *I've known that I am forgiven, I don't think about it anymore and An amazing feeling of peace came over me*. The respondents sought to name experiences that were surprising and profound to them.

#### **4.4.1.6 Unmediated forgiveness**

The word “unmediated” in this context means one’s ability to deal with self-forgiveness of sins. There is no intermediary person between self and God, not even Jesus, because the person speaks directly to God. This is an inner conversation between God and the respondents.

1. “As I say, that is in my inner heart. That is the incarnate God within me as I understand it. The God who forgives in me. The God I know and to whom I go. I think I have got a strong sense of ... Charles, a sense of me in God and God in me; that sense of reciprocity! I do not see there is a line where God ends there, and I begin here!” [A1].
2. “Because my sins are mine and I cannot talk to another person about them, I’m in communion with God, not with the priest. The mission of the church is to bring people to God for forgiveness but cannot forgive. The mission of God is stopped with the disciples. Once they are dead that is it” [A11].
3. “You can have a conversation with God and you know that you have been forgiven” [A9].
4. “I have a direct relationship with God” [A2].
5. “I don’t go to anyone. Why? I suppose I’m sure there is a meaning in God forgiving my sins. Only God can forgive my sins as such” [A5].

Summary: all these respondents believe in unmediated *conversation with God*, not Jesus nor the Church. *Only God can forgive my sins as such*. The God who forgives their sins is *the incarnate God within them*.

#### **4.4.1.7 Section summary: the theme of God**

For the Anglican Church respondents, God is the source of forgiveness of sins. All respondents say that forgiveness of sins comes from God. This theme combines six categories, namely God’s forgiveness, signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, assurance of forgiveness, no intermediary role, and unmediated. The forgiveness of sins is understood as available to respondents; no intermediary role between God and the respondents is necessary. Forgiveness of sins has conditions, one

must ask for it and obtain it through words of assurance or signs of forgiveness. While an intermediary is not required, forgiveness required personal endeavour by these respondents. All these respondents valued corporate liturgical forgiveness of sins, as well as individual forgiveness of sins.

#### **4.4.2 Theme 2: Faith**

Respondents reflected on faith in relation to their experience of God's forgiveness of their sins. Four categories emerged, namely belief in God's forgiveness, God's love, Prayers, and Sermons.

##### **4.4.2.1 Belief in God's forgiveness**

This category refers to the respondents' appreciation and belief in a gracious God whose grace is abundant and forgives every sin.

1. "Forgiveness of sins comes from faith. It is my faith that delivers forgiveness. Maybe the priest is a conduit, but I do believe it comes from God. When I open my heart and pray, that is asking for forgiveness, it does come. So, if that condition of me agreeing in my heart and listening is there, I believe that forgiveness is granted. It's faith and listening. So, opening myself up to the possibility. But it my faith that delivers the forgiveness, I guess" [A2].
2. "We found principles that we believe make our life worth living to the best of our ability. And I believe that for me, my God is in the best efforts I make. I think there is a deep understanding in whatever that universal spirit is, that when I fail, or when I do wrong, it can be transformed. I can do, and God will enable me to rectify that." [A8].
3. "God's grace blows me away. Over and over again I am forgiven. It is I who am the stumbling block because I cannot forgive myself. I feel the patience and the love of God's forgiveness" [A7].
4. "Yeah, I think the grace of God is not just one thing. The grace of God could be the understanding of the other. With that sense of saying you know, 'Oh God, look I have done this'. I think it is that acknowledgement of being truly sorry" [A1].

Summary: for these respondents, a belief in God was the source of forgiveness. Their faith in God who is gracious enabled them to accept the forgiveness of all their sins.

#### **4.4.2.2 God's love**

In this category, God's love was the reason for forgiveness according to the respondents. The love of God is expressed by the respondents in forgiveness, breathing, and the life that comes out of death.

1. "In a sense breathe in, we breathe in the Holy Spirit. And in breathing in that Spirit, therefore breathing the essence of what Jesus is. And the essence of Jesus is about love and forgiveness" [A8].
2. "I feel like I am forgiven [...] I am sad a bit in a way because I have a really loving, close relationship with my mum. A bit like that, you know, somebody who you know loves you. You might be scared to tell them something, but you are so confident in their love for you. Even if they were cross with you, you'd feel like they still love you. And I think that is what I feel about Jesus or God. I think that God's love is wide enough to forgive my sins" [A9].
3. "But to know that you are loved regardless is profound. I think it is your responsibility to not hide things from yourself. You can hide things from other people. That is easy. You can trick yourself too. We all do it sometimes. But faith is difficult. That is God in another. That is sacred. There is a sense of love and feeling of saying now you are forgiven" [A1].
4. "I still believe that there is a redeeming action of Christ. Life comes out of death" [A6].

Summary: For these respondents, God's love was understood in relation to Jesus. There was a sense of relief, most clearly seen in respondent A1, as being forgiven deepened their sense of being loved in full knowledge of their imperfection.

#### **4.4.2.3 Prayers and hymns**

Prayers, both individual and communal, are perceived as being central to forge a relationship with God and to ask for forgiveness of sins. In the same vein hymns allow



respondents *to understand and see the action of God forgiving sins and renewing the world.*

When one sins, one needs to pray and ask God for forgiveness.

1. "I think when you realise that you have done something wrong; you know straight away that you need to pray and ask God to forgive you. I don't think that I must kneel and ask for forgiveness immediately after I have sinned. It takes a day or two. It comes later that you realise that you may have said something that might have hurt somebody or have done something wrong and pray about it. When I do pray which is not often, I start by saying to God that I am sorry for what I have done. I thank him and then I ask for anything. Maybe ask what I want" [A6].
2. "I say my prayers every day at different times. Often while driving. I do not have a set time and it will happen as it occurs to me. Driving is the only time in my busy life that I am by myself. But it can be any time. Sometimes it's when interacting with somebody. For me prayer is on the go. In the Church Service, there are certain prayers that we say as a group, we worshippers ask forgiveness. And we use those words, 'forgive us our sins'. We pray as a group. The Lord's Prayer is one example. Apart from particular prayers, I think we do more of thinking about, let's do better in the future. We acknowledge and talk about it through the sermons or praise or discussion. We talk about what we are not doing right. The forgiveness part hasn't been our focus" [A2].
3. "I guess as community, that is marked during the intercessions. We as a community—not as a Christian community but the wider Australian community or global community—ask that we can act with intelligence, respect and compassion to people who need that help and acknowledging that it could be any one of us. So, I guess in that way, yeah". [A1].
4. "Sinning encourages me to pray in the sense that I read, I think, I meditate – a similar kind of psychological preoccupation to try to understand and see the action of God forgiving sins and renewing the world" [A5].

Summary: the respondents named instances of individual prayer at different times, prayed as the opportunity arose. They also acknowledged the importance of communal prayer, such as praying the Lord's Prayer in the Church Service.

#### **4.4.2.4 Sermons and hymns**

The category of sermons includes hymns and passages that speak of forgiveness to respondents. The forgiveness of sins in this category happens during or after listening to a sermon or during or after listening to the words of a hymn that touches their lives. The sermons are not limited to an explanation of a biblical passage by the Ordained Person but must relate to respondents' lives.

1. "In a particular service, there are many sermons that help me to understand my faith and part of that is understanding God's forgiveness and a whole range of other aspects of our faith" [A11].
2. "To be honest, it's often during the sermon time that I experienced that rather than that point in the service where we talk about being forgiven of sins. It depends. In a sense and it will depend. Some weeks I do not hear anything in the words of the priests that causes me to think along those lines, sometimes I do. Sometimes it is in the sermon" [A2].
3. "The hymns mean more to me. The ritual becomes meaningless" [A8].

Summary: the respondents can experience sermons as a means of growing in faith and becoming more aware of their personal relation with God who forgives them. This is not always the case. For one this is often true, whereas for another it is not frequent. Similarly, the hymns can be a means of encounter with God who forgives.

#### **4.4.3 Theme 3: Agents of Forgiveness**

The theme of Agent of forgiveness consists of three categories; the Ordained Person, all Christians and people in the community. The Ordained Person is the Church representative based on the recognised ministry categories of the Church. All Christians is understood as those called to forgive based on the Holy Spirit received at baptism. All people refers to anyone has been offended and is in a position to forgive.

##### **4.4.3.1 Ordained person**

The Ordained Person in the congregation is the authoritative figure of the Church. He or she is the priest of the Church and can forgive sins in a recognised sense.

1. "If I have to go to anybody, I will go to the priest, the dean"<sup>5</sup> [A12].
2. "All I know since I was tiny it was always the minister [priest] who represented Jesus Christ and only he could offer confession or administer communion" [A6].
3. "The priest can absolve you of your sins" [A9].
4. "Maybe the priest is a conduit, but I do believe it comes from God" [A2].
5. "We have deacons who are partly trained ministers, we can talk to them. We have chaplains who visit the hospitals. People who are theologically trained and have a licence to preach or work in the church" [A8].

Summary: four respondents in this category mention the priest can absolve a person's sins ([A2], [A6], [A9], and [A12]). But [A2] believes forgiveness comes from God whereas the priest might be a conduit. One respondent ([A8]) says people who are theologically trained; deacons who are partly trained ministers and chaplains who visit hospitals.

#### **4.4.3.2 All Christians**

The Holy Spirit received at baptism is a key factor for all Christians to forgive sins against them. The Holy Spirit is understood as passed on from one to another.

1. "I think we will say the whole community. But there is a sense of like (sic) from the Archbishop to the Dean. There is a laying on of hands where there has been a traditional transference of the Spirit in a sense through the ages by touch. But also, by role, and ordination. But it's not limited to the priests, because we all have been baptised. And we all have the laying on of hands in a sense. So, there is this continuity for a couple of thousands of years. There is a touch, a continuity. If we have baptism, we will be confirmed" [A8].
2. "It is all of us. It is everyone's responsibility, not just the chosen few. This is one of the problems that we do not understand the responsibility we've been given. There are ministers who worship with us in the church, lay people and pastoral care people as well" [A9].

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<sup>5</sup> The dean is the parish priest of the Cathedral in lieu of the Archbishop. The Dean is the most senior priest in the Cathedral responsible for the administration of the Cathedral while assisting the Archbishop. He/she oversees the liturgical duties, supervises priests who are on the Cathedral staff, and is responsible for the daily activities of the Cathedral which is the seat of the Archbishop.

Summary: for these respondents it is a responsibility of every baptised person to forgive sins. This is nevertheless understood as being in the context of a continuous transference of the Spirit by touch from baptism to confirmation and ordination to consecration of an archbishop.

#### **4.4.3.3 People in the community**

People in all walks of life can forgive sins which affect them. One is able to forgive sins when s/he has been offended. This category includes people beyond the Christian community.

1. “Yes, if we are all disciples. There are people out in the community who aren’t churchgoers who are quite capable of forgiving sins of other people. So, where we begin and end on that one, I don’t know” [A8].
2. “It can be anyone. It depends on the person, wisdom, compassion, and maturity. It all depends on their hearts and wisdom. It is not something that comes with the role, I do not think. I think it depends on anyone’s maturity. And by that I do not mean age, because maturity of kindness can be found in very young people and not found in very old people. I do not think it is a monopoly of the Ordained Person being able to understand and forgive sins of another or themselves any more than a compassionate spiritually aware and engaged, mature human being who is not ordained” [A1].
3. “I guess in a way I probably do go to someone. Because there are issues you talk with friends about over a cup of coffee. A problem shared is a problem halved. And the more serious or sensitive the issue, the wiser and more selective the counsel I would seek. And that should be a friend. It would be the friendship first or just I would value their opinion or insight, and most of all their honesty” [A1].
4. “We do not have a formal forgiveness but if something troubles me I will go to the priest. However, they are many people to see” [A7].

Summary: All these respondents understand that every person can forgive sins. *It is not a monopoly of the Ordained Person.* There is some uncertainty as to how this fits with Christian theology [A8].

#### **4.4.3.4 Section summary: the theme of the agent of forgiveness**

The Ordained Person (priest), a Christian or indeed anyone can be an agent of forgiveness according to these respondents.

#### **4.4.4 Theme 4: Confession and Absolution**

Confession and absolution complement each other. The offer and receipt of divine forgiveness of sins is made in three ways: Private confession, General Confession and Confessional prayers for forgiveness. Private confession is outside the context of the Worship Service. Within the Service, there is the opportunity to confess one's individual sins silently before God in General Confession. There may also be communal confessional prayers, asking for God's forgiveness. The theme combined five categories namely, private confession and absolution, confession, acknowledgement of sins, confessional prayers for forgiveness, and absolution. The theme combined five categories, namely private confession and absolution, confession, acknowledgement of sins, confessional prayer for forgiveness, and absolution.

##### **4.4.4.1 Private confession**

Private confession happened when people share their weaknesses. This is not necessary in the Church but could happen in small group or one on one conversation.

1. "I have been brought up in the Anglican Church; they teach me that if I say that I am sorry for doing something wrong or for saying the wrong thing and through confessing that Jesus will forgive me. I made appointment with the priest 18 months ago. It was rewarding because I shared my weaknesses" [A6].

##### **4.4.4.2 Confession**

Confession is a brief time of general acknowledgement and admission of one's sins in the Worship Service.

1. "Each time we worship here and part of the service including the confession so, that through the priest, we are forgiven of our sins. I know that the other churches have personal confession. They go to the priest and asked for forgiveness, but we do it as a congregation together in a service" [A6].

2. "The Holy Spirit has given the priest the power to speak for Him and forgive us through the confession. The priest says you are forgiven. Could be any of the three priests in this particular church who can do that" [A12].
3. "Certainly, that forgiveness of or the rite of forgiveness on Sunday Service. I really acknowledge that. I think is a point of reckoning. I think it is a moment of vulnerability if you are truly open to that and truly expose yourself; you are truly invited to do in that liturgy. I think that vulnerability is rewarded with a great sense of compassion in return" [A1].
4. "I like formal liturgy because it is clear. You don't have to go to anyone because you have communal confession. So, you know you're at a special place and a special time. Going to church is not just going to church" [A9].

Summary: for these respondents, confession is *a special time. A moment of vulnerability in the Worship service when the priest says you are forgiven.*

#### **4.4.4.3 General acknowledgement of sins**

The respondents humbly accept their failures with regret and pray for forgiveness.

1. "But when you really have a quiet moment and own up. You know whether you had a good intention or not. Or you were still a little bit mean there, a little bit jealous or a little bit impatient or oh yeah probably eh yeah, they did get under my skin. I probably could have just given them the time of day. But you know it. Maybe you were tired, okay! Acknowledging that you did not mean to do it, but you did it. Just be sorry about it but do not beat yourself up" [A1].
2. "For daily faults or miscellaneous or trivial things, I tell lies, I am unkind to people, what else do I do, I make rude gestures, that I still do very deliberately and usually I apologised and say I am sorry, and life goes on. They are ritual recitations of guilt; 'we have sinned against you and we have done what we should not do, we are sorry and will not do it again' [A5].
3. "Because acknowledging that we are the flip side of them, we are the same, we are all sinners, none of us is perfect. Sin as I understand it is deeply at spiritual level; a level where our existence is actually acknowledged. To me it's not living as well –

as fully – as we can. At the same time, this is a difficult thing, not living in a way that allows others to be similarly freed up to live fully. That is kind of easy to say but there is a heck of a lot of responsibility in that. The way we vote; the way we shop; the way we regard marginalised people in our society [A1].

Summary: all respondents in this category acknowledge the need *to have a quiet moment and own up* to their sins, *say sorry*, *to apologise*, and *not beat oneself up*.

#### **4.4.4.4 Confessional prayers for forgiveness**

Confessional prayers for forgiveness include dedicated prayers of confession and absolution said by both the priest and respondents, respectively.

1. “A prayer on Sunday; the prayer of preparation in the Anglican service p. 120: “Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thoughts, words, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not love our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord”. I get like a vision when I say this prayer. God shows me the things I have done wrong in the week. This prayer goes straight to my heart” [A7].
2. “That is the lovely part in the early part of our liturgy ... ‘Almighty God to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secret are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen’. Now what a credible exposure” [A1].
3. “And in the prayer book, I mean in the evening prayer, it talks about ‘Father I’ve sinned against you in thought, word, and deed’” [A9].
4. “In the Church service, we pray as a group. The Lord's Prayer is one example; we use those words, ‘forgive us our sins’. Apart from particular prayers that we use in our worship, I think we do more thinking about let's do better in the future. So, we acknowledge and talk about it in the sermons or our prayers or discussions” [A2].

Summary: all respondents pray to God for forgiveness of sins through confessional prayers. They are moved by the prayers and cite such prayers as the prayer of preparation and the

prayer of confession as examples of the way the liturgy draws us into God's presence via naming our need for cleansing and forgiveness.

#### **4.4.4.5 Absolution**

Absolution is the forgiveness of sins that is obtained in prayer. It can be either personal or communal.

1. "But I could receive God's absolution at home through prayer" [A11].
2. "The absolution is each week. But I don't come for that – it happens just that it's within the service. And it's always nice to know that the absolution is in participating in the service" [A8].
3. "I know that every Sunday [X]<sup>6</sup> takes the service and will give the absolution. But I think absolution is given on the understanding that you don't walk out and just think, I'm fine now" [A 8].

Summary: for respondents, the fact that one participates in the Sunday worship, means that one is absolved of one's sins. It is also noteworthy that one respondent (A11) experienced absolution by praying at home.

#### **4.4.4.6 Section summary: the theme of confession and absolution**

The respondents acknowledge their sins before God and the absolution is generally received from the Ordained Person, though it may be experienced at home through prayer.

#### **4.4.5 Theme 5: Eucharistic Church Service**

This theme encapsulated two categories, namely the Church Service as a whole, and specifically the Service of Holy Communion. Jesus offers himself in the eating of bread and the drinking of wine. This reception is preceded by hymns, prayers, reading of biblical passages, and the sermon. Through the Church Service and through Holy Communion, respondents are reconciled to God.

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<sup>6</sup> I have replaced the name with X to protect the identity of respondents.



#### **4.4.5.1 Church service**

Respondents experienced forgiveness of sins in the Church Service. Some respondents went to the early Church service which used the Traditional Book of Common Prayer of 1662 (BCP), while others went to the Church Service which used A Prayer Book for Australia (1995). The Church Service is the main liturgy in which lay people worship and experience their sins as being forgiven through communal and personal prayers.

1. “The entire service makes me feel that I’ve intentionally spent time in the presence of God. And I have as a part of that been forgiven for the things I’ve got wrong” [A11].
2. “I have a 14-year-old son who is a teenager—he is going through development, what I believe is all type of issues. He comes with us to church every Sunday, but there was a period about six months ago that he did not come. He was doing the teenage things. But each time we come to that part of forgiveness in the service, I’d point it out to him and tell him what it’s about and the message I’m trying to give him is no matter what happens—and teenagers do a lot of silly things—the message is that in coming to the service, you are forgiven. You can start with fresh eyes going forward” [A2].
3. “I like the part in the Anglican service each week when I attend Sunday Service where I am forgiven of my sins. My sins, whatever they are. I used to worship in the Catholic faith. There in the Catholic service you need to go to confession before you have the privilege of receiving communion or all the other things. In the Anglican Church it is like turned around—you are forgiven. If you repent in your heart, you are forgiven” [A2].

Summary: In this category, respondents understand that they *are forgiven in coming to the Service* and whenever one *repents in the heart*.

#### **4.4.5.2 Service of Holy Communion**

The bread and wine prayed over by the Ordained Person is received as Holy Communion by the respondents. The Ordained Person utters the words “the Body of Christ” while holding the bread and “the blood of Christ” while holding the cup in front of the respondents, to which the communicants respond “Amen”.

1. "I think when you take communion which you say is the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ, which the priest shares. So, you know you're at a special place and a special time" [A 9].
2. "No, I do not go to anyone. My forgiveness is when I come to communion. The absolution is in participating in the service" [A8].

Summary: the reception of the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ is experienced as forgiving sins.

#### **4.4.6 Theme 6: Anointing and Blessing**

The Anointing rite comprises three categories: the anointing, the healing rite, and the blessing. This is a ceremony that brings blessings, healing, and forgiveness of sins, not necessarily during the Church Service. Sacred oil is used to anoint the respondents and prayers are said. Respondents who are sick or ill experienced a spiritual healing by the improvement of their health. There is the possibility that they are cured.

##### **4.4.6.1 Anointing**

Anointing brings peace and reinforces faith in God. It is applied to the one who is sick in the context of prayer. Respondents are spiritually rewarded and they treasured that moment as a very special occasion in their lives.

1. "I had a breast cancer three years ago and the priest offered to anoint me before the operation. That brought a lot of peace" [A6].
2. "I felt much more spiritual closeness. There was a time when I felt there was an openness to the Spirit. It was a first step of that ladder. There was lovely feeling of closeness. It was when I went up for the healing. It was at that stage of the healing and the anointing was very special" [A10].
3. "And I think, once when I was very ill, I was anointed and that is a very special moment. It's a very special moment that reinforces faith. We don't often do it. It is very rewarding and special" [A8].
4. "Yes, about six years ago. My brother was in trouble and I needed somebody to talk to. That person was comforting and helped a lot. He was not a minister but a

pastoral care person. He did not anoint my brother but just said some prayers. In our Church, only the priest anoints” [A2].

Summary: for these respondents, forgiveness is experienced in more spiritual closeness and openness to the Spirit; anointing is a moment that reinforces faith.

#### **4.4.6.2 Healing rite**

The healing rite is the ritual dedicated to healing the respondents from spiritual or physical illness.

1. “Certainly, I had wonderful caring support from clergy at my mother’s bedside when she was near death. It was fantastic, wonderful support, very special, beyond just support. It was something more than that. When the priest anointed my mother and all of us in the room, that I can only describe as that sort of – I guess – real communion, that acknowledgement of God in each other and our mother in the bed. It was extremely powerful, extremely supportive” [A1].
2. “Yes! I made appointment with the priest 18 months ago. It was rewarding because I shared my weaknesses” [A7].
3. “Lately, I was at a service of healing and was anointed. It was a good feeling. Nothing transcendental. But having a special healing with the priest. It was a sort of moment to enable the Spirit to come. A sort of being forgiven” [A9].

Summary: for these respondents, a service of healing, either communal or private, led to a sense of peace, which included forgiveness of sins.

#### **4.4.6.3 Blessing**

Blessing alludes to both the strength and healing that respondents received when they are struggling, facing difficulties, and sorting out their identity in life. The physical healing is the result of divine blessing.

1. “But I would say that it was actually when I came back to the church in my late 20s having not been anywhere for ten years at least. That was my real confirmation. That was my real baptism and confirmation. That is when I took responsibility for the blessings of this life. For the responsibility and the challenge of working out

who? What? Where? Is this thing I call God in my life? I could not take the Sunday school version of God because I said, I have to mature” [A1].

2. “Yes, I did a long ago. I had the pain of guilt and went to see a priest for a blessing. Since that time no, I have not needed absolution from sins” [A5].
3. “I was struggling last year and asked (priest X) and his wife came to bless my home and say prayers. It was really special” [A7].
4. “When my husband divorced me six weeks after we got married. It was difficult. I needed a priest. He came, we talked, and he blessed me. It was not easy. But his blessing gave me peace” [A3].

Summary: for these respondents, forgiveness is a blessing expressed in sentences such as *it was actually when I came back to the church, it was really special, and his blessing gave me peace.*

#### **4.4.6.4 Section summary: the theme of anointing and blessing**

Through the theme of anointing and blessing, the respondents experience forgiveness in the form of special peace, healing, and blessings.

#### **4.4.7 Summary of the Anglican Church respondents**

Central to God’s forgiveness of sins among the Anglican respondents are six themes, namely: God, Faith, Agent of forgiveness, Confession and Absolution, the Eucharistic Church Service, and Anointing and Blessing. The distinctive understanding of God’s forgiveness of sins among the Anglican respondents is threefold; attending Sunday Service, receiving Holy Communion, and feeling peace through receiving anointing and being blessed. The liturgical form is significant, with the familiar, sacred words. The role of the priest is also significant, invested with power to pronounce forgiveness of sin. While respondents acknowledge the power of the priest to forgive sins, they also acknowledge that the Holy Spirit enables everyone to forgive sins.

For all respondents from the Anglican Church, God is the author of forgiveness of sins. This is achieved both in Church and outside of Church through human agency. God’s forgiveness is known in Jesus Christ, particularly through the cross. The Holy Spirit becomes a conduit

or a channel of forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit gives the continuity of God's forgiveness through the laying on of hands. This fact does not prevent non-Christians forgiving sins.

#### **4.5 Twelve respondents from the Roman Catholic Church**

Among Roman Catholic respondents, I identified five themes as follows: God, faith, Agent of forgiveness, Confession and absolution, and Anointing and Blessing. Each theme and category relate to each other. Below are respondents' quotations to amplify the theme.

##### **4.5.1 Theme 1: God**

The forgiveness of God combined five categories namely, God's forgiveness, signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, and unmediated. Although divine forgiveness seemed conditional on the respondents' faith, this fact did not stop them from praying, seeking for forgiveness and relying on ones' relationship with God. The five categories were related to each other. Respondents understood themselves to have been forgiven in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

##### **4.5.1.1 God's forgiveness**

Respondents understood that God forgives their sins through the Ordained Person. The Trinitarian formulae—God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is important and seems to function as a means of assurance of divine forgiveness of sins.

1. "And it's a forgiveness in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It's in the name of the Trinity. So, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of great power which is coming from the Father through the Son. It must be a great Spirit of love because once again I cannot see that forgiveness can exist without love" [RC8].
2. "Somehow, it's the Holy Spirit who forgives because the absolution is in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. And the priest says through the Spirit of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I absolve you. So, the priest is the medium and the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is the power that enables sins to be forgiven. It goes all through to the New Testament" [RC3].
3. "The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity. He is God. He was given to the disciples to guide them, fortify them and preach the Gospel and forgive sins in

the community. They also received the gift of wisdom, understanding and were capable of performing deeds which they were not capable of performing previously. It is the Spirit of God who forgives sins in the Catholic Church” [RC7].

4. “I suppose the Holy Spirit is God not in physical form. Something Jesus gives to the Church. Something to live with the Church. It’s like the way God breathed into Adam, giving life. It’s quite tricky. We have just to believe that it’s God who forgives our sins when the priest says; “Your sins are forgiven. I absolve you in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” [RC11].

Summary: God’s forgiveness of sins is a forgiveness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

#### **4.5.1.2 Signs of forgiveness**

Respondents identify the sign of the cross within the context of the sacrament as a real sign of God’s forgiveness because of the death of Jesus.

1. “As I said again from my experience as a Catholic going to confession, I think: I haven’t considered that before. Now that you ask me the question, I feel quite strongly when the priest makes the sign of the cross in the time of absolution, to me that would be a very important sign” [RC8].
2. “It’s when the priest grants us absolution and makes a sign of the cross on us and grants us forgiveness” [RC4].
3. “When the priest makes the sign of the cross and says that “I absolve you of your sins” [RC7].

Summary: forgiveness of sins happens when the priest says the words, “I absolve you of your sins” and makes the sign of the cross.

#### **4.5.1.3 A plea for forgiveness**

A plea for forgiveness involves a request for forgiveness of sins. This might be in a group or individually. The congregation prays for forgiveness and asks God to forgive them of their sins through the communal confession. The individual also prays for forgiveness and asks God to forgive them of their sins. This can happen publically or privately.

1. "Yes, a very moving experience in the Cathedral... And there were some controversies and bad things about their behaviours. When the last priest left, they had Mass and ceremony and the last one prostrates himself before the altar and asks everybody for forgiveness for any sins, crimes, might have been committed in the past by any member of his Order. And that was just a strong feeling. Everybody just said wow. That was fantastic. Personally, he asks for forgiveness for anything wrong while he was there" [RC6].
2. "But I can go into an empty Church and pray to God, ask for forgiveness and I will receive forgiveness" [RC12].
3. "And I suspect, I think, I believe, that if I come truly and say sorry and come to God to ask for forgiveness, then I would be forgiven" [RC2].
4. "Yes, at Mass we say the *confiteo* which is the prayer to say that we have sinned and asked for forgiveness" [RC7].

Summary: While this references forgiveness, it is received in very different ways. It can be offered (RC6), experienced in an empty church (RC12) or during Mass (RC7). There is no one way, or one ritual, by which respondents experience forgiveness.

#### **4.5.1.4 Conditional forgiveness**

The respondents are expected to be sorry, repentant, and commit to not sin again for their sins to be forgiven by God.

1. "I believe that providing I really look at what I've done deeply, examine it and then resolve, I will do the absolute best not to do that again, they would be forgiven. Now I understand that as human beings we fall again and again. But providing the resolution is to try to reform, God will forgive us our sins. But we have to be sorry and endeavour to live a better life" [RC12].
2. "God forgives me because he is very generous to me. He wants to forgive everybody their sins as long as they are sorry. One has to be sorry for what they have done to receive forgiveness. People must be sorry for their sins and ask for forgiveness from God, then receive forgiveness" [RC10].

3. "I understand that God completely forgives sins, but we must be repentant of those sins and commit to not sinning again" [RC7].
4. "I think when we have our sins forgiven, we have to go through penance or time in purgatory. We have to, in my language, make good for the sins we have committed. So, we have two parts; the actual forgiveness and our reparation to God for the sins we committed" [RC4].

Summary: God forgives sins as long as respondents are repentant.

#### **4.5.1.5 Unmediated forgiveness**

This category denies the role of a human mediator, although acknowledges some mediatorial actions. The respondents emphasised their direct link to God rather than any human intervention or intercessors for the forgiveness of sins.

1. "Forgiveness can come straight away from Jesus. In this way it is based on my faith. There are rules in the Church that encourage people to go to confession for forgiveness. But I can go into an empty Church and pray to God ask for forgiveness and will receive forgiveness without the help of the priest" [RC11].
2. "I like this anonymity because I'm really in communion with God. It's God and me. And the priest is just an intermediary. So, I prefer not to know them. I have done one-on-one, but I just get a better sense of the spiritual if I'm not looking at another person. That way I get better sense of forgiveness. I know other people like to sit one to one and that's good, but I'm really trying to focus on God and me. The other person there can do the absolution, say the words but not ask anything" [RC12].
3. "I don't go because I don't feel the need to go to anybody. I like to sit in Church and contemplate my failings and all that I have done wrong. Examining my conscience and all that had happened to me. Also, I don't see the need for confession or to go and tell somebody what you've done wrong. I can reconcile to God through my own mind" [RC6].
4. "Here I do not go to confession because I believe in Mass and God, then the priest" [RC10].



Summary: forgiveness happens when respondents experience themselves in communion with God. The respondents emphasised their direct link to God rather than any human intervention or intercessors for the forgiveness of sins. Even if they confess their sins with a confessor, they may prefer anonymity.

#### **4.5.1.6 Section summary: the theme of God**

The theme of God had five categories namely God's forgiveness, signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, and unmediated. Through these categorises, respondent experienced God's forgiveness through faith that is anchored in the total love of God. God forgives sins through the agency of the Ordained Person. Most respondents believe that repentance is the condition for them to be forgiven and God's forgiveness sometimes is not mediated by the Ordained Person. Most respondents believe that forgiveness of sins was instituted by Christ based on the Gospel of John 20:19-23 and that is the reason the Ordained Person has the authority to forgive sins.

#### **4.5.2 Theme 2: Faith**

Respondents' faith is central to their understanding of God's forgiveness of their sins. This theme consisted of three categories, namely: belief in God's forgiveness, God's love and prayer. Respondents have to believe in God for forgiveness of sins to be effective. The faith is nourished by prayer, which validates the love of God toward them.

##### **4.5.2.1 Belief in God's forgiveness**

Central to God's forgiveness of sins is belief in God. Respondents believe that they are forgiven because God is forgiving. This faith in God's forgiveness brought peace.

1. "God for me is a God of love. I know that's a modern perspective, but it comes and goes depending on what, who the theologians are and what they say; some of them don't even have a clue of what is important. Forgiveness is about bringing you back into relationship with the person you have broken away from. That's how I see it. If you go to confession with the belief that you are forgiven, it is a great sense of joy. When I have been to confession a couple of times with faith that God forgives me, I felt a deep sense of peace after that" [RC2].

2. "God forgives me because He created the world and I think, I believe He forgives anyone. He didn't think that the world He created was wrong. If Adam and Eve didn't do what they have done, we wouldn't need God's mercy. Thank God they did and now we are forgiven" [RC10].
3. "I believe in God's forgiveness at all times. From what I've learnt and read from the Gospel, God is merciful and forgives at all times. We have to be prepared and ask. God always forgives" [RC11].

Summary: four respondents note that God forgives based on their belief and differ in their justification. The reason for [RC2] is that God is a God of love. For [RC10] God created the world whereas [RC11] remarks that God is merciful.

#### **4.5.2.2 God's love**

Respondents understand that forgiveness of their sins is based in the love of God for them. Respondents cannot imagine forgiveness of sins without love nor faith without love. The love of God is at the heart of forgiveness.

1. "God's forgiveness of my sins is based on God's love for me. I think all forgiveness is based on love. And I believe that God's love for me is infinite and individual and God knows me through and through. Because of all of those factors, I believe God forgives my sins totally, because God loves me totally" [RC8].
2. "To me the most fundamental thing is love. Because you can't have forgiveness without love or love without forgiveness. So, to me, it's at the very heart of what Catholics' faith is about; at the very heart of what relationships are about. I mean you can get on very well with someone for years and years, but if it comes down to a major disagreement or something, it's forgiveness that is the only thing that can fix it. In fact, I can't even imagine faith without forgiveness" [RC2].
3. "I understand that God is almighty and merciful. Even if we make the biggest mistake, God is ready to forgive us. Whatever you do, God forgives you. God is merciful and always ready to forgive us. Even when we are not ready to ask for forgiveness. I believe that God knows everything about us. He is always ready to forgive us. He forgives us because he loves us and created the world. He wants the world to be good" [RC12].

4. "Jesus is giving them a sort of last commandment [in John 20:19-23]. It's an expression of the love of one another and to love one another is to forgive one another. Forgiveness is an expression of love. For me to forgive is the heart of God because he sends Jesus to die for me. He forgives my sins because he loves me" [RC11].

Summary: God forgives sins because of total love for the respondents. Forgiveness of sins is at the heart of God's sending Jesus, and shows the fundamental meaning of God's relationship with the world.

#### **4.5.2.3 Prayers**

This category captured the respondents' understandings of the value of personal or communal prayers for the forgiveness of their sins. Prayers for these respondents echoed the humility and grace of God and established a real connection of the human soul and the offering of God.

1. "Sin encourages me to pray and does not prevent me from going to Church. It goes back to the Lord's Prayer. Our Lord's Prayer encourages me to pray, 'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us'. And we pray not to 'lead us into temptation'. Our Lord's Prayer encourages me to pray. We pray for forgiveness and we recognise our need for God" [RC9].
2. "The prayer of 'Lord I am not worthy for you to enter under my roof but only say a word and my soul shall be healed', this particular prayer penetrates all my emotions and intellect. Every time it gets me. Every time. This part always affects me. I think it puts into perspective humility and grace, and a moment of real connection of human soul and the offering of God. I don't know why it is. It takes me emotionally as well as intellectually" [RC2].
3. "Well I find that a very interesting question because I have noticed more of late that when I go into the church and prepare myself for the sacrament, talk to God as I go through it, ask forgiveness from God, I get a greater sense of God's forgiveness than I do when I'm actually with the priest. Because it's a very personal, one-on-one thing with God. And actually, going in and being with the priest, it's literally formalising what I have just done, talking directly to God. If I haven't gone

through that bit first, there is no point in going in. I really have to be quite in sync with God before I get in there. I find more forgiveness than when I am with the priest. I only found this out in the last couple of years, which is very interesting. I think it is because I've done deeper preparation for it. There is an intimate relationship with God. He is the one I have offended, and I must ask for forgiveness" [RC12].

4. "But sin encourages me to pray in as much as I carry the guilt of the sin. Because I think of my sins, then I will pray to God to forgive me for what I have done" [RC7].

Summary: respondents ask God's forgiveness because they have offended God. This conversation is achieved through liturgical and private prayers.

#### ***4.5.2.4 Section summary: the theme of faith***

The respondents understand that their faith in God who loves them totally is the reason for their forgiveness of sins. This is the defining moment of divine forgiveness of sins where respondents and God are in one-on-one communion in prayer. This theme had three categories, namely: belief in God's forgiveness, God's love, and prayers. These categories were the three pillars that ensured God's forgiveness is achieved.

#### ***4.5.3 Theme 3: Agents of Forgiveness***

The theme of Agent of forgiveness consisted of one category; the Ordained Person. Respondents believed that the Ordained Person is a consecrated person who administers the forgiveness of sins because of the connection back to the apostles who were given the authority to forgive sins.

##### ***4.5.3.1 Ordained person***

The priest is the person who verbally actualises God's forgiveness of sins to the respondents. This power has been granted to him through consecration.

1. "It comes from our Lord. The Priest is the administrator of the sacrament. I cannot receive a pardon of God without going to the priest. The priest is the vehicle through which the forgiveness of God passes through. No one else. What I like about the priests in the Catholic Church is that there is a direct line of succession

from St Peter, the leader of the apostles, and all the way through the centuries. It has been handed down through the Holy Spirit” [RC9].

2. “Forgiveness of sins does not come from the priest. The priest is an instrument who has power and authority to forgive. The priest is a conduit through which the forgiveness flows. The priest is an instrument through whom God acts. I go to any one of the parish priests. The disciples that Jesus gave the authority to to forgive sins were the twelve apostles. He gave the authority to spread the Good News and ordained the ministers of the Church to forgive sins” [RC7].
3. “We ordinarily go to a priest. But at times I have been to confession and the confessor hearing my confession turned out to be a bishop. So, as far as I understand, a consecrated member of the Church, bishop or archbishop, can also have that power to forgive sins. A validly consecrated priest is given the power to forgive sins. The sister, the deacon, and the lay minister – none of those are given the power to forgive sins. To forgive sins is one of the things that the priest is given when he is consecrated. All I understand was that always to forgive sins was one of the things a priest is granted at his consecration. The same power our Lord gave to the apostles as in this text of John” [RC4].
4. “I guess the forgiveness comes through the priest. It is the way the government of the Church has made it. It is the structure of the Church. That is the way the Church has decided it to be” [RC1].

Summary: for respondents, forgiveness comes through the priest who is the vehicle, instrument or administrator of forgiveness of sins.

#### **4.5.3.2 Section summary: the theme of agents of forgiveness**

The majority of respondents understand that the priest is the agent of forgiveness of sins, while others believe that the Ordained Person is a conduit or instrument through whom forgiveness of sins passes to them. The agent of forgiveness had one category, namely the Ordained Person.

#### **4.5.4 Theme 4: Confession and Absolution**

The theme of Confession and Absolution consisted of five categories, namely: the sacrament of confession, confession to an Ordained Person, general and personal acknowledgement of sins, absolution, and confession in the Mass. While confession and absolution complete each other, confession means the naming of sins either mentally or verbally, while absolution is the assurance that sins are forgiven. Both confession and absolution are called the sacrament of penance (or sacrament of reconciliation or sacrament of confession). The process of the forgiveness of sins is achieved either between the priest and the respondent or in the community of the Church. Some examples are given to illustrate the meaning of these categories.

#### **4.5.4.1 Sacrament of confession**

The respondents understood that the sacrament of confession is the sacrament of the Church in which the Ordained Person exercises the authority to absolve the sins of the penitents.

1. “As a Catholic, I understood that this was the starting point for the sacrament of confession. This is where Christ passed on to the apostles the ability to forgive sins in what we know today as the sacrament of confession. Our sins are forgiven in our religion as I understand it through the sacrament of penance, which was described in John’s Gospel 20:19-23. In the Catholic Church that’s normally in the form of the sacrament of confession where we confess our sins to a priest and he grants us absolution” [RC4].
2. “I think Christ established confession as one of the sacraments. I understand that Jesus gave to his disciples and the future priests the power to forgive sins. He sends the disciples to forgive the sins of everyone in the world. As Catholics, we go to confession to get our sins forgiven by God” [RC12].
3. “It is the institution of the Blessed Sacrament of reconciliation. The main thread of this Gospel is forgiveness of sins. I’m not a theologian and I’m a convert. I think the way I see it, it’s because we are supposed to imitate Jesus. Jesus as we know always forgives. So, as disciples we are supposed to imitate Jesus, to be merciful, forgiving. We are supposed to ask to be forgiven. For Catholics, this is the sacrament of reconciliation where we confess our sins and the priest forgives them” [RC1].

Summary: for these respondents God forgives sins through the sacrament of confession, which is based on John 20:19-23.

#### **4.5.4.2 Confession to an ordained person**

This confession to an ordained Person requires two individuals in conversation: the respondents who name their sins, and the ordained person who forgives the sins in the name of Christ.

1. "I know people who would like to go to people to confess where they truly feel anonymous rather than one of the priests in their own parish. I personally rather like confession or reconciliation, not when it's sort of compartmentalised, the division of confessor and sinner. I would rather like to sit talking to the person to whom I'm confessing my sins. It's more usual or I have got more normal sort of relationship with that person. I prefer to talk to the priest without any curtain between us" [RC8].
2. "I'm a Catholic from way back. I started out with confession to a priest on one-to-one basis. So, I came to see that as what we might say is the real confession. And I would feel or be concerned that I still hadn't confessed my sins until I went to a priest and confessed directly. This is how I feel and I'm not necessarily saying that other Christians don't do it correctly. It is just the way I feel" [RC4].
3. "From my perspective as a Catholic, when I go to confession and confess my sins with that firm purpose of amendment, I understand that they are forgiven through the person of the priest acting in *persona Christi*" [RC12].
4. "Well, before confession, I pray for help to recall the specifics of my sins so that I can do it reasonably and sensibly. Then I go in to talk to the priest and get advice. I explain my sins, get advice of what I should do and ask for forgiveness. Once my sins are forgiven, God has effectively forgotten them on my part" [RC3].

Summary: respondents understand that the priest forgives sins in *persona Christi*.

#### **4.5.4.3 General and personal acknowledgement of sins**

Acknowledgement of sins is the awareness of sins committed and the willingness to present them to God for divine forgiveness. The naming of general sins happened in general prayers of intercessions during the celebration of Holy Mass. Individuals do it in the silence of their inner thoughts.

1. “Well in our prayers of the faithful in the Cathedral parish, they frequently call out all sorts of rather annoying things actually that I’m not aware of having committed myself. But there is this finger that is pointed and it’s usually things against the environment. There are terrible things that we allow to happen. There are well known places where abortions are regularly committed. That’s our sins. There are sinful situations which we give acceptance to. In terms of same sex marriage, there is this shocking program which is going into schools” [RC5].
2. “There isn’t a time when we would specifically be coming together as a community to reconcile to God or acknowledge our sins. And I think the term which I tend to use for myself in preparing for reconciliation is acknowledging my sins before God. Actually, I say I acknowledge that what I have done is wrong. I have offended you. And then I can say that I’m sorry. But first, I’ve to acknowledge the wrong I’ve done” [RC12].
3. “I suppose there are other serious sins like stealing. I would imagine that the priest will say to you, you must return what you have stolen to the owner if you possibly can. Sometimes people take something like money and use that money for something they need. If they want to be forgiven they must pay that money back. If they cannot pay that money altogether at once, you have to do it otherwise. But I suppose the priest will say; your sins are forgiven and make the sign of the Cross. Go your way and sin no more” [RC10].
4. I suppose in the case of very serious sin, it might be required that particular action is taken that the person seeking forgiveness, perhaps until the action is taken, forgiveness might not be granted. I was thinking in the case of child abuse. You know it might be essential if the person was seeking forgiveness in the Catholic rite, say reconciliation, I think if somebody was seeking forgiveness in the situation like



that, forgiveness shouldn't be granted until that person has agreed to go to the police and actually confess to them. Because if you are seeking forgiveness and you have that true contrition, that true sense of seeking a complete removal of that sin, I think you have to do that, and I think the Church actually insists that has to be done before forgiveness is granted in that situation. I think so. I don't know if I'm right, I think that the case" [RC8].<sup>7</sup>

Summary: Most respondents acknowledge their personal sins and ask God for forgiveness while not admitting general sins because they do not feel responsible for sins they did not commit.

#### **4.5.4.4 Priestly absolution**

Priestly absolution is the Church's way of saying that the respondents' sins are forgiven by God through the role of the priest.

1. "Only in as much as the priest grants absolutions for sins. Those times my sins are forgiven "[RC7].
2. "Again, when in confession, the priest gives me absolution. He makes the sign of the cross on me. And at the end of the Mass as well I feel renewed and to be renewed is to be forgiven" [RC5].
3. "We confess our sins to God. And forgiveness comes from God through the priest to us. The priest as the administrator of confession grants us absolution" [RC10].

Summary: most respondents feel forgiven by two things: a sign of the cross in the confession and the absolution.

#### **4.5.4.5 Confession in Mass**

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<sup>7</sup> The Roman Catholic position on confession is that sins are forgiven by God. The Ordained Person is bound by the seal of confession and his role is strictly spiritual, not social or political. The Code of the Canon Law Canon 983.1 states: "It is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason. The revised Code of the Canon maintained that Canon 1388. This has been the tradition teaching of the Roman Catholic Church since the ninth century. The Ordained person in the Roman Catholic Church is bound to respect the dignity of the penitent. More articles have been written recently in the light of child sex abuse and the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

Confession in Mass is the introductory part of the Mass in which respondents confess their sins to God and say prayers asking forgiveness from God.

1. “We do that at every Mass. In the introductory rite of the Mass. In the *confiteo*, we actually confess to God, to the people around us that we have sinned, and we ask the people who are there with us to pray for us, to pray for our forgiveness. And we call upon Mary and the Saints to pray for us. And I think it’s implicit in the Kyrie too. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy. That is in the liturgy of the Mass. I find that very important to me and very moving too” [RC8].
2. “And when we make an act of confession, we ask to be forgiven for what we have done and to what we have failed to do. Well then, to me what we have failed to do is probably a far more prevalent issue than what we have done. And I will be the first to admit that I go for a long period of time without giving God even a second thought” [RC4].
3. “In Mass, we make an act of contrition. We recall sins. We don’t stand up and say individual sins. But before that we stand and recall individual sins. And then make a public act of contrition with everybody else” [RC3].
4. “I choose my priests very carefully. I know all the priests here. When I know the priest, who preaches one thing and behaves differently, it discourages me. So, here I do not go to confession because I believe in Mass and God then the priest. For me forgiveness happens during the introductory rite at the beginning of the Mass where I confess my sins and ask forgiveness from God” [RC11].

Summary: Respondents make an act of contrition, acknowledge their sins and confess quietly to God. Most of the respondents feel forgiven at this time of the liturgy.

#### **4.5.4.6 Section summary: the theme of confession and absolution**

Respondents go to the Ordained Person for the forgiveness of sins because that what they have learnt. Most feel forgiven by God through the confession in the Church Service as they speak from heart to God.

#### **4.5.5 Theme 5: Anointing and Blessing**

The anointing and blessing combined three categories: the healing rite, the blessing and the third rite of confession. This is a ceremony that brought blessings, healing, and forgiveness of sins to the respondents. The Ordained Person used blessed oil and anointed the sick person faithfully in the hope that the sick person will recover from illness and be forgiven his or her sins. The respondents in turn hope that through the anointing they will receive spiritual blessing and get well. The physical recovering of the sick person confirmed that blessings are bestowed upon them by God.

#### **4.5.5.1 Healing rite**

The healing rite is the ritual dedicated to healing respondents from spiritual or physical illness. Respondents found an extraordinary strength and a sense of peace coming from God through the anointing.

1. "I'm still thinking a couple of times I faced really very serious surgery. And in both cases I actually sought out the anointing of the sick and forgiveness in that. I find that very great. I find an extraordinary strengthening, and a wonderful sense of peace and trusting God with that anointing. It happened twice and each time it has been something which makes me face surgery with a sense that whatever the outcome was, I was approaching that surgery in the presence of God. And I know God is always there in a particular way. That is very important. The anointing of the sick has helped me because it forgives my sins and helps me face my surgery regardless of the outcome" [RC8].
2. "I had a nasty diagnosis about six years ago and I was in big trouble in all likelihood. And the first time I went along to the Mass of healing and received the blessings for the healing the sick, all my signs improved dramatically, my symptoms reduced dramatically. And I've been in remission since. To me, I don't know whether that removal is possible but it's removal to me" [RC3].
3. "So, this is different from going to a counsellor or psychologist, because you get healing for your sins and strength to not sin again" [RC11].
4. "I had a life-threatening illness. I almost died. They had called the priest who anointed me with oil and said some prayers. I was working for the Hospital. I

survived by God's grace. It was a disease which had about 26 deaths. And one or two people survived" [RC9].

Summary: respondents described the physical healing they received through the anointing and prayers. Healing and forgiveness of sins are connected: *you get healing for your sins* [RC 11].

#### **4.5.5.2 Blessings**

The word "blessings" alludes to both the strength and healing received through the ritual. The physical healing is a point of reference for divine blessing.

1. "My father had always asked me for the gift I could give him: a death bed confession and blessing. When he was about to die, the priest granted my father the last rite. He had a chance to confess and received the last blessing" [RC7].

Summary: respondents believe in forgiveness of sins through confession and blessings.

#### **4.5.5.3 Third rite of confession**

The third rite is a spiritual ritual in which respondents reflect upon their sins, ask forgiveness directly from God and get a communal absolution from the priest. The third rite of confession spoken by the respondents is a conditional absolution given to respondents after they have said prayers and confess their sins to God communally, whereas confession is the sacrament of confession where the respondents name their sins as an individual before an Ordained Person and receive absolution, followed by some prayers.

1. "When we did have the third rite of reconciliation, we used to receive a gathering absolution from the priest". I would like to see the third rite of reconciliation returned. I think it was a major mistake to stop the use of that rite. It stops the community and an opportunity to have people's sin absolved. People who struggled to go to the normal or formal forms of reconciliation, in other words one-to-one confession, are denied completely the opportunity to confess their sins and be forgiven" [RC7].
2. "Yes, there was a third rite of confession. They abolished it. You did not have to speak one-on-one. I thought that was really fantastic. It's just instead of me

speaking to an intermediary, I could speak to God direct. Well, that sounds arrogant. I'm not. It was about me examining my conscience and confessing my sins to God. It was good to do that, rather than going to a priest. I thought that was really a good moment. There was a reading. The service took about half an hour. You were led through it. But for some reasons, they dropped it. They can't do it anymore. It was really powerful. The priest read a script and led the congregation through various stages and then gives us time to reflect and absolve our sins. In terms of forgiveness, I felt I can start fresh again" [RC6].

3. "Yes. I would like us to go back to the third rite of reconciliation. There is a community gathering. We participated by doing readings. It provided concentration and really to be there and ask for forgiveness. The opportunity to come together, pray together and ask for forgiveness of sins" [RC1].
4. "And I think some of this goes to when we used to have the third rite of reconciliation. We had a particular priest in the parish who would always do extremely good examination of conscience. And it was a beautiful ceremony and really you could have zoomed in to that examination. And I think that makes such a huge difference. It's that preparation beforehand. Otherwise you could just pop in around the cathedral, go in and come out. And it's not the same like that. You confess your sins to God and receive the absolution" [RC12].

Summary: respondents are forgiven by God through an examination of conscience led by the Ordained person leading to communal absolution, without confessing their sins to anyone but God in the secret of their heart. The third rite is no longer offered, which all of the respondents regret.

#### ***4.5.5.4 Section summary: the theme of anointing and blessing***

The theme of anointing has three categories namely, healing rite, blessings, and third rite of confession. Most respondents experienced God's forgiveness and healing through anointing and prayers that accompany the ceremonies.

#### ***4.5.6 Summary of the Roman Catholic Church respondents***

Five themes sum up God's forgiveness of sins among Roman Catholic respondents namely, God, faith, Agent of forgiveness, Confession and absolution, and Anointing and Blessing. The distinctive understanding of God's forgiveness of sins for the respondents for the Roman Catholic Church is twofold; Ordained Person's granting of absolution followed by confession and anointing and blessing. Forgiveness of sins comes from God and is exercised within the frame of Roman Catholic ecclesiastical structure. While God forgives the respondents in the inner heart, the external liturgical rites are significant to individual faith.

#### **4.6 Summary of themes and meaning**

The table below shows the meaning of themes and the denominations.

UC: Uniting Church

LC: Lutheran Church

AC: Anglican Church

RCC: Roman Catholic Church

v: the theme is applied by the denomination.

X: the theme is not applied by the denomination.

**Table 4.1: Presentation of the themes by the four denominations**

THEMES	MEANING	DENOMINATIONS			
		UC	LC	AC	RCC
1. GOD	Divine forgiveness comes from God.	√	√	√	√
2. FAITH	Trust in God’s forgiveness.	√	√	√	√
3. AGENT OF FORGIVENESS	People who are conduits of God’s forgiveness.	√	√	√	√
4. CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION	Words and actions that erase sins.	√	√	√	√
5. EUCHARISTIC CHURCH SERVICE	Eating bread and drinking wine for the forgiveness of one’s sins.	√	√	√	x
6. ANOINTING RITE	God’s blessings and healing.	x	x	√	√

**4.6.1 Narrative of presentation of the themes**

This narrative is a presentation of the themes. The first four themes, namely, God’s forgiveness, Faith, Agents of forgiveness, and Confession and absolution are shared across all denominations. All 48 respondents agree that God is the source of all forgiveness of sins and not anyone else.

The theme of Faith represents respondents’ personal trust in God who forgives in the inner being through prayer. Believing in God makes forgiveness of sins possible.

The theme of Agents of forgiveness differs from one Church to another. The Uniting Church respondents do not view their ministers as the principal agent of forgiveness in contrast to the Catholic respondents. The Uniting Church, the Lutherans, and the Anglicans use the words 'conduit' and 'medium' to describe the role of the minister or pastor in the forgiveness of sins. While the minister is theologically trained and ordained to facilitate the Church service, s/he is among other Christians who can assure people of God's forgiveness of sins. This belief is equally upheld by the Anglicans and the Lutherans. The priesthood of all believers is the *raison d'être* for all baptised to forgive sins. But the sins could only be forgiven through the work of the Holy Spirit. Among the Lutherans as well as in the Anglicans, the priest announces the forgiveness of sins based on his/ her role in the worship service. The Roman Catholics understand that the priest has the divine power to forgive sins based on his priestly ordination and the tradition handed down from the apostles.

The terms conduit and medium which described the Agents of forgiveness in other denominations were used with differing emphasis by the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church. For the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church the priest is the agent who carries God's authority to forgive sins. When they say that the priest is a medium, they mean that the priest is both a channel of God's grace and possesses divine power to forgive sins. This is in contrast to the Anglicans, although they also believe in the apostolic succession of the power to forgive sins. Most of the respondents of the Anglican Church agree with Roman Catholic respondents that Jesus gives the disciples the power to forgive sins. The power to forgive sins is passed on to the disciples by Jesus breathing on them and sending them. For Roman Catholic respondents, this power is passed on to the priests of their respective denominations by laying on of hands by the bishop at one's priestly ordination. However, the Anglican respondents believe in God's forgiveness of sins through the Church Service, whereas their Roman Catholic counterparts largely see God's forgiveness of sins is achieved in individual confession to a priest.

The theme of confession and absolution exists in all the churches but has different meaning to the respondents. Confession for the Roman Catholic respondents primarily means going to the Ordained Person, listing the sins, saying prayers and receiving absolution from the Ordained Person. While there is also confession in Mass and there was the third rite of



confession, the primary locus of confession leading to the pronouncement of forgiveness is in the sacrament of reconciliation.

It is called by different names in each denomination. The Uniting Church has various liturgies which include prayers of confession and declarations of forgiveness, but the specific wording of the Uniting in Worship Prayer Books are not mandatory. Confessing also has another meaning in the Uniting Church, namely confessing one's faith. This is seen in the Service of Baptism, where one confesses one's faith prior to baptism.

For the Uniting Church respondents, absolution can also be administered by friends. This understanding involves an encouragement to move on, not to worry about the past wrong doing. For example, "It was a colleague who picked up one day. I seem to be binding myself with this and he gave me the absolution. That was unequivocal. But it was someone who actually understood the pressure and could see both sides. He says eh yeah. Are you blaming yourself for that? That was not your fault" (2.4.3 Absolution [U12]).

This is significant, will be discussed in the next chapter. The fact that one expresses his or her failure to someone else suggests that absolution is achieved through the mere understanding of the issues.

This concept to a lesser degree is shared by some respondents from the Anglican Church and understood in the reverse sense. For example, "Because forgiveness is a funny word. We don't go around using that word. I think we choose to move on. With today, we say; look, I've moved on, don't think about it anymore. I move on" (4.1.5 Experiences of forgiveness [A 8]). In this way when the respondent is forgiven, s/he hears the words of absolution, "look, I've moved on, don't think about it anymore".

For the Lutheran respondents, it is unusual to extend absolution into a social setting, although it might happen occasionally. The absolution is within the context of the Worship Service. Individual confession has recently been introduced into this Lutheran congregation, and the majority of respondents are still not ready for it. For example, "I also know that in our congregation in one recent time, the current pastor has offered private confession and absolution. That is not a common practice in the Lutheran Church. I haven't accepted that invitation yet. I don't know why. I suspect part of it is a fear of a practice with which Lutherans are not familiar" (3.4.1 Private confession and absolution [L6]).

For the Roman Catholic respondents, absolution is in the Sacrament of confession to a priest, and can only be administered by priests. The rite of forgiveness is called *Confiteor* by the Roman Catholics. Absolution means that sins are forgiven, for example, “Only in as much as the priest grants absolutions for sins. Those times my sins are forgiven “(5.4.4 Priestly absolution [RC7]).

The theme of participating in communion leading to an experience of the forgiveness of sins is found across three denominations, with the exception of the Roman Catholics. Holy Communion for the Uniting, Anglican, and Lutheran respondents is the true moment of God’s forgiveness of sin. This theme is not listed by the Roman Catholics. Confession in Mass is the introductory part of the Church service in which respondents confess their sins to God and say prayers asking forgiveness from God.

The theme of anointing of the sick was not evident among the Uniting and Lutheran respondents but was present in the Anglican and the Roman Catholic. However, there is a Uniting Church service of healing with anointing and prayers of confession (Uniting in Worship 2, p. 530-538), but the respondents did not refer to it. Anointing brings forgiveness and blessings through the laying on of hand and prayers. The physical recovery from illness is a tangible evidence of divine blessing.

#### **4.7 Summary of the findings**

The aim of this chapter was to identify the differences and similarities among the 48 respondents from the four mainline Christian denominations, namely the Uniting Church, the Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholic Church in the city of Adelaide. Six themes were identified, namely God, faith, agents of forgiveness, confession and absolution, Eucharistic Church Service, and anointing and blessings. The themes related to each other within and across the four denominations. Although the first five themes were shared among all four denominational groups, they had distinct differences which gave a particular identity for each. The respondents from the Uniting Church and Lutheran Church mentioned five themes, except the anointing and blessings, whereas the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church mentioned five themes except the Eucharistic service. The respondents from the Anglican Church mentioned all the six themes.

Having established the commonalities and differences between the understanding of God's forgiveness of sins across the 48 respondents through categories and themes, I now turn to the discussion chapter to compare these results with the exegetical understanding of John 20:19-23 by the four Biblical scholars introduced in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 5:

### Discussion

#### 5.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter brings together the two key groups: respondents and exegetes. I begin with a comparison of the respondents within the four denominations by theme. I then present the similarities and differences between the scholars' exegetical analysis of John 20:19-23 and the summary findings of the 48 respondents. It is important to reiterate that both exegetes and respondents have been charged with different tasks. While the exegetes are tasked with recovering the original meaning (to the extent that anyone can do so), the respondents were reflecting on their experience of the forgiveness of sins, prompted by the text. This is a methodological and hermeneutical difference, as I place both the exegetes and the respondents on the hermeneutical process or circle seeking to understand the contemporary meaning from John 20:19-23.

The hermeneutical spiral is the understanding of the text through interpretation that deepens understanding.<sup>1</sup> One enters the hermeneutic circle or spiral with preconceived ideas and moves to new understanding of the text.<sup>2</sup> In the following discussion, I argue that respondents' understanding of God's forgiveness of sins is based on a personal experience with God. This experience involves the individual feeling forgiven in their inner heart. This is demonstrated below in contrast to the four scholars' analysis of the text before them. The two groups agree on three themes, namely God, faith, and agents of forgiveness. They disagree on the other themes which shows that they are at different locations on the hermeneutical circle. In fact, they cannot be compared directly, because their respective tasks are different. While the exegetes examine the Biblical text from professional viewpoint, the respondents reflect on the same pericope from faith and personal experience. I am not critiquing the exegetes for not including their faith perspective, because it is not the genre of their writing. The methodology and the tasks at hand

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<sup>1</sup> As set out in the Introduction. See Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics* (SCM Press, 2007), 98-98.

<sup>2</sup> Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 4.

between the exegetes and the respondents are different. While the exegetes avoid anachronistic approaches, respondents may well use anachronism without hesitation.

## **5.2 Similarities and differences between denominations by themes**

Here I present the similarities and differences one theme at the time. I have themed similarities and differences based on the respondents' statements.

### **5.2.1 Theme 1: God**

This theme has six categories which are shared by all denominations. The six categories were God's forgiveness, signs of forgiveness, a plea for forgiveness, conditional forgiveness, assurance for forgiveness, and the unmediated role. The meaning of the theme God across all respondents was understood to be a Christian God: the God who is the origin of the divine forgiveness of sins. This God was addressed slightly differently by the respondents. While the Uniting Church respondents emphasised the aspect of God in Jesus the redeemer through his death, the respondents of the Lutheran Church saw God as a redeemer, but also more particularly a Triune God and reconciler. The Anglican respondents addressed God as the incarnate God; "the Word made flesh", the God who was in the best efforts of one's life, and the God who was compared to a mother who loved her daughter. The Roman Catholic respondents identified God as the creator, a lover and the God who was the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a Trinity.

The respondents of the Anglican Church believed that God through the Holy Spirit forgave sins. The Holy Spirit was a personal thing, the hand of God and the incarnate God. Example, "The Holy Spirit is the mechanism that, I'm really physical touched by God. I think of the Holy Spirit as a conduit, as a channel. To me it means be touched by God -be touched by the Holy Spirit. I see it as the hand of God, the touch of God, the flow of God's love and forgiveness. It's a channel. That's how I see it" (4.1.1 God's forgiveness [A2]. Whereas for the Lutheran the Holy Spirit who was a challenger and forgiver. The Holy Spirit was a conduit, and channel. For example, "The Holy Spirit gives power to forgive sins. The Holy Spirit is a challenger. He challenges us how to forgive, shows us better way to live and convicts us. He gives the power to forgive the sins of others. The Holy Spirit is a part of the Trinity. It is God's Spirit that forgives sins" (3.1.1 God's forgiveness [L7]. For the Uniting

Church respondents is the presence of God the Father and Jesus. The Holy Spirit not only forgives sins but also forgives when the respondent forgives sins. For example, “We don’t see Jesus these days. We don’t see the Father. The Holy Spirit is a personal thing. In this context, He’s empowering them, giving them the power to forgive sins” (2.1.1 God’s forgiveness [U3]). For the Roman Catholic Church respondents, the Holy Spirit was a great power of love and God not in a physical form. For example, “I suppose the Holy Spirit is God not in physical form. Something Jesus gives to the Church. Something to live with the Church. It’s like the way God breathed in Adam giving life. It’s quite tricky. We have just to believe that it’s God who forgives our sins when the priest says; “Your sins are forgiven. I absolve you in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (5.1.1 God’s forgiveness [RC11]).

In general, God was understood by all four denominations to forgive, but is experienced in different ways. For the respondents of the Uniting Church, a personal conversation is crucial for God’s forgiveness of one’s sins, whereas for the Roman Catholic respondents the role of the priest is understood to be essential for God to forgive one’s sins. The priest for them is the representative of God and can forgive sins, despite one’s relation with God. This is a bit of a dilemma to some of the Roman Catholic respondents who emphasise God’s forgiveness as experienced in the preparation before going to a priest for confession (5.2.3 [RC12]). These respondents feel that the ecclesial structure to go to priest for the forgiveness of sins has been imposed on them. While some went to a priest for confession, others did not. For the Lutheran and the Anglican respondents, God forgives most frequently during the Worship Service through liturgical prayers. Like the Roman Catholic respondents, some Lutheran respondents saw the pastor for individual confession.

Even among the responses that sound similar, differences are evident. The signs of forgiveness are in all denominations. For respondents from the Uniting Church, the word ‘shalom’ and the empty cross are used to refer to the signs of God’s forgiveness, for respondents from the Lutheran Church, the signs of God’s forgiveness are the death of Jesus on the Cross, the Crucifix. The sign of the Cross is given at the preparation of communion rather than the sign of the cross in the confessional rite for Roman Catholics. For Anglicans, the sign of God’s forgiveness of sins is the sign of the cross during the Worship Service.

Respondents from all four denominations understand repentance as the condition to God's forgiveness. For the Uniting Church respondents, the assurance of God's forgiveness includes the ability to forgive oneself and the strength to let go of the past experiences of sins and move on. For the Lutheran respondents, one is assured of God's forgiveness of sins when one feels supported and is kindly advised by anyone including the pastor. For example, hearing that God has forgiven the sins that one is worried about is understood as an assurance of God's forgiveness of sins. For the Anglican respondents the assurance of God's forgiveness is mostly through Church prayers and words of hymns. For the Roman Catholic respondents, the words of assurance of God's forgiveness are the priestly absolution and the blessing following the *Kyrie Eleison*.

### **5.2.2 Theme 2: Faith**

The theme of faith comprised five categories. The category of God's love appears across all respondents from all four denominations except respondents from the Lutheran Church. The category of sermons appeared only among respondents from the Uniting, Lutheran and Anglican denominations, while the category of gratitude to God appeared only among the Uniting and Lutheran respondents. The category of Prayers appeared only among respondents from the Uniting, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. The category of belief in God's forgiveness appeared among the respondents from the Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. The respondents from the Uniting Church did not have the category of belief in God's forgiveness. Although they did believe in God's forgiveness, they did not explicitly express it in this theme.

The theme of faith is what made divine forgiveness effective for all respondents, regardless of denomination. For all respondents what is similar in faith is that God forgave each person in their inner heart. The internal personal relationship with God was the borderline where respondents met with God for the forgiveness of their sins, regardless of their denomination. While faith was important, the Anglican, Lutheran and the Uniting Church respondents emphasised the sermons

Anglican Church, it was a personal faith that delivered forgiveness of sins. The respondents of the Roman Catholic Church believed in the God who always forgave.

The following quotations indicate these denominational differences. For the Uniting Church, one of the respondents states: “I understand that God’s grace is new every morning. There is always a fresh invitation to start again. It is a source of hope that there is always an openness on God’s part toward me despite my weaknesses and inadequacies. ([U10] 2.2.1 Gratitude to God). In the Lutheran Church a respondent notes: “Jesus is the one who reconciles us to God the Father. Jesus is also interceding for us on our behalf before God the Father. So, it is in the name and the authority of Jesus that sins are forgiven. God’s forgiveness through Christ. Always through Christ. I look at what he has done and his words” (3.1.1 God’s forgiveness [L1]. One of the Anglican respondents remarks: “Forgiveness of sins comes from faith. It is my faith that delivers forgiveness. -- may be the priest is a conduit, but I do believe it comes from God. When I open my heart and pray and that is asking for forgiveness. It does come. So, if that condition of me agreeing in my heart and listening is there, I believe that forgiveness is granted. It’s faith and listening. So, opening myself up to the possibility. But it my faith that delivers the forgiveness I guess” (4.2.1 Belief in God’s forgiveness [A2]). A respondent of the Roman Catholic Church had this to say: “I believe in God’s forgiveness at all times. From what I’ve learnt and read from the Gospel, God is merciful and forgives at all times. We have to be prepared and ask. God always forgives” (5.2.1 Belief in God’s forgiveness [RC11]).

### **5.2.3 Theme 3: Agents of Forgiveness**

All respondents agree that some people are able to forgive sins in the Church. There were three categories in this theme: the Ordained Person, all Christians, and people in the community. The Lutheran and Anglican respondents accepted all three categories, while the Uniting Church respondents drew on two categories, the ordained person and all Christians. The Roman Catholic respondents singled out only the category of the Ordained Person.

The Ordained Person was mentioned by respondents from all four denominations. However, the reason why respondents went to the Ordained Person differed from one denomination to another. In the Uniting Church, respondents went to someone for the forgiveness of their sins. If it happened that they went to the Ordained Person it was because the Ordained Person was theologically trained, trustworthy, and commissioned by



the Church. In contrast, the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church went not because of theological training or trustworthiness, but because the person was ordained to the priesthood in the line of succession of the disciples that linked the ordained person back to St Peter, the leader among the twelve apostles, the small group of the disciples of Jesus. The Ordained Person for the Roman Catholic Church respondents was the administrator of the sacrament of confession, the medium, conduit, and the instrument through whom God's forgiveness of sins passed through. This is what has been taught to the respondents. They believed that the Ordained Person had the heavenly authority of Christ to forgive sins.

While the respondents from the Anglican Church mentioned the possibility of going to someone, there was less probability of doing so. However, if they happened to go to the Ordained Person, it would have only been for a major issue. In this case, the Ordained Person was considered as the formal person who could forgive sins. The Lutheran Church respondents, for their part, went to the Ordained Person because of confidentiality and the fact that the Ordained Person was well versed in the Word of God. The role of the Ordained Person was to guide the lay person through the Decalogue while reflecting on what sin one has committed. For Anglican Church respondents, the Ordained Person's role was to say his/ her part of prayers in the Worship Service. This is similar to the views of the Lutheran and Uniting Church respondents who saw the Ordained Person as being like any baptised person and not having within his/her being the divine power to forgive sins. The role of the Ordained Person was to announce or proclaim the divine forgiveness of sins during the Church Service.

Like the Anglican Church respondents, those from the Lutheran Church regarded the Ordained Person as the formal avenue to go to in case of necessity. The Ordained Person in the Lutheran Church was a conduit, though not in the same way the Ordained Person was understood by the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church. For the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church, the Ordained Person possessed divine power to forgive sins, whereas the understanding of the respondents from the Lutheran Church and the Anglican Church is the complete opposite. The Ordained Person did not possess God's forgiveness of sins in himself/ herself but proclaimed God's forgiveness of sins during the

Worship Service. The Uniting Church respondents saw the Ordained Person very much as a baptised person who has been given a role in the Church Service.

#### **5.2.4 Theme 4: Confession and Absolution**

Ten categories combined the theme of confession and absolution. The respondents from the Uniting Church drew on three categories namely, acknowledgement of sins, confessional prayers for forgiveness, and absolution. The respondents from the Lutheran Church indicated four categories, namely private confession, confession, confessional prayers for forgiveness, and absolution. The respondents from the Anglican Church named five categories namely private confession, confession, acknowledgement of sins, confessional prayers for forgiveness, and absolution. The respondents from the Roman Catholic Church identified five categories, notably sacrament of confession, confession to an Ordained Person, acknowledgement of sins, priestly absolution, and confession in Mass.

The categories of confession and absolution varied in meaning between each Christian denomination. The theme of confession and absolution, although sounding similar to all 48 respondents, meant different things. From the respondents of the Uniting Church, confession and absolution occurred both in church and out of church. Absolution included words such as it is not your fault, as well as your sins are forgiven in the context of the liturgy. Confession in church meant confessing to God and being forgiven through the liturgical prayers. In contrast, for the respondents of the Roman Catholic Church, confession and absolution echoed the institution of the sacrament of confession. For the respondents of the Anglican Church, confession was a time of vulnerability that was extended to every daily life and absolution was obtained both in church and privately in one's home at prayer. Absolution was a belief that one was forgiven by God. For the respondents from the Lutheran Church, confession and absolution happened in the Church Service.

The sacrament of confession denoted the practice where one goes to a priest, named the sins and received forgiveness by the priest. For respondents from the Lutheran Church, confession and absolution meant acknowledging one's sins to God during the Church Service, followed by the pastor's words of forgiveness, as well as individual confession to

the pastor. By contrast, the respondents from the Anglican Church regard confession and absolution as a blessing after acknowledgement of sins during the Worship Service.

What sounds different is sometimes the same. Private confession and absolution among the respondents from the Lutheran and Anglican Church is what is called Sacrament of confession by the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church. Even though the action is essentially the same, the significance of the action is different. For the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church, the Sacrament of confession was instituted by Jesus based on the Gospel text under study and the priest acts in *persona Christi*. The role of the priest in forgiveness of sins was essential among the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church, whereas the same role was acceptable among the respondents from the Lutheran and Anglican Churches but insignificant among the respondents from the Uniting Church. The respondents from the Uniting Church understand the role of the minister in relation to the priesthood of all believers rather than a ministerial priesthood based on ordination. The forgiveness of sins is primarily a duty and a commissioning rite of priesthood among the respondents of the Anglican Church. This is how respondents from the Anglican Church perceive their priests. It does not preclude that the priestly ordination is sacred. The forgiveness of sins is exclusively a sacred duty and a commissioning rite of priesthood among the respondents of the Roman Catholic Church. The respondents from the Lutheran Church are midway between the priesthood of all believers and the theological training of the pastor as a spiritual leader of the congregation.

Looking at confession across all respondents, despite the ecclesial differences, there was one common thread. Confession means fundamentally humbly saying to God ones' sins from the heart and trusting that one is forgiven by God's grace and love.

While absolution is applied across all respondents, it is understood in different ways. The meaning of absolution among respondents from the Uniting Church is to encourage someone to forget the past and move on, to pick someone up and help them to forget the sins. It is a word that does not condemn but frees from the burdens one experiences in life. It is not limited to the liturgical prayers of the Church. For some it comes through conversation with friends. This aspect to a degree applies also to respondents from the Lutheran and Anglican Churches, although, for the latter the emphasis is on the blessing

pronounced by the pastor or priest after general and personal confession in the Church Service.

Confessional Prayers for forgiveness are said among the respondents from the Uniting, Lutheran, and the Anglican Churches. For respondents from the Uniting Church, it means an activation baton to be in touch with one's failures. It alerts one to some personal sins and helps one to understand one's brokenness. These prayers are not the same every Sunday. For respondents from the Lutheran and Anglican Churches, the traditional forms of words are important. They are formulated based on the old format of penitential prayers. For respondents from the Anglican and Lutheran Churches, the Confessional Prayers of forgiveness are sometimes monotonous and, other times, prayerful.

The category of Acknowledgement of sins for respondents from the Uniting Church meant a contemplation of one's vulnerability. Among the respondents from the Anglican Church, it was an occasion to face up to the reality of one's weakness and move on. This is significant because to both the Anglican and Uniting Church respondents this aspect went out of the Church Service and embraced daily life. The Church gives this opportunity at least weekly, but it can happen elsewhere, especially in conversations, when one apologizes for having done something wrong to someone. For the Roman Catholic Church respondents, it meant a brief reassessment of one's relationship with God and others.

### **5.2.5 Theme 5: Eucharistic Church Service**

The striking difference was that the respondents from the Uniting Church found divine forgiveness of sins in receiving Holy Communion, whereas respondents from the Anglican Church considered the entire Church Service as a time for praise and forgiveness for sins. The Roman Catholic respondents found forgiveness of sins at *Kyrie Eleison*, when the priest says the blessings. The Lutheran respondents experienced forgiveness both in receiving Holy Communion and in the time when the Ordained Person declared God's forgiveness of sins to the congregation.

The Church Service and the Service of Holy Communion are two categories that combined the theme of the Eucharistic Church Service for respondents from the three denominations, but not for respondents from the Roman Catholic Church. The category of

Church Service for respondents from the Uniting, the Lutheran and the Anglican Church meant a guarantee for forgiveness of sins. The only difference was the emphasis and meaning respondents attached to a part of the Church Service.

In the category of the Service of Holy Communion, for the respondents of the Uniting Church, receiving Holy Communion seem to be the most direct possible effective way they understood God's forgiveness of their sins. All respondents from the Uniting Church said that they were forgiven by God when they receive Holy Communion. This was equally true for most of their counterparts from the Lutheran Church. While the emphasis on God's forgiveness of sins for respondents from the Lutheran Church was the moment when the pastor announced the forgiveness of sins on behalf of the Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, it was also true for some that forgiveness of sins was most effective in communion, because one was receiving the Body and Blood of the risen Lord. The Anglican respondents viewed the Service of Communion differently. For them it is a sacred meal that they receive at a very special place. The forgiveness of sins in receiving communion is not as noticeable as for the Lutherans and the Uniting Church respondents.

#### ***5.2.6 Theme 6: Anointing and Blessing***

The theme of anointing and blessing was mentioned only by respondents from the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. The meaning of anointing and blessing was a ritual that healed the sick and restored the health threatened by physical or spiritual ailment. The categories between the Anglican and Roman Catholic respondents differed. The Healing rite, and blessings are common to both Anglicans and Roman Catholic respondents. The Roman Catholic respondents had a third rite of confession which was not mentioned by the Anglican respondents. Similarly, the Anglican respondents mentioned the category of anointing, which was not mentioned by Roman Catholic respondents.

On the one hand, the anointing for respondents from the Anglican Church meant blessed oil applied on the forehead and hands of a respondent who was experiencing a critical moment and needed God's intervention. Through the healing rite, the respondent experiencing physical and spiritual isolation made peace with God and the blessings concluded the anointing, as the respondent praised God for the blessings received. Forgiveness of sins is experienced when the respondents recover from illness. On the other

hand, for the Roman Catholic respondents, the third rite of confession meant a profound guided self-examination, which enhanced their relationship with God, to whom they confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness of their shortcomings. The Ordained Person was a representative of God who gave a general absolution without hearing any individual's sins. In a similar way to the respondents in the Anglican Church, the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church understood<sup>15</sup> the Healing rite as a call for God's rescue in times of sickness. Like the Anglican respondents, the blessing was viewed as a sign that God's forgiveness of sins has been achieved. One is restored with peace and good health.

For the Anglican respondents, anointing and blessing was a time for forgiveness of sins and support with abundant blessings, whereas for the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church, the rituals forgave sins and improved the physical well-being of respondents.

### **5.3 Comparison between understanding of respondents and exegetes**

This thesis was a study seeking to understand the experience of God's forgiveness of sins based on John 20:19-23 in the four Christian communities residing in the city of Adelaide. The 48 respondents from Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cathedral, St Peter's Anglican Cathedral and Pilgrim Uniting Church identified six themes with God and four themes common to all 48 respondents. Two themes were only common to the 24 respondents from St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cathedral and St Peter's Anglican Cathedral. One theme was common to the 36 respondents from Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St Peter's Anglican Cathedral, and Pilgrim Uniting Church, but not to those from St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cathedral.

While Chapter 1 identified the need for this study to include lay people's understanding of God's forgiveness of sins from individual perceived reality, it is Chapter 3 that through individual interviews gave a comprehensive description on how the 48 respondents understood and experienced God's forgiveness of their sins in their own communities. This was in contrast to Chapter 2 which detailed various techniques on how data were collected, Chapter 4 that laid down the findings from both respondents and Biblical scholars' careful analysis of the text of John 20:19-23. The findings were meaningless without discussing the context and interpretation of the meaning respondents gave to divine forgiveness of sins.

The discussion and comparison of the value of God's forgiveness of sins is the task of Chapter 5. In the discussion respondents understood God's forgiveness of sins as a deep personal relationship with God as well as Eucharistic community celebration in which God's word of forgiveness is proclaimed and cleansed sins both when the Ordained Person on behalf of the risen Lord announces God's forgiveness of sins and at individual reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church Worship Service was a time for respondents to leave the worldly business aside and concentrate on divine mercy, love and worship. Each Church Worship Service was a spiritual renewal of vulnerable people who individually experienced the underserving pardon of God.

In continuation of Chapter 5, Chapter 6 concludes the study that distinguished respondents from the exegetes as both understood God's forgiveness of sins differently except in a few instances where a few themes intertwined. The respondents have God's experience of forgiveness at heart whereas exegetes understood God's forgiveness of sins through intellect textual analytical usage. Chapter 1 highlights the various trajectories of forgiveness of sins from Israel perspective to Christian understanding of the crucified and risen Jesus, the Lord and Son of God. The trajectories although understood differently from one context to another, there is both discontinuity and continuity of God's forgiveness of sins from Judaism to the present respondents. The discontinuity is mainly portrait in the rite of sprinkling of blood in the temple. While Israel hoped in YHWH's forgiveness through various offerings, most respondents believe in God forgiveness through the death of Jesus, through the love of God, and God's mercy. Some respondent believes in God's forgiveness through the sign of the cross when the priest pronounces the words of absolution. And others it is the crucified Jesus.

There is also continuity of forgiveness of sins from Israel people, the religion from which Christianity sprang. Israel prayed in the Temple and offered sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. The respondents find forgiveness of sins in the Church Worship Service. Yahweh dwelt in the Holy of Holiest where the high priest enters once a year to atone for his sins and the sins of the people. Respondents at least go to Church once a week and were forgiven through special way in receiving Holy Communion. The six Israel trajectories of God's forgiveness of sins, as identified in Chapter 1, namely, Jewish Day of Atonement, Covenant, Atonement, Repentance, Confession and Exclusion, if seen in a Christian light,

will no doubt echo respondents need for God's forgiveness of sins. The Jewish Day of Atonement could be understood as the day respondents meet for worship and as part of prayer are forgiven. Covenant has no continuity except when understood as God's promise at baptism. But the study was based on forgiveness of sins after baptism. Atonement is discontinued but repentance was presented by the respondent as a condition to God's forgiveness of sins. Confession was evident in all 48 respondents. Exclusion which appeared in Paul's letters is contrasted by the respondents who receive Communion for forgiveness of sins rather than a condemnation.

The similarities and differences between respondents and exegetes are expressed in twelve themes. Theme one was God. Both exegetes and respondents agreed that divine forgiveness of sins emanates from the God of Israel and the New Testament. Theme two was faith. Both exegetes and respondents agreed that faith was essential virtue that enable forgiveness of sins to take place. While faith is personal and post baptismal journey experience for the respondents, for the exegetes, faith is a general term and a pre baptismal condition for God's forgiveness of sins. Third theme was Agents of forgiveness. Both exegetes and respondents agreed that God's words of forgiveness of sins are spoken through human agency. The fourth theme was confession and absolution. There were divided opinions on this theme. While three exegetes did not see any use for confession and absolution, respondents and one exegete noted that this theme was vital for one to express remorse and hear the word or to ascertain that sins are finally forgiven. The fifth theme was the Eucharistic Church Service. The exegetes did not mention this theme because it does not feature in the passage. The respondents assembled in liturgy with various penitential prayers and have their sins forgiven within the Eucharistic Church Service. The seventh theme was the Anointing and blessing. Half of the respondents experienced divine peace and physical healing as a result of anointing prayer while another half and all the exegetes were silence about this theme. The following theme was Peace. Twice the risen Lord wished peace to his disciples. For the exegetes, peace is a restoration to wholeness and eschatological cleansing. For the respondents, peace was not a theme for forgiveness of sins but a result. The twelve were the ninth theme. Three third of the respondents and one exegete were not convinced that the twelve monopolised Jesus authority to forgive sins. In contrast on quarter of the respondents and thee third of the



exegetes the historical twelve close friends of Jesus had the authority to forgive sins and pass it on to selected people. Discrimination was the tenth theme that was important for all the exegetes because it bring condemnation or free people from sins. This theme was not mentioned by the respondents although some expression of being condemned was felt when one does not forgive others.

Similarities and differences show that exegetes and respondents share almost half of the themes and separated on another half. There are two groups of people who live in two different worlds; the world of human experience and the world of textual grammatical analysis but merge at certain intercessions with various meaning. As mentioned above, more scholarly and pastorally research are needed to address the gap between exegetes and lay peoples' understanding of God's forgiveness of sins.

### 5.3.1 Comparison of key aspects

The table below presents key aspects of both respondents' and scholars' interpretation of the forgiveness of sins of John 20:19-23.

**Table 5.1: Forgiveness of sins: interpretation by respondents and scholars**

RESPONDENTS' THEMES	UC	LC	AC	RCC	HOSKYNS	BULTMANN	BROWN	BARRETT
God	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Faith	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Agents of forgiveness.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Confession and absolution.	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X
The Eucharistic Church Service.	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X
Anointing and blessing.	X	X	√	√	X	X	X	X

<b>SCHOLARS' THEMES</b>								
Peace	X	X	X	X	√	√	√	√
Twelve	X	X	X	√	√	X	√	√
Disciples	√	√	√	X	X	√	X	X
God	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Faith	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Discrimination	X	X	X	X	√	√	√	√
Father/Son relation	X	X	X	X	√	X	√	√

Notes: The symbol √ means 'agree', while x means 'disagree'. UC = Uniting Church, LC= Lutheran Church, AC= Anglican Church, RCC= Roman Catholic Church.

#### 5.4 Discussion of findings

I will now proceed to discuss the table by referring to respondents' quotations, scholars' interpretations and the literature review.

This chapter is a comparative analysis based on the findings from the 48 respondents and the hermeneutic of the selected scholars in the light of the exegesis of John 20:19-23. These findings suggest that every one of the respondents to a degree agree and disagree with one or two of the scholars. No one denomination is entirely consistent with the exegesis. No one denomination has complete uniformity in their understanding of the forgiveness of sins according to John 20:19-23. Differences were apparent among all respondents and none appeared to be a perfect match to the exegesis.

Most notably, a huge disconnect was evident between respondents and the exegetes. Here is where the disconnection happens. The respondents spoke about their personal

experience, whereas the exegetes write from their intellectual understanding of the text before their eyes. For example, God is central to the respondents, whereas the exegetes' focus is not upon their experience of God, but on articulating the themes that arise from the passage. Nevertheless, there are points of comparison between them according to the themes which have been identified, and these will now be discussed.

#### **5.4.1 Theme 1: God**

The theme of God was prominent among all 48 respondents. God was the ultimate foundation of forgiveness of sins. As one respondent said; "only God can forgive my sins. He is not embodied in anyone" (4.1.1 God's forgiveness [A11]). This firm belief in the God who has unique attributes echoes the *Adonai*, the *YHWH*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel and indeed the God of Jesus Christ as St Paul identifies the Crucified Jesus Christ. The belief in a superior being whose substance is superior is a continuity of the faith Christians inherited from the monotheistic God. This is the God who became human being, a personal God revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:14). A distant God and yet very close to humanity. God is the other and yet tabernacles in humanity. The incarnate and compassionate God. One of the respondents describes God in the following: "That is the incarnate God within me as I understand it" (4.1.1 God's forgiveness [A1]). This is how close God is to respondents, not in human flesh but in Spirit. Another example is when the respondent says the following: "To me, the Holy Spirit is the bit that says, 'they are forgiven' as supposed to just saying as a series of words. Forgive sins or I forgive you. Without the Holy Spirit, it just becomes a series of words. But, this passage says, you say it and it would be so. It's because of the Spirit, it would be so. It would be gone. It would be over, done and dusted. The Holy Spirit makes it real (2.1.1 God's forgiveness [U4])".

The exegetes see this God primarily as a creator referring to the risen Lord breathing into his disciples not as a repetition of creation but as a second creation.<sup>3</sup> "As God breathed into Adam the breath of life, and he was made a living being, so the son of God breathed upon his disciples, and they receive the Holy Spirit".<sup>4</sup> The God of the exegetes is the God

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<sup>3</sup> Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), 544.

<sup>4</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 544.

who created Adam and Eve from the dust. This act is understood as recalling the supreme act of creation in (Genesis 2:7 [LXX]; Ezekiel 37: 5-10; Wisdom 15: 2.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the exegetes are speaking of the same God known by the respondents. The God who answered Moses that my name is “I AM” (Exodus 3:14). As such, the theme of God has been understood by both respondents and exegetes equally as God the creator. God who creates also re-creates (John 20:22) indicating a second creation.

The exegetes remain with the meaning of the Biblical text before them, whereas the respondents are living the text in a relationship of love and mercy. For the respondents, God is both creator and forgiver; the author of divine forgiveness of sins. While the exegetes identify God as creator, the respondents call God their God. The God of the exegetes is the God in the biblical text.<sup>6</sup> The God of the respondents is a personal God from personal faith and experience, a God who has a profound relationship with the respondent. This is a very intimate God. Whereas the God interpreted by the exegetes is a distant God, a God who created the universe, liberated Israel from slavery in Egypt, is powerful and unseen. It seems to be the same God yet is perceived differently. Again, this is a hermeneutical issue, not simply a theological difference.

Briefly, the respondents and exegetes differ in their understandings of the nature of God.

#### **5.4.2 Theme 2: Faith**

Faith is the second theme that respondents and exegetes have in common. Faith connects respondents to both God and the Church. One respondent states: “Forgiveness of sins comes from faith. It is my faith that delivers forgiveness” (4.2.1 [A2]). Both exegetes and respondents emphasise belief as the nexus for divine forgiveness of sins. Here faith could be compared to cause and effect. The faith is so radical that it produces divine forgiveness of sins. “Forgiveness of sins comes from faith. It is my faith that delivers forgiveness 2.2.1 Belief in God’s forgiveness [A2]”. The faith is a personal belief of the respondents whereas

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<sup>5</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 547; Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, The Anchor Bible, (London Dublin Melbourne: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 1037; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray (General Editor) R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1884-1976), 692.

<sup>6</sup> A universal distant God whose name was *YHWH* in the sixth century BC then popularly called *Elohim* from about the third century BC. This was then replaced by the Hebrew word *Adonai* due to its sacred nature. Finally translated Lord, *Kyrios* the Greek translation of the Hebrew scripture, Septuagint.

it is a general understanding for the exegetes. For example, the exegetes emphasise the significance of belief in Jesus as the door to forgiveness of sins in referring to (John 9:1-12; 20:24-29).<sup>7</sup> Although the two passages are not directly from the pericope under study, they relate directly to the faith the exegetes are referring to. This faith transforms life in the case of Thomas or the blind man. For the respondents, faith is nourished by prayers, sermons, belief in God's forgiveness and love that increasingly makes one open to God's grace. In contrast, for all the exegetes faith is a yearning for healing. The exegetes used the example of the healing of the blind man in John 9: 1-12 to illustrate the divine forgiveness of sins as well as a culminating point of Jesus' earthly life to show that he had authority over sins.<sup>8</sup> The fact that faith is absent in John 20:19-23 from the exegetes perspective whereas it is at the core of the experience of the respondents' experience of forgiveness of sins, suggests that the anachronism is rigorously avoided by the exegetes whereas anachronism is not an issue for the respondents. This also reflects their different places in the hermeneutical process.

The faith of the respondents is at the heart of their experience of God's forgiveness of sins whereas the exegetes in seeking for the original meaning of the words, do not see faith in this pericope. For the exegetes, faith refers to the acknowledgement that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29) and a willingness to seek baptism. These are key aspects of Johannine theology.<sup>9</sup> This line of thinking focuses on the pre-baptismal forgiveness of sins rather than postbaptismal forgiveness of sins. Faith for the exegetes is distinct from the forgiveness of sins under study. It is general, rather than specific as it was for the respondents. The exegetes expressed faith in relation to conversion and baptism. For example, Barrett notes that forgiveness of sins is linked but not limited to baptism: "There may well be a reference to baptism in the Johannine charge also; the church, by conferring or not conferring baptism, opens or closes the door of the

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<sup>7</sup> Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1995), 567, 569, especially 571; Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 544. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 381, 1042. 1037; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 692

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1042.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1042.

redeeming community. But it would be wrong to restrict the meaning of the saying to baptism”.<sup>10</sup>

The respondents understand that faith is the door for forgiveness of sins and the faith they are concerned with is the faith for the forgiveness of postbaptismal sins. This is a gap in understanding faith between the exegetes and respondents. However, for the respondents once one has faith, then forgiveness of sins follows. The exegetes used faith in the context of the Johannine theology at large rather than finding faith in the pericope as the respondents do. Faith for the respondent is the *raison d'être* of their Christian identity. Who the respondents are and the God in whom they believe are two distinct characteristics that define God's forgiveness of sins to them. The themes of Faith and God are intimately connected that the latter exists because of the former. “We found principles that we believe make our life worth living to the best of our ability. “Believe! is the summary of forgiveness in my experience [...] People should be formally being reminded that their forgiveness depends on their belief and their faith in Jesus and nothing else” (3.2.1 belief in God's forgiveness [L2]”; “And I believe that for me, my God is in the best efforts I make. (4.2.1 believe in God's forgiveness [A8])”.

Briefly, faith of the respondents emerged from the text under study, in contrast to the exegetes for whom faith was a precondition for salvation. The respondents' perspective shows an integration of text and experience.

#### **5.4.3 Theme 3: Agents of Forgiveness**

The theme of agents of forgiveness is controversial for both respondents and exegetes. There is no one who takes the place of Jesus, but everyone seems to represent the words of Jesus. This means that the words of Jesus; if you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven are paraphrased and expressed by other people. By so doing, respondents are assured of God's forgiveness of their sins which took place in their conversation with God prior to any contact with other people. When respondents hear the words of Jesus forgiveness from other people, they (respondents) validate the forgiveness of sins from God. The plethora of meanings of agent of forgiveness supports the thesis I suggested earlier that

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<sup>10</sup> Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 571.

denominational lines are not as significant as one might expect. While respondents are satisfied with being part of a specific Christian community, their core beliefs in God's forgiveness of sins seem to be based on their personal relationship with God.

On the one hand respondents consider themselves forgiven in the depth of their being through faith. On the other hand, they need to hear words of comfort from either a person appointed by the Church or anyone who cares for them. For example, most respondents from the Roman Catholic Church are selective in who they will approach as agents of forgiveness among the priests. This is equally true for respondents from the Uniting Church and Lutheran Church who have confidants to share their failures. This is in contrast to the respondents from the Anglican Church who enjoy God's forgiveness within the Church Service unless a really major issue happens. This leads me to say that lay people's theology is distinct from exegetes and shows that their experience modifies theology. It becomes apparent that there is a difference between the narrow definition of Christian community and the broad definition of community, largely along the lines that the exegetes see the Christian community narrowly defined in the passage, whereas the respondents interpret it differently.

With this background, the position of the agents of forgiveness extend beyond the boundaries of the church community in to the streets, shops, sportsgrounds, entertainment centres, anyone who listens and brings hope into a shuttered situation is an agent of forgiveness for most of the respondents Bultmann agrees with most of the respondents who believe that the role of agents of forgiveness of sins is given to all disciples.<sup>11</sup> For example, "I might go to someone who is a mentor, or someone who is the chair of the Church council. They have been given some authority" (2.3.2 All Christians [U9]); "In the Lutheran Church I will use a spiritual adviser, someone I trust, for example my husband" (3.3. 2 All Christians [L12]); "I think we will say the whole community (4.3.2 All Christians [A8]); "Forgiveness of sins does not come from the priest 5.3.1 Ordained Person [RC7]); "I guess the forgiveness comes through the priest. It is the way the government of the Church has made it. It is the structure of the Church. That is the way the Church has decided it to be" (5.3.1 Ordained Person [RC1]). Bultmann writes: "it is self-

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<sup>11</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

evident that it is not a special apostolic authority that is imparted here, but that the community as such is equipped with this authority”.<sup>12</sup> But like his associates Hoskyns, Brown, and Barrett, he does not go further to explain how sins are forgiven by all disciples.

Hoskyns states, “With the definition of the work of the Spirit as the remission and retention of sins the essential nature of the activity of the Church and of the ministry is also defined. As the Lord washed the feet of his disciples, so must they remit the sins of the faithful”.<sup>13</sup>

It seems that Hoskyns concurs with most of the respondents who support the notion that all the disciples can forgive sins. However, his next comment states that “the traditional Catholic exegesis of the passage, emphasized at the Council of Trent, insists on finding here the sanction for the sacrament of Penance”<sup>14</sup> and he endorses this, to the extent that sins committed after baptism are able to be remitted or retained. He dismisses the question as to whether this commission is given to the church as a whole, or just to the apostles, and so does not address whether the power of forgiveness of sins is invested only in the Ordained Person, as the Roman Catholic understands it. Hoskyns admits that this pericope is the foundation of the Sacrament of Penance, but implies that every baptised person can be an agent of forgiveness by stating: ‘The principle which the evangelist has established is “... susceptible of applications wider and more various than he himself was able to make, or than those to which he bore testimony.”’<sup>15</sup> His position on the commission of every believer to remit or retain sins is not clear, but his overall argument implies this. While Barrett and Brown shared the same sentiments, they have some reservations with a warning: “... the Roman Catholic position reflects an interpretation whereby the power mentioned in XX 23 concerns the forgiveness of sins committed after baptism and is given to a specific group, the Eleven, who pass it on through ordination to others. This interpretation has been rejected by other Christians.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Barrett and Brown do not restrict the role of agents of forgiveness but suggest that every Church is responsible to set their guidelines as to who the agents of forgiveness should be. The exegetes

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<sup>12</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John.*, 693.

<sup>13</sup> Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), 545.

<sup>14</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>15</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1041.



acknowledge the need for the Christian community to forgive one another's' sins and referred to 1 John 5:16-17; there is a role of intermediary in the Johannine community.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that exegetes belonging to one tradition are actually describing something that seems to be held by the respondents from a different tradition suggests that the denominational lines are blurred from the point of view of how respondents are forgiven. The denominational affiliation as I mentioned in Chapter 2 is relatively minor when comparing exegetes and respondents. These results confirm that there is no necessary correlation along denominational lines. Also support the practice of biblical studies in the mid-20th to 21st centuries, particularly following the modernist crisis. The results demonstrate that this verse has been divisive both among and within Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars and lay people alike. While the Roman Catholics emphasise ordination to priesthood, the respondents from the Protestant congregations focus is on the priesthood of all believers. In other words, One approach is to emphasise ordination to priesthood, another approach is to focus on the priesthood of all believers. Both theological positions find support among respondents.

The respondents' reason for the need of agents of forgiveness varied. Either they have affinity with friends or relatives or the Ordained Person. In some cases, the Ordained Person might be a subject of destruction to respondents' relationship with God. For example, "I choose my priests very carefully. I know all the priests here. When I know the priest, who preaches one thing and behaves differently, it discourages me. So, here I do not go to confession because I believe in Mass. For me forgiveness happens during the introductory rite at the beginning of the Mass where I confess my sins and ask forgiveness from God" (5.4.5 Confession in Mass [RC11]). In other cases, the Ordained Person could be viewed as a confidant with whom one shares both joys and sad moments. Or in other cases, the agent of forgiveness could be a person outside the community who is a role model. In this sense, absolution, can be exercised beyond the Worship Service.

To a degree, there was a healthy tension between clergy and laity. "I choose my priests very carefully. I know all the priests here. When I know the priest, who preaches one thing and behaves differently it discourages me" (Confession in Mass 5.4.5 [RC11]). To resolve

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<sup>17</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI* 1045.

the tension, either the respondents completely ignored the Ordained Person and perhaps the norm of the operant theology and focus on new path which opens the way for agents of forgiveness beyond the church and church community.

This finding is significant because the exegetes are divided as well as the respondents. The exegete from the Anglican Tradition affirms aspects of the Roman Catholic position, and in this respect aligns with the respondents of the Roman Catholic Church. By contrast, Brown, who is from the Roman Catholic tradition, is consistent with the respondents from the Pilgrim Uniting Church, St Peter's Anglican Church, and Bethlehem Lutheran Church. Barrett and Bultmann add their voices to extend the role of agents of forgiveness to all disciples.

What is the understanding of priesthood of all believers in the context of forgiveness of sins? Does it mean one has power to forgive sins? If so, when did one receive this power and where is it supported? By the priesthood of all believers, respondents understand baptism. Once one is baptised, one is incorporated in the priesthood of Christ who is priest, prophet, and king. A number of documents from the Roman Catholic Church attempt to make the distinction between common and ministerial but it is never clearly sufficiently explained how the baptism character differs from the Character at priestly ordination.<sup>18</sup>

The major difference between respondents and the exegetes is that respondents are focused on the quality of relationship that reaches to anyone in the society, whereas for the exegetes, it is a role given to Christians.

#### **5.4.4 Theme 4: Confession and Absolution**

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<sup>18</sup> Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947) and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963) Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy set out the discussion but there were still unsolved issues. The topic came again for discussion under the Church dogmatic constitution, *Lumen Gentium* Cf. Aloys Grillmeier, "The People of God", in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, 5 vols (London: Burns & Oates, 1967): 1.153-185 especially 156. This topic is first and foremost about the priesthood of Christ, then how the baptised and the Ordained Persons participate in the priesthood of Christ and cooperate with each other in the Church. For a comprehensive discussion between baptised and ministerial priesthood cf. Melvin Michalski, *Doctoral Dissertation of the Universal Priesthood of the Baptized and the Ministerial Priesthood of the Ordained in Vatican II and in Subsequent Theology: Understanding "Essentia et non Gradu Tatum"*, *Lumen Gentium No. 10* (Lewiston, New York: Mellen, 1996); Georges Chantraine, "Synodalité, expression du Sacerdoce Commun et du sacerdoce ministerial?" *Nouvelle revue Théologique* 113 (1991): 340-362; Philip Rosato, "Priesthood of the Baptized and Priesthood of the Ordained", *Gregorianum* 68 (1987): 215-266; David Coffey, "The common and the Ordained Priesthood", *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 209-236.

The theme of confession and absolution was not mentioned by the exegetes because they see nothing in this pericope that speaks of confession and absolution and avoid imposing anachronistic categories on to biblical texts. This theme is important to respondents because it connects them to God and the Church. There is no survey of forgiveness of sins in the three of the Congregations I studied as far as I am aware, because the standard liturgy of forgiveness of sins is within every gathered church Worship service. The Roman Catholic Church has a regular survey about the sacrament of confession. This is a national survey rather than for a single community.<sup>19</sup> This leaves all the four congregations without a census on the forgiveness of sins. All that is known about the four congregations is the estimated number of lay people who attend the Church Services each weekend, which will give the estimated number of people who receive communion rather than confession and absolution.

The theme of confession and absolution differs in names and rites from one denomination to another. Despite the differences among the four congregations, what is common across all 48 respondents was their individual conversation with a merciful God. It is in the inner heart of one's being where one meets with God. For instance, one respondent notes: "I have noticed more of late that when I go in to the church and have prepared myself for the sacrament, talk to God as I go through it, ask forgiveness from God, I get a greater sense of God's forgiveness than I do when I'm actually with the priest" (5.2.3 Prayers [RC12]).

For respondents at St Francis Xavier Cathedral, confession and absolution from the Ordained Person is an essential part of God's forgiveness of sins, although most of them know well that God forgives their sins prior to the absolution of the Ordained Person. However, some are happy with the structure of individual confession, while others feel compelled to follow it. Here is an example in point: "I guess the forgiveness comes through the priest. It is the way the government of the Church has made it. It is the structure of the Church. That is the way the Church has decided it to be" (Ordained Person [RC1]). A significant number of Roman Catholic respondents express their frustration at attending individual confession and just attend the Worship Service, for instance, "For me forgiveness happens during the introductory rite at the beginning of the Mass where I confess my sins

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<sup>19</sup> The National Centre for Pastoral Research (formerly Pastoral Research Office) carries out the National Life Surveys of the various activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia (2001, 2006, 20011, and 2016).

and ask forgiveness from God” (5.4.5 Confession in Mass [RC11]). The national survey shows a dramatic decline in people attending confession and absolution in the Roman Catholic Church. Recently, Pope Francis followed his predecessors in calling people to attend the sacrament of confession for God to forgive their sins.<sup>20</sup> This is an indication that confession and absolution is not only decreasing among Roman Catholic adherents more generally, but also disappearing at least among some, as indicated by some respondents from St Francis Xavier Cathedral.

The other denominations, as represented by Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Pilgrim Uniting Church and St Peter’s Anglican Cathedral, have a general admission of sins and absolution. St Peter’s Anglican Cathedral maintains the maxim: “All may, some should, none must”, the anaphora that reminds respondents that general confession and absolution is the norm.<sup>21</sup> Sacramental confession and absolution may be done for those who wish. The Pilgrim Uniting Church extends confession and absolution into daily activities to families, schools and work places, while the Bethlehem Lutheran respondents tend to combine both absolutions in Church Services and in individual confession.

For respondents regardless of their respective congregation, confessing one’s sins to God is the preferred rite, rather than individual confession to an Ordained Person. This type of confession differs from the early type of confession exercised in the early Church or during the Carolingian era or even today in the Roman Catholic Church. This is one-on-one with God. Among the exegetes, Hoskyns (from the Anglican tradition) agrees with Cyril of Alexandria who advocated individual confession to an Ordained Person. Although Hoskyns does not explicitly say so, his work seems to support the sacramental aspect institutionalised at Trent. Here are the two reasons that Cyril of Alexandria gave: the priest remits or retains the sins in two ways. First, the priest welcomes people to baptism and in certain circumstances excludes some from the community, namely those who threaten the

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<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, “Don’t treat confessional like a dry cleaner” *Catholic Herald*, Wednesday, 22 March 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Prayer of confession is said by all the congregation and the Ordained Person says the absolution alone cf. The Anglican Church of Australia, *A Prayer Book for Australia: for use together with The Book of Common Prayer (1662) and An Australian Prayer Book (1978)* (Chicago Illinois: Broughton Publishing, 1995), 120, 126; at morning and evening prayer the congregation kneel while saying the prayer of confession followed by the Ordained Person who stands alone and says the absolution, *A Prayer Book for Australia*, 4-5.

unity and peace of the community. Second, the priest has the authority of the Risen Lord to forgive sins, based on the gospel of John 20:19-23.<sup>22</sup>

By following this line of thought, Hoskyns supports the concept of individual confession and absolution as directed by the Council of Trent (one-on-one confession and absolution between parishioner and priest). I will quote Hoskyns for a better understanding of the context:

The traditional Catholic exegesis of the passage, emphasised at the Council of Trent, insists on finding here the sanction for the sacrament of Penance. 'If anyone say that these words of the Saviour ... are not to be understood of the power of remitting and retaining sins in the sacrament of Penance, as the Catholic church has from the beginning understood, but shall twist their meaning so as to apply them to the authority of preaching the Gospel, and not the institution of this sacrament, let him be anathema' (Council of Trent, Sess. XIV. Can. 3, see Cornelius a Lapide). If this means no more than the words contain a reference to the remission and retention of sins committed after conversion, the Catholic exegesis must be upheld, since both the cleaning and the forgiveness of the sins of believer are important elements in the Johannine teaching (xiii, 3-11; 1 John 1. 7-9, v.16, 17), of which the rehabilitation of Peter is the classical illustration (xxi. 15-17).<sup>23</sup>

First, it needs to be understood that Hoskyns died before the completion of this commentary. Secondly, in the Preface Francis Davey notes that by the time Hoskyns died, the commentary of the Fourth Gospel was completed up to page 294. The rest of the commentary was in form of draft well before 1931.<sup>24</sup> Thirdly, it is not certain whether these words are the proper words of Hoskyns or the editor. However, considering the quotation above, if the above are the words of Hoskyns, first, he disagrees with the Catholic exegesis of the passage. Secondly, he put a condition and according to such condition he agrees with the statement. Third, he supports his argument by drawing on an internal Johannine theology of forgiveness of sins like his colleagues. I find this theological perspective is in line with most of the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church who see confession as the sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ based on the Gospel of John 20:19-23. Here are a few quotations: "For Catholics, this is the sacrament of reconciliation where we confess our sins and the priest forgives them" (5.4.1 Sacrament of confession [RC1]); "As a

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<sup>22</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint John*, II (London 1885), 680.

<sup>23</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>24</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* 9-10.

Catholic, I understood that this was the starting point for the sacrament of confession” [RC4]; “Only in as much as the priest grants absolutions for sins. Those times my sins are forgiven” (5.4.4 Priestly absolution [RC7]).

In contrast, Brown and Barrett reject the decision made by the Council of Trent that the sacrament of confession was instituted by Christ on the ground of John 20:19-23.<sup>25</sup> Brown states: “In summary, we doubt that there is sufficient evidence to confine the power of forgiving and holding of sin, granted in John 20:23, to a specific exercise of power in the Christian community, whether that be admission to Baptism or forgiveness in Penance”.<sup>26</sup> Further, the declaration of Trent was formulated to refute the Protestant argument that the power to forgive sins was given to all Christians and that power was for preaching and welcoming people to baptism.<sup>27</sup> Most of the Roman Catholic scholars do not agree with the Trent interpretation of Penance based on John 20:19-23. A document *Lamentabili sane* released in 1907, Decree Condemning Certain Errors of the Modernists, reads “The words of the Lord, ‘Receive the holy Spirit (sic); whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained’ (John 20:22-23), in no way refer to the Sacrament of Penance, no matter what the Fathers of Trent were pleased to assert.”<sup>28</sup> Bultmann remains the only exegete who completely ignores confession and absolution.

The respondents understand that absolution is given 1) during Church Service after one has directly confessed to God, 2) at sacramental confession, and 3) sometimes in ordinary day to day life. For respondents, confession is achieved in the process of saying prayers of confessions in the form of 1a) in telling God one’s failures without the intermediary, 2a) and in reciting one’s sins in reflective and sorrowful way before the Ordained Person, and 3a) in intimate conversation with a confider. For those respondents who believe in absolution after prayer of confession during the Church Service (1 and 1a) say words such as “in the confession part of the service, I hand over my sins. And because I accept that Jesus died for my sins, then my sins are forgiven. So, I go like through cleansing every Sunday when we have a Communion Service (2.5.1 Church Service [U3])”. “When we did

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<sup>25</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1036.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1044.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1041.

<sup>28</sup> Dean P. Béchard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2002), 186.

have the third rite of reconciliation, we used to receive a gathering absolution from the priest. I would like to see the third rite of reconciliation returned. I think it was a major mistake to stop the use of that rite. It stops the community an opportunity to have people's sin absolved. People who struggled to go to the normal or formal forms of reconciliation, in other words one-to-one confession, are denied completely the opportunity to confess their sins and be forgiven" [RC7] 5.5.3 Third rite of confession)". For those respondents who make sacramental confession by reciting their sins to the Ordained Person (2 and 2a), say word to the effect of: "The Priest is the administrator of the sacrament. I cannot receive a pardon of God without going to the priest. The priest is the vehicle through which the forgiveness of God passes through. No one else. What I like about the priests in the Catholic Church is that there is a direct line of succession from St Peter, the leader of the apostles, and all the way through the centuries. It has been handed down through the Holy Spirit (5.3.1 Ordained Person [RC9]"; "Forgiveness of sins does not come from the priest. The priest is an instrument who has power and authority to forgive. The priest is a conduit through which the forgiveness flows. The priest is an instrument through whom God acts. I go to any one of the parish priests. The disciples that Jesus gave the authority to forgive sins were the twelve apostles (5.3.1 Ordained Person [RC7]". Other respondents who believe in absolution after a conversation with a trusted friend say things to the extent of "Maybe anyone can give the absolution. I don't think Jesus requires certificates. I don't think God requires a Bachelor of Theology for a Christian fellow to absolve sins. And I think the absolution can come from others (absolution 2.4.3 [U2])".

By and large, comparing the exegetes to the respondents on confession and absolution, I find that the exegetes do not see confession and absolution in this passage, whereas respondents feel confident after a conversation with God about their shortcomings and can hear the words of absolution either in Church or from relatives or friends. Barrett emphasises the absolution within the context of John 20:19-23 and not confession. For respondents, confession is essential because one shows God that s/he is sorrowful for having offended God and asks for forgiveness. For the exegetes, confession is not

mentioned in the five verses under study and therefore it might be a harmonisation of the passage rather than reading what the evangelist has written.<sup>29</sup>

#### **5.4.5 Theme 5: Eucharistic Church Service**

The Eucharistic Church Service is central to the life of the respondents because it enables them to meet the Risen Lord in their physical bodies and thereby experience the forgiveness of their sins. This is an effective and spiritual means by which the Risen Lord enters the life of individuals and remains with them. The peace of Christ is the result for the respondents that this spiritual encounter that has taken place has also brought healing and forgives the sins. For example, “when I have been to confession a couple of times with faith that God forgives me, I felt a deep sense of peace after that (5.2.1 Belief in God’s forgiveness [RC2])”.

The exegetes did not mention the theme of the Eucharistic Church Service. They describe the pericope as the Risen Lord coming back from the Father, recreating his disciples with the presence of Christ, commissioning, and giving absolution.<sup>30</sup> Barrett notes that; “the image of breathing does not necessary mean that the Spirit is understood in material sense. It means rather that Jesus is personally communicating and committing himself to his disciples in the person of the Spirit”.<sup>31</sup> The physical presence among the disciples is depicted in Jn 20:19-23 as strengthening them. The evangelist reports that the disciples rejoiced after they have seen the Lord because he showed them his hands and his side.

The risen Lord pronounces peace upon his disciples twice in this short pericope, in verses 19 and 21. This greeting is considered to not be an ordinary Jewish salutation but is regarded according to Johannine theology to be both “eschatological”<sup>32</sup> and “a statement of fact”.<sup>33</sup> It is the presence of the risen Lord who reveals himself to the disciples and restores their wholeness. Peace understood in this way becomes what respondents describe as the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ received in communion. However, the exegetes did not mention the theme of the Eucharistic Church Service. If peace signifies

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<sup>29</sup> Béchard, *The Scripture Documents*, 1042.

<sup>30</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 545.

<sup>31</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 570.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1021.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1021.



shalom not as a simple Jewish greeting but as the presence of the Risen Lord, would peace mean the Eucharistic Church Service from the respondents' perspective? If so, then the exegetes and the respondents are speaking about forgiveness of sins in differing terms but meaning that the presence of the risen Lord makes one holy, sanctifies and therefore erase all sins. When respondents speak about peace, they refer to the peace of the Risen Lord. For the respondents, this peace signifies a profound unity between them and God. For example; [U11] notes that one of the signs of forgiveness is that "we are at peace with God. Jesus died for me. The sins are forgiven because he had done the work" ([U11] 2.1.2). For the exegetes, the peace is "the enduring presence of Jesus and the gift of divine sonship that is the basis of Christian peace."<sup>34</sup>

Three of the four congregations are able to offer Holy Communion to anyone who comes to their Church Worship, as witnessed by the respondents, whereas the Roman Catholic Church cannot. "I used to worship in the Catholic faith. There in the Catholic service you need to go to confession before you have the privilege of receiving communion or all other things. In the Anglican Church it is like turned around -- you are forgiven. If you repent in your heart, you are forgiven." (4.5.1 Church Service [A2]) In a similar fashion another respondent said to me that he was married to a Catholic girl and in his experience of the Catholic Church, you just can't go and receive communion. The normative theology of the Catholic Church is that no one should receive Holy Communion without previously having attended confession. It is notable that not only other Christians are not welcomed to the Lord's Table in the Roman Catholic Church, but their own members are not allowed to receive Holy Communion in a state of sinfulness, as they would be condemning themselves. This theological concept of the body and blood of Christ -- instead of becoming a fountain of life in one's life but becoming a curse -- can be traced back to the teaching of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32. This teaching has made its way through the Church Fathers, and down to the contemporary times. The evidence from the Roman Catholic respondents is that they do not associate Holy Communion with the forgiveness of sins, which suggests that a theology derived from 1 Cor. 11:29-30 is primary for them.

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<sup>34</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1035.

The Catholic Church insists that Holy Communion should be received by one who is in a good state of life, otherwise one eats the body and drinks the blood of Christ to his/her own condemnation.<sup>35</sup> It is evident that from the theme of the Eucharistic Church Service, different congregations have differing doctrinal teaching about the Eucharist. In the Roman Catholic Church, only those who have reached the age of reason should receive Holy Communion, and then only if they are in good standing with Church and with God. This is in line with the traditional interpretation of the teaching of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27 (Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord). More recent interpretation,<sup>36</sup> including Roman Catholic, points out that Paul's concern is not primarily individual, but for the corporate body of Christ being unworthily represented in their community behaviour towards one another.

This is instructive because the congregations that consider Holy Communion to be a symbol of Christ see a more direct link with the forgiveness of sins in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ than the respondents whose normative teachings claims that "the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life."<sup>37</sup> In other words, one emphasises the grace, the other emphasises the holy—which includes the danger of being excommunicated from the community. To participate in the Eucharist in a state of sin, one eats his or her own damnation. For one, the reception of the Eucharist forgives sins while for others it is a condemnation to receive communion in a state of sin. The respondents state: "The Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ. It's forgives. To me it's symbolic." (3.5.2 Service of Communion [L8]). Similarly, "I receive forgiveness in the Body and Blood of Christ. I think it's very mysterious." (2.5.2 Service of Communion [U11])

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<sup>35</sup> CCC 1385; Code of the Canon Law code 916; *Didache* 10, 9.

<sup>36</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners, New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 165-166.; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 431; Joachim Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 261; Paul Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Oxford University Press, 2004), Joseph Fitzmyer, 1 Corinthians, Anchor Biblical Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 427; Günther Bornkamm, "Lord's Supper and Church in Paul", in *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). Bornkamm argues that the meals which take place just before the liturgical Eucharist at Corinth disturbed the worthiness of the Lord's Supper; Dennis Smith, *From the Symposium to Eucharist* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 279

<sup>37</sup> CCC 1324; *Lumen Gentium* 11.

The exegetes are far removed from the understanding of the respondents on this theme. Respondents are concerned with their real life, experience, and the possibility of living a sinless life. For respondents, Holy Communion, preaching and conversion are some of the ways in which God forgives their sins. In contrast, the exegetes consider preaching, Holy Communion and repentance to be some of the harmonised biblical texts from other Gospels that narrates the life of the risen Christ.<sup>38</sup> There is a huge disconnection between exegetes and respondents. The exegetes focus on the text while respondents are concerned with the life of their souls. Again, this is a methodological and hermeneutical issue.

Respondents note that “The message is that in coming to the service, you are forgiven. You can start with fresh eyes going forward” (4.5.1 Church Service [A2]); “The entire service makes me feel that I’ve intentionally spend time in the presence of God. And I have as a part of that been forgiven for the things I’ve got wrong” (4.5.1 Church Service [A11]).

Briefly, the exegetes are specific to the meaning and context of wording, whereas the respondents are confronted with the fresh reality of God’s forgiveness through the Church Service and in particular, the sacred meal of the Church. In this instance, peace and the Eucharistic Service of the Church have equal or similar meaning. It is worth noting that Holy Communion as blessing leads to linking it with the experience of the forgiveness of sins but when it is considered as potential curse (1 Cor. 11:29-30) that link is broken.

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<sup>38</sup> CCC., 1041.

#### **5.4.6 Theme 6: Anointing and Blessing**

This theme was not mentioned by the exegetes. The exegetes have written about the consecration of the twelve, the insufflation,<sup>39</sup> and the Spirit/Paraclete that transforms life. This consecration involves some anointing and blessing because the person is commissioned to forgive sins. On the other hand, the respondents used anointing and blessing to express God's intervention in their lives at the moment when God changed their vulnerability into becoming a healed strong whole person. One of the respondents said: "I'm still thinking a couple of times I faced really very serious surgery. And in both cases I actually sought out the anointing of the sick and forgiveness in that. I find that very great. I find an extraordinary strengthening, and a wonderful sense of peace and trusting God with that anointing" (5.5.1 Healing rite [RC8]). Anointing and blessing can transform physical weakness into strength and sanctify the heart with incomprehensible grace that increased faith in God. Having said this, it does not mean that this is a common practice because Churches use the Anointing and Blessing in situations for the dying persons who most of the times died although in rare occasions the dying person recovers.

Anointing is connected with mystical happenings. This implies a direct contact with God, as one of the respondents says: "I had life threatening illness. I almost died. They had called the priest who anointed me with oil and said some prayers [...] I survived by God's grace. It was a disease which had about 26 deaths. And one or two people survived" (5.5.1 Healing rite [RC9]). The ultimate search for God's forgiveness of sins is to attain unity with God. Such unity with God begins in one's heart and ultimately grows into various relationships. 'Anointing and blessing' is a sensitive theme, particularly so after an experience between life and death. When one is threatened by physical ailment or, one asks for anointing, the aim is to get better or recover. Forgiveness of sins in this case is second.

The exegetes did not use the theme anointing and blessing. For the exegetes, the disciples were consecrated. The exegetes refer to John 17 to support the meaning of Jesus breathing on the disciples. Jesus was imparting to them the Holy Spirit that sanctified and

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<sup>39</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 544.

empowered them with the “power and glory which is superhuman.”<sup>40</sup> The disciples are transformed into the image of Christ in order to do what Christ was able to do.

The theme of anointing and blessing is closely related to consecration. By consecration, the exegetes mean filled with the grace to announce the forgiveness of sins. This is an inward change, the grace that allows one to continue the mission of Christ to forgive sins. By anointing and blessing, the respondents mean that one is filled with the grace, the purpose of which is to restore both physical and spiritual health. Consecration also means dedication to God and making holy. It is equally true that anointing and blessing makes a person holy by washing away the sins through the symbolism of anointing.

From the background of consecration and anointing and blessing, both exegetes and respondents begin with the same point, which is empowerment with the Holy Spirit, but end with differing results. While the focus of the exegetes is to make holy, the concern of the respondents is to get life in order. While the result of the exegetes is to forgive sins, the result of the respondents is to be cured from illness and be forgiven by God. The respondents see what is real and immediate in their living situation, whereas the exegetes see the truth outside of their own situation and a general reality. Respondents are touched by the experience. For instance, one respondent notes: “When my husband divorced me six weeks after we got married. It was difficult. I needed a priest. He came we talk and blessed me. It was not easy. But his blessing gave me peace” (4.6.3 Blessings [A3]). Respondents are fully involved in the situation, “When I have confessed my sins and receive the forgiveness, is also a strength that comes to not go back and do it. It almost a power given to me to not go back and do the same thing. But receiving that word of forgiveness helped me, strengthened me to not going back there. In addition of what I talk about during the Church Service, I've also had a confession time one-on-one with another person in the congregation where I've spoken about what it was that I knew had gone away from God's will. And they gave me a word of forgiveness: ‘in the name of Jesus Christ, Jesus forgives your sins’, in that time, I also experienced the strength to not going back and do it again.” 3.1.5 Assurance of forgiveness [L1]. For the respondents, to feel peace after a spiritual

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<sup>40</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

exercise it is a sign of forgiveness and blessings whereas exegetes study the text with no attachment, less feelings but with more intellectual precision.

Briefly, the most obvious difference between exegetes and respondents regarding the anointing and blessing is that respondents are speaking from a firsthand experience, from the heart whereas the exegetes speak of the same situation in different words that lead to differing results. The similarity is sanctification. The difference is that sanctification for the respondents is a result of healing, because they focus on personal forgiveness of sins, whereas the exegetes regard sanctification as a means to forgive sins. Both exegetes and respondents used different words but are applying the concepts according to their respective contexts – academic, or personal.

#### **5.4.7 Theme 7: Sending of the Son by the Father**

The Father–Son relationship is the crux of God’s forgiveness of sins in humanity according to the exegetes. The sending of the Son by the Father is the foundation and model of the sending of the disciples by the Son. The continuity of the mission to forgive sins from the Father to the Son and the disciples is permanent and effective to the disciples and their successors as it was effective from the Father to the Son. Unless one understands verse 21, one cannot grasp the meaning of verse 22 and 23 because these three verses are intertwined and should be read as a unity.<sup>41</sup>

“The disciples can forgive and hold men’s sins because now the risen Jesus has sent them as the Father sent him.”<sup>42</sup> In this sense, v.23 to forgive or retains sins should be seen through the lens “of Jesus’ own actions toward sins.”<sup>43</sup> It is implying that if the Father did not send the son, forgiveness of sins would have remained distant. But because the eternal Word who was with the Father from the beginning became flesh (John 1: 1-18) and sends them (John 20:21) followed by the breathing in them the power of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22), then divine forgiveness of sins became available to the disciples. For the exegetes, the privilege to forgive sins has been passed on from Jesus to the disciples in the words of John 20: 21b (As the Father has sent me, even so I send you).

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<sup>41</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1045.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1042.

The Father sending the Son was not a theme of interest among the respondents. However, in the forgiveness of sins, the respondents see Jesus' utmost love to die on the Cross so that their sins may be forgiven. The respondents see Jesus as saviour, rather than as Son. "Of course, you're going to think about Jesus' death. Why he died. He has died to redeem us all" (2.2.2 Signs of forgiveness 3.1.2 signs of forgiveness [U11] 3.1.2 signs of forgiveness); "By Jesus going to the cross, He stood in me stead. Jesus takes my burden and makes me free (3.1.2 signs of forgiveness [L3]"; "It was completely God's grace that saved me that he reached out and gave me faith to believe that Jesus died for my sins. So, I believe that Jesus died for my sins. I trust that Jesus could die for my sins, descend into hell, defeat sin, death and the devil and rise again on the third day. Because of this he bought with that my forgiveness of sins, and my eternal life." (3.2.1 Belief in God's forgiveness [L1])

The respondents understood that they are forgiven by the death of Jesus rather than by the Father sending the Son or in the light of Jesus' own action toward sin.<sup>44</sup> The relation of Father/Son was not a significant theme for the respondents.

Briefly, the exegetes and the respondents differed on the significant premise understanding of God's forgiveness of sins. While the exegetes grounded forgiveness of sins on verse 21b, the Father/Son relationship,<sup>45</sup> the respondents placed it on the death of Christ on the Cross.

#### **5.4.8 Theme 8: The Twelve**

The theme of the Twelve, like that of the agent of forgiveness, is a subject of disputation among both exegetes and respondents. Brown notes that "the characteristically Johannine outlook does not demote the Twelve, but rather turns these chosen disciples into representatives of all the Christians who would believe in Jesus on their word".<sup>46</sup> Most respondents and exegetes support the Twelve as the first agents of forgiveness of sins. In contrast, Bultmann notes that the Twelve have no important function in the Fourth

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<sup>44</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1042.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1042.

<sup>46</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1034.

Gospel.<sup>47</sup> Most respondents agree with Bultmann, although they still expect their Ordained Person to be more Godly, probably because of the abuse people have suffered at the hand of the Church.

In contrast to Bultmann, the three exegetes reject such a claim, on the basis that there is nothing in the text that supports such a position. On the contrary, the Twelve have been given the respect due to them. For Brown the post resurrection appearance was to the Twelve minus Judas.<sup>48</sup> For Brown and his two colleagues this is a fact attested by the Synoptics (Luke 24:33; Matthew 28:16, and the Marcan Appendix 16:14).<sup>49</sup> Although the Twelve might have been with other disciples as Luke reports, these exegetes insist that “the tradition of the appearance only to the twelve had importance, and the words that Jesus spoke were addressed to them”.<sup>50</sup> The pericope of John 20:19-23 does not mention the Twelve but the disciples. The evangelist does not give a detail account of who and how many of the disciples were in the locked room. It becomes evident that it is difficult to settle the question of who the disciples were in that room. But, it seems that the pre-Gospel sources identify the Twelve as the disciples to whom Jesus addressed at last supper and in the following events of appearance after the resurrection.

St Paul also reported the appearance to the twelve in 1 Corinthians 15:5 (and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve).<sup>51</sup> Brown acknowledges that the Fourth Gospel does not mention the Twelve in relation to the appearance and that some commentators have argued that the Fourth Gospel disregards the importance of the Twelve. This can be read as being “against the theory of the apostolic succession”.<sup>52</sup> For Brown there is nothing in the Fourth Gospel that rejects the role of the twelve. On the contrary the twelve are given special role, like in John 6: 66-67. In this instance, the Twelve are “the foundation of the wall of heavenly Jerusalem”.<sup>53</sup> Shortly after the pericope under study, in the second appearance of Jesus, the Fourth Gospel mentioned Thomas, one of the Twelve; this directs

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<sup>47</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, 537; cf. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel of John*, 1024.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1033-1034.

<sup>49</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1034.

<sup>50</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1034.

<sup>51</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1034.

<sup>53</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1034.



the attention of the reader to a small group of the disciples, the Twelve. The question is not whether the twelve were more important than the rest of the disciples or vice versa, but rather when does the evangelist make use of the twelve in their role as the closest friends of Jesus and when are they to be understood as the historical representatives of all past and future disciples of Jesus who accept Jesus as their Lord and saviour on the witness of the Twelve?<sup>54</sup>

The pericope of John 20:19-23 does not specify the role of the Twelve nor mention them. All that is said is the disciples. It is not clear whether the disciples in this context constitute the historical role of the Twelve or represent all Christians. However, the role of the Twelve should not be underestimated as Brown rightly notes that the role of the twelve is “unshakable”.<sup>55</sup> While the synoptic Gospels support the sending of a bigger group rather than the smaller one, there is more likelihood of the risen Lord sending a small group than a large one in John 20:19-23 because, as Hoskyns, Brown, and Barrett attest, the disciples whom Jesus commissioned were the twelve (although they were ten with the absent of Judas and Thomas. The reference to the twelve rather than ten or eleven is consistent with the nature of the small group of the disciples of Jesus). This argument has been rejected by Bultmann, who insists that Jesus sent all the large group of disciples.

The respondents understand that Jesus had Twelve disciples. Some understand that the mission to forgive sins was given to the twelve while others insist that the responsibility to forgive sins was given to every Christian. Those who believe that the power to forgive sins was given to the Twelve, support the apostolic succession claiming that the Ordained Person receive such power at ordination. There are those who argue that the power to forgive sins is given to all Christians; some see the Ordained Person as the first person to go to for the forgiveness of sins because of the Church teachings; while others either ignore the teaching of the Church and do it themselves through prayer and meditation or find some trusted people to share their burdens. Some examples, “The priest read a script and led the congregation through various stages and then gives us time to reflect and absolve our sins. In terms of forgiveness, I felt I can start fresh again (5.5.3 Third rite of confession [RC6]”; “I like this anonymity because I’m really in communion with God. It’s God and me.

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<sup>54</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1034.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) 102-105.

And the priest is just an intermediary. So, I prefer not to know them (5.5.1 Unmediated) [RC12]”. “All I understand was that always to forgive sin was one of the things a priest is granted at his consecration. The same power our Lord gave to the apostles as in this text of John” (5.3.1 Ordained Person [RC4]; “I don’t go because I don’t feel the need to go to anybody. I like to sit in Church and contemplate my failings and all that I have done wrong. Examining my conscience and all that had happened to me. Also, I don’t see the need for confession or to go and tell somebody what you’ve done wrong. I can reconcile to God through my own mind” (5.5.1 Unmediated) [RC6].

Briefly, the exegetes and the respondents agree that Jesus had twelve disciples, but differ in explaining how the power of forgiveness comes down to the contemporary Church. While most of the exegetes find that the twelve are a continuation of the power to forgive sins based on in the relationship between the Father/Son (John 20:21), the majority of respondents believe that every disciple of Jesus can forgive and receive forgiveness of sins. Some hold that it is through ordination in the Church that officially an Ordained Person is given the power to forgive sins. The difference between respondents and exegetes is ecclesiological and theological. This means the respondents see ordination in relation to the apostolic succession, whereas the exegetes see this primarily as the Father sending the Son, who confronts the world and who in turn sends the Twelve in obedience to the Father.

#### **5.4.9 Theme 9: Disciples**

The theme of disciples continued the theme of the Twelve and now concentrates on contemporary discipleship. The respondents did not look at the disciples as a theme rather as a category. Every Christian is a disciple and can forgive sins by the virtue of baptism. To a certain degree, even non-disciples can forgive sins in the case when they have been offended. For example, I think the gift of absolution which actually can be given by the congregation can give the gift to move on [...] And I think the absolution can come from others (2.4.3 Absolution [U2] 2.4.3 Absolution)”. “There are people out in the community who aren’t churchgoers. Who are quite capable of forgiving sins of other people (4.3.3 People in community [A8]”; “It can be anyone. It depends on the person, wisdom, compassion, and maturity. It all depends on their hearts and wisdom. It is not something that comes with the role” (4.3.3 People in community [A1].

For the exegetes, the Twelve are understood as the close, small group of disciples<sup>56</sup> as opposed to the large group followers of disciples of Jesus. Brown notes; “that while in the Johannine pre-Gospel tradition ‘the disciples’ to whom the risen Jesus speaks were the Eleven, we cannot be certain whether the evangelist is thinking of them as a historical group or as symbols of all Christian disciples”.<sup>57</sup> For the exegetes, the disciples carried the message of forgiveness. The reference to the letter of 1 John 1:7-9; 1 John 2 :12 are examples of one asking forgiveness of sins directly from God. “The possibility that Christians have a role in the forgiveness of one another’s sins, at least by prayer, is seen in 1 John v 16-17, where there is encouragement to pray for the forgiveness of sins that are not deadly, but not for sins that are deadly.<sup>58</sup>

For both exegetes and respondents, every baptised person is a disciple of Jesus and can forgive sins.<sup>59</sup> “It is all of us. It is everyone’s responsibility not just the chosen few. [A9] 4.3.2 All Christians)”. Bultmann is clear on the subject of who has been given the power to forgive sins. For Bultmann “it is self-evident that it is not a special apostolic authority that is imparted here, but that the community as such is equipped with this authority; for as in Chapters 13–16 the *μαθηταί* represent the community.”<sup>60</sup> The exegetes are not explicitly saying that all baptised can forgive sins, but this is implied. For instance, Hoskyns writes: “The controversy whether the commission is given to the Church as a whole or to the apostles is irrelevant. There is no distinction here between the Church and the ministry; both completely overlap.”<sup>61</sup> Brown notes that “It is up to the denomination as to who in the community has the authority for such a ministry.” Barrett remarks that “the commission of v. 21, the gift of the Spirit in v. 22, the authority of v. 23 are given to the apostolic church.”<sup>62</sup> And then goes on to explain that the Fourth Gospel used the word *ἀπόστολος* only once in John 13:16. The use of *ἀπόστολος* is for convenience and does not have any “technical term.”<sup>63</sup> What appears to be essential for Barrett is that the Twelve

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<sup>56</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1041; for more elaboration on the subject, 1034.

<sup>58</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1044.

<sup>59</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545; Bultmann, 693; Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1044; Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568-569.

<sup>60</sup> Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 693.

<sup>61</sup> Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 545.

<sup>62</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568.

<sup>63</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

were “representatives of the whole Ecclesia of the future, whether associated with other disciples or not, that they had given to them those two assurances and charges of our Lord, about the receiving of the Holy Spirit and the remitting or retaining of sins.”<sup>64</sup> This means the Twelve cannot be ignored in the mission of Jesus forgiving sins. How do contemporary disciples forgive sins? Barrett sees the Twelve as the “apostolic Church, commissioned by Christ, only in virtue of the fact that Jesus sanctified it (17.19) and breath the Spirit into it (v. 22), and only so far as it maintains an attitude of perfect obedience to Jesus.”<sup>65</sup> The transition from the Twelve to all disciples is not clear but implies because Barrett insists that “... the life and mission of the Church are meaningless if they are detached from this historical and theological context.”<sup>66</sup> Similarly, while some of the respondents think that the Ordained Person has the privilege to forgive sins according to normative theology, others ignored the normative teaching of their denomination and pray to God directly for the forgiveness of sins. God’s forgiveness of sins happens first and foremost in one’s heart. This is then confirmed through the Church service either through the Eucharist, confession or through prayers of forgiveness. Outside of the Church Service, forgiveness of sins is assured through words of encouragement and absolution from confiders.

#### **5.4.10 Theme 10: Discrimination and Judgement**

The presence of Christ in the world is the cause of judgement.<sup>67</sup> For the exegetes, sin is understood as unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah, and Son of God. The theme of discrimination and judgement were not mentioned by the respondents. Most respondents although were shocked by v. 23b of John 20:19-23 that speaks of retaining sins, they did rather focus on forgiveness of sins.

The theme of discrimination and judgement is “a Johannine realized eschatology and dualism that offer a background for understanding the forgiveness and holding of sin in John 20:23”.<sup>68</sup> Verse 21 is connected to the disciples’ ability to forgive sins in the world based on the Father sending the Son model. Although the two words; discrimination and

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<sup>64</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 568.

<sup>65</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

<sup>66</sup> Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, 569.

<sup>67</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1042.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1043.

judgement are not words found in John 20:19-23, the three exegetes except Bultmann see a relation between Jesus forgiving and retaining sins and the disciples' mission to forgive and retain sins following Jesus' words and deeds. Because Jesus claims to have come into this world for Judgement so do his disciples (John 9: 39-41). The judgement is not a social or political judgement but rather consists of peoples' choice between believing in Jesus or remain in sin (a division between good and evil in John 3:17-21). Metaphorically, Jesus claims to cause blindness for those who claim to see and enable other to see. This seems to be the role of the disciple in the world, a role that causes hatred for some (John 17:18) and salvation for others (John 17:20).

Unlike the exegetes, the respondents' interpretation did not include the theme of discrimination and judgement. The respondents believe that forgiveness of sins is God gifts to them although sometimes it is conditioned by one's willingness to repent. The exegetes see forgiveness in terms of post baptismal sins and therefore, a discriminatory presence of Jesus in the world. To this end, like Jesus, "the disciples continue to discriminate in the world".<sup>69</sup> For those who believe in the Risen Lord, their sins are forgiven, but those who stubbornly refuse to believe in the words of the disciples, their sins remain. Sins in Johannine theology is a lack of belief in Jesus as the Son of God. While respondents agree with the exegetes that faith in Jesus is the key to forgiveness of sins, they also disagree that faith in Jesus without repentance removes sin. One respondent states: "I understand that God completely forgives sins, but we must be repentant of those sins and commit to not sinning again" (5.1.4 Conditional forgiveness [RC7]). While respondents' faith is conditional, it is also radical and makes forgiveness of sins effective. As one respondent notes: "But it my faith that delivers the forgiveness I guess." (4.2.1 [A2]) Similarly, as stated by another respondent: "My faith is in Jesus forgiving my sins. That's my strong base" (3.2.1 [L8]).

The respondents understand that faith is the doorway for forgiveness of sins which suggests a complete trust in God. An acknowledgement of sins and confession from the inner heart with a firm belief in God produces forgiveness of sins. For the respondents,

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<sup>69</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1042. The presence of the disciples in the world makes people bring judgement upon themselves which theologically is realized judgement. People make a choice as to whether to believe in God and have their sins forgiven or to reject God and remain in sins.

once one has faith, then forgiveness of sins follows. This is so important for the respondents and marks a difference from the exegetes' interpretation of faith in John 20:19-23. For the exegetes, lack of faith poses a threat. One believes and is saved, but if one does not believe in Jesus, one perishes. Furthermore, Jesus and the disciples after him are symbols of judgement in the world. The exegetes recall the words of Jesus in John 9:39 that reads: "'Jesus says that he came into the world for judgement: to enable some to see and to cause blindness' for other [...] this discriminatory process is related to the purpose for which God sent the Son into the world."<sup>70</sup> To an extent, the Gospel is a knife with a double edge.

The exegetes refer to Jesus' word "judgement" in John 9:39-4, when Jesus says that he came for judgement in this world. In other words, those who are blind might see, and those who claim to see, might be blind. "Deliberate blindness means remaining in sin; and, implicitly, willingness to see results in being delivered from sin. John iii:17-21 describes a separation of those whose lives are good from those whose lives are evil, and this discriminatory process is related to the purpose for which God *sent* the Son into the world. And so, if the disciples are sent just as the Son was sent, they must continue the discriminatory judgement between good and evil".<sup>71</sup> This healing of the blind man is contrasted with the Pharisees' refusal to believe in Jesus. While relating this reading to forgiveness of sins, the exegetes are speaking about the forgiveness of sins before baptism. Aware of this fact, Johannine theology supports the concept of forgiveness of sins through the admission to baptism. People are left to make a choice which has consequences, namely to remain blind (in sin), or to accept Jesus and be baptised (to be forgiven of one's sins).

John 20:21 refers to John 17:18, which also refers to the sending of the disciples into the world having consequences for love (John 17:20) and hatred (John 17:14). Brown points out that Johannine dualism and realised eschatology prepare the reader to understand verse 23, which is about the forgiving and retaining of sins.<sup>72</sup> The presence of the disciples in the world makes people bring judgement upon themselves which theologically is

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<sup>70</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1042.

<sup>71</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1042.

<sup>72</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1043.

realised judgement. People make a choice as to whether to believe in God and have their sins forgiven or to reject God and remain in sins.<sup>73</sup>

## 5.5 Limitations

These findings were limited to these specific 48 respondents, who may or may not represent the vast majority of their congregations or denominations. They were members of the four congregations residing in the city of Adelaide, aged over 18 years, who willingly chose to participate in the research interview.

## 5.6 Chapter summary

Among the findings, three themes stand out as more significant than the others. The themes of faith, agents of forgiveness, the Eucharistic Church Service are significant. Sins are forgiven by the fact of believing or hearing a word of absolution, or by taking part in the worship service. The respondents understand 'disciple' as everyone in their Christian community. Having said this, they do also acknowledge that Jesus had twelve disciples during his ministry. To some, the ministry of forgiveness of sins was given to the historical twelve disciples. For example, "I understand that Jesus gave to his disciples and the future priests the power to forgive sins (5.4.1 Sacrament of confession [RC12])". To others, the ministry of forgiveness was given to all disciples including themselves. "I think as children of God, we've all been given the task as disciples of God to forgive sins 3.3.2 All Christians [L1])".

What the text of John 20:19-23 suggests is that there is a mysterious power to forgive sins beyond human capability. Brown states: "These are but partial manifestations of a much larger power, namely, the power to isolate, repel, and negate evil and sin, a power given to Jesus in his mission by the Father and given in turn by Jesus through the Spirit to those whom he commissions".<sup>74</sup> For the exegetes, to receive a person to baptism or penance is not in the text of John 20:19-23 but in the Johannine theology but does not exhaust the commission of Jesus.

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<sup>73</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1043.

<sup>74</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John XIII-XXI*, 1044.

The theme of faith is central. It is in believing in God through personal and communal prayers that the respondents are assured of divine forgiveness of their sins. Most respondents believe that God forgives out of love. "God's forgiveness of my sins is based on God's love for me. I think all forgiveness is based on love. And I believe that God's love for me is infinite and individual and God knows me through and through. Because of all of those factors, I believe God forgives my sins totally, because God loves me totally" (5.2.2 God's love [RC8]). This forgiveness of sins should not be taken for granted. In this sense, faith in God should be accompanied by a willingness not to sin again as shown in this statement; "I am generally sorry for my sins and want to change. My belief is that it's always there. Forgiveness is always there. If you repent in your heart, you are forgiven. I like that. This is one of the things that drew me to change from the Catholic Church to the Anglican Church (4.1.4 conditional forgiveness [A2]); "If I regret that it hadn't happened, in that sense I am sorry, I can see that God will say something like 'alright, then we will forget about it'" (4.1.4 conditional forgiveness [A5]).

Themes of God, confession and absolution and anointing and blessings are theologically potent, because they convey the conviction that God's grace is sufficient to ultimately forgive sins. "God's grace is beyond me, I admit to sin and God forgives me through faith" ([U6] 2.1.1 Gratitude to God)". God is seen by the respondents as a forgiver and a lover. "God for me is a God of love ([RC2])".

Lay people interpret John 20:19-23 through the lens of their own personal experience of God's forgiveness of sins, whereas exegetes interpreted the same biblical text based on critical scholarship. They both agree on three themes with some nuances, namely, God, faith and agents of forgiveness. In contrast to the exegetes, lay peoples' reality of forgiveness of sins lies also in three themes not mentioned by the exegetes, notably, confession and absolution, the Eucharistic Church service, and anointing and blessings.

All the themes completed and amplified each other. In the theme of God, respondents showed their total dependence on divine forgiveness of sins. In the theme of faith, respondents indicated that through belief in the God of Jesus, forgiveness of sins is effective. In the theme of agents of forgiveness, respondents experienced love and divine forgiveness of sins through human agency. In the theme of the Eucharistic Church Service, respondents experienced God's forgiveness of sins in the person of the resurrected Lord



who shows his wounded hands and side. In the confession and absolution, respondents understood forgiveness of sins to be an act of moving on with words of blessings. In the theme of anointing and blessing, respondents bodily and spiritually experienced divine cure.

## Chapter 6:

### Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 6.1 Conclusion

This qualitative research study examined lay people's experience of God's forgiveness of sins. The understanding of lay peoples' experience of divine forgiveness of sins as described by 48 individuals was compared to the four biblical exegetes' interpretation of John 20:19-23. During the study, I found that lay peoples' understanding of God's forgiveness of sins was personal, internal affair with God whereas biblical scholars are interpreting a text before them. For scholars the text is external, a written document whose meaning is in the wording. For lay people, the meaning of God's forgiveness of sins is embodied in their faith, Church life, and ultimately in communion with God. While scholars emphasised "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you [disciples]" as the crux of divine forgiveness of sins in the pericope, the 48 respondents emphasised God's love. The two distinctions are clear. God's forgiveness of sins functioned in the heads or from the intellectual realm according to the exegetes whereas lay people were focused on hearts, feelings, and individual experience of life.

There is a better internal Johannine support for relating the forgiveness of sins to admission to Baptism, for some of the Johannine passages that have a secondary baptismal symbolism touch on the question of sin ... in chapter ix the opening of the blind man's eyes (baptismally symbolic; vol 29, p. 381) is contrasted with having the Pharisees' sins remain ix 41.<sup>1</sup>

Churches' liturgies exercised a vital role in allowing people to enter into a visible sacred place that in turn becomes a personal sanctuary within the community of believers. Respondents understood God's forgiveness of their sins in attending Church Services. In Church Services, respondents communicate with God both as individual and as a community. Central to the liturgy of the worship Service, respondents emphasised Communal prayers, hymns, and sermons among elements that brought them close to God and asked forgiveness of their sins. The community offered a spiritual support because one

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1042.

can pray at home and obtain God's forgiveness of sins but preferred to come to Church for communal prayers, companionship, and spirit of love and forgiveness among others. The reason respondents came to church varied, but primarily the churches were spiritual homes for prayers where one meets God. Sometimes churches have been the beacon of salvation and hope for individuals, but for others, the very churches were centres for destruction.

After having looked at the interpretation of John 20:19-23 from the four Biblical exegetes' perspective and the understanding of forgiveness of sins by the 48 respondents, 10 themes emerged.

Three themes, namely, God, faith, and agents of forgiveness are common to both exegetes and respondents. Seven themes are different between the scholars and the lay people among which three belonged only to the respondents and four to the Exegetes. The three themes that are specific to respondents are confession and absolution, the Eucharistic Church Service, and anointing and blessings. Four themes that are unique to the exegetes are, the Sending relation from Father to Son and disciples, the twelve, disciples, and discriminatory role.

While the scholars are concerned with the translation of the text the respondents are touched by the experience of divine forgiveness of their individual sins. For example; the scholars debate how many times the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples. In contrast, for the lay people, the Holy Spirit is God. While the scholars are concerned with the distinction between the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the Holy Spirit that the risen Lord breathed into the disciples, the respondents understand that it is God who forgives their sins. It is absolutely clear that scholars' interpretation of the detail of the text seems to have no impact on the respondents' understanding of forgiveness of sins.

While the scholars think about the Father—Son relation of sending equivalent to the Son sending disciples to be the premise of forgiveness of sins in John 20:23, the respondents completely ignored that perspective. While the Exegetes think of the twelve as the custodians of forgiveness of sins in the world, the respondents are divided on this reality. While the scholars think of all the disciples' role to forgive sins, the respondents are also divided on this theory. While the scholars speak of discriminatory role, the sign of Jesus

judgement in the world, the respondents speak about God's love whose forgiveness is based on love. There is agreement between respondents and exegetes over those points where the exegetes speak of God, including where faith is considered to be the cornerstone for forgiveness. Exegetes and respondents pretty much agree on the role and identification of Agents of forgiveness of sins.

In short, the themes reveal the agreement and disagreement between the Exegetes and respondents that identify a gap between the two kinds of understanding divine forgiveness of sins in John 20:19-23.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

I have laid the ground work and established some potential themes of divine forgiveness of sins according to the experiences reported by 48 lay people. I have identified some core features of forgiveness of sins. And some possible other features of it, some of them did work and others did not. Some of the agreements were made by denominations and others were made by individuals. A logical step next recommendation would be to expend an exploration of the gap between the scholars and the people in the pew to a wide range of people or to a wide range of congregations or wide range of denominations.

What are the varieties of things could be done given that scholars and respondents have little in common? A small study in four congregation. To expend logical next step is to expend an exploration of this study congregations. Establish a potential phenomenon about forgiveness of sins.

A gracious God for God's forgiveness of sins is at the heart of salvation history and involved every person. The findings of this research are significant and can possibly offer hope anyone interested in God's mercy. I should make clear that this research was primary directed to lay people. Now that it is completed and the research question is answered, I have some recommendations to make for churches before mentioning a word or two for further study.

### **6.2.1 For churches**

The four Congregations could have scholarly discussions about God's forgiveness of sins in John 20:19-23. To hear the espoused theology could assist the individual Congregations to address some practical issues at the level of domestic pastoral care which might inform the overall polity of each denomination.

My research offers suggestive evidence that most respondents have expressed their need to confess directly to God than listing their sins before the Ordained Person. This significant finding appears to support the process of ecumenical unity if Churches revised their policies and design a rite of forgiveness of sins for the four Christian communities. The number of people attending individual confession and private absolution has declined dramatically at least in the Roman Catholic Church. In the Anglican and Lutheran Church, it is encouraged but not attended. The Uniting Church does not offer it. Based on these findings, if the tentative conclusions of my findings are confirmed by lay people from the four congregations, then there would be a case for unity in celebrating God's forgiveness of sins as an ecumenical result. The question is, could the churches revisit their laws to ensure that peoples' sins are forgiven in addition to individual confession and absolution? At least if there is a choice for one to receive absolution without telling the Ordained Person the list of sins, it might increase churches' attendance. Most people have expressed frustration in the individual confession followed by absolution. What would be churches' pastoral care for these lay people?

### **6.3 Further research**

Based on the findings of this study, I suggest two possible areas of study: firstly, in Dogmatic Theology and, secondly, in Ecclesiology:

1. This study could be widened to include more mainline Christian denominations, more congregations, and more lay people.
2. The gap between the exegetes and lay people could be reduced by scholarly and pastorally understanding the exegesis of John 20:19-23 and lay people's understanding of the pericope through patient training regarding the central meaning of God's forgiveness of sins in the four communities.
3. Research into how Ordained Persons are trained to ensure that lay peoples' theology of God's forgiveness of sins is carefully incorporated as a sensitive pastoral ministry.

4. A study in the field of Ecclesiology: an investigation of the impact the Eucharist on the four Christian denominations. The Eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church is defined as “the source and summit of Christian life”.<sup>2</sup> Although it was not mentioned among the respondents from the Roman Catholic Church, it has been understood by the Church as the best way for one to obtain God’s forgiveness of sins.

#### **6.4 Contributions of this study**

This study has made one contribution in the area of Biblical study and two major contributions to the literature of Practical Theology. First, my study has confirmed that the exegesis of John 20:19-23 does not solve the understanding of God’s forgiveness of sins but needs a pastoral component. Second, the research has contributed to the discipline of Practical Theology. I have not identified other research that interviews respondents from four mainline Christian denominations to talk about a phenomenon common to each church but dealt differently. In so doing, the espoused theology was put alongside the formal theology in an attempt to draw similarities and differences. Finally, the study has grounded a possible dialogue between espoused theology and operant theology. If the normative theology of the identified churches could be broadened, a common understanding of God’s forgiveness of sins could support pastoral care for lay people from the four Congregations.

The study brought together the thinking of two groups of people who live in two different worlds—the world of human experience and the world of textual grammatical analysis—but merge at certain intersections with various meanings. As mentioned above, more scholarly and pastorally research are needed to address the gap between exegetes’ and lay peoples’ understanding of God’s forgiveness of sins.

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<sup>2</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic church 1324-1327 especially *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1324 and *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

## Appendices

### ***Appendix A: Letter of introduction***

17 March 2016

#### **LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**

Dear Sir/Madam/Name

This letter is to introduce Charles Dufour who is a PhD student in the Department of Theology at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

He is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of How are sins understood to be forgiven in four mainstream Christian Churches? How lay Churchgoers understand God's forgiveness of sins through textual analysis of liturgy in light of John 20:19-23. He would like to invite you to assist with this project by working with him to establish a focus group of lay people from your church community, in order to conduct an Ethics approved focus group. No more than one hour of your involvement and two hours on one occasion of participants in the focus group would be required.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Since he intends to make a tape recording of the interview, he will seek the consent of participants, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that individual name or identity is not revealed, and that the recording will not be made available to any other person. It may be necessary to make the recording available to secretarial assistants (or a transcription service) for transcription, in which case you may be assured that such persons will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement which outlines the requirement that your name or identity not be revealed and that the confidentiality of the material is respected and maintained.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08-8416 8420, or e-mail [steve.taylor@flinders.edu.au](mailto:steve.taylor@flinders.edu.au).

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely



Dr Steve Taylor  
Senior Lecturer, Department of Theology, Flinders University.

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number **INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval**). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*

**Appendix B: Request for permission to conduct research (to leaders of each of the four churches)**



Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law  
Department of Theology  
GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001  
[dufo0001@flinders.edu.au](mailto:dufo0001@flinders.edu.au)  
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

Date 12 July 2016

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE PARISH**

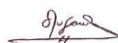
Dear \_\_\_\_\_

As part of a PhD research project in the Department of Theology at Flinders University, I am writing to request your permission to interview twelve people from your church. The interview will consist of fourteen questions based on the Gospel of John 20:19-23. Its main purpose is to explore the understanding of God's forgiveness of sins from the perspective of lay people in selected mainstream denominations, namely Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Uniting Church situated in the city of Adelaide.

Drs Steve Taylor and Vicky Balabanski are my supervisors in this project. I'm in a process of receiving ethical approval for the research project to commence. As part of requirement to gain permission from Flinders Ethics Committee, can you send me an official letter inviting me to conduct individual interviews of twelve Churchgoers from your parish community?

Participation in the research is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the interview whenever they wish.

Yours sincerely,



Charles Dufour



**Appendix C: Revised ethics application, including information flyer, consent form and information sheet**



**School of Humanities and Creative Arts**

GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001

Tel: 08 (+61 8) 8201 3651

Fax: 08 (+61 8) 8201 2784

Email: [dufo0001@flinders.edu.au](mailto:dufo0001@flinders.edu.au)

Mobile: 0413 454 313

<http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/theology/>

CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

**How do lay Churchgoers understand God's forgiveness of sins through textual analysis in light of John 20:19-23?**

The chief aim of the research project to this parish / community is to identify the theological threads of divine forgiveness of sins among Churchgoers as a community and as an individual, in order to answer the question whether Churchgoers have been pastorally cared for in this context.

Its significant is to explore Christians' understanding of forgiveness of sins in the four mainstreams churches, namely, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Uniting Church in the city of Adelaide. This will assist to identify the commonalities and differences not only among the Churchgoers but also among the teaching of the churches.

Participation in the research project is voluntary and refusal to participate will have no effect to your relation with your Church.

A sound recording will be made of the individual interview which will be transcribed and any information that identifies participants will be discarded.

An amount of \$20 will be given to each participant as a token for generous time and contribution to the research project.

All relevant information is in Information Sheet, Letter of Introduction, the flyer and the Consent form.

When? From September to October 2016. Provisional date and time as given above in answer 5. Time to be specified.

Where? You have three choices of where you would like to be interviewed.

1. At your home: provide your physical address.

How long? About an hour and half to two hours.

How to minimise the risks?

1. Please focus on the questions at hand.
2. Avoid emotions and make use of your faith experience.
3. You might feel discomfort, however, take your time to engage with the text.
4. Please feel free to contact the following numbers for free counselling assistance.

2.1 ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy): (08) 8363 1963.

2.2 Life line counselling: 13 11 14

2.3 MensLine counselling: 1300 789 978

2.4 Salvation Army: contact number 08 8227 0199.

2.5 [info@online-therapy.com](mailto:info@online-therapy.com)

5. The researcher 's responsibility is limited to the research project. You are free to contact any counsellors if you experience discomfort.

How to maximise the benefit of the project?

1. Engage with the text and suggest a beneficial way for divine forgiveness in your church.
2. Express your theological response to the text and that of your church.
3. Mention what is what is essential in divine forgiveness.
4. Point out what makes divine forgiveness of sins a reality in your church, what is vital and what is missing in that context.

6.	<p><u>Direct Recruitment (item D6)</u></p> <p>Please reconsider the ‘no’ response given to the question regarding direct recruitment approaches. The committee advises that recruitment of respondents face-to-face or via telephone is considered to be a direct approach. Please explain in detail how the researchers will address any real, or perceived, feelings of obligation and/or pressure to participate.</p>
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**Researcher’s response**

The researcher will distinctly explain to potential participants their right and free will to whether participate in the research project or not. There will be no persuasion neither reward nor punishment to any response made by potential participants. Participation in the study is purely voluntary. Further, there will be no feeling of obligation because none of the potential participants is known to the researcher. All potential participants will be given Information Sheet, Letter of Introduction, Consent Form, and Flyer. Participants will be well informed of the aims of the research subject and sign the Consent Form before individual interview commences. The Information Sheet and the flyer state that all the participants have the right to withdraw from the study whenever appropriate. The Consent Form emphasises that participation in the research project is voluntary and that participants have fully understood the relevance of the project.

7.	<p><u>Interview Anonymity (item D7)</u></p> <p>Please provide additional information by responding to the following comments:</p> <p>-</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><u>Interview Locations</u></p> <p>On the basis that the committee has requested that individual interviews to be conducted instead of focus groups please clarify where interviews will be held (i.e, possible locations). To preserve anonymity, the committee suggests that it would be preferable for interviews to be held in the homes of participants or at a public location such as a library meeting room (i.e, rather than a room at the Church).</p> <p>-</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><u>Safety Protocols</u></p> <p>Please explain what safety protocols will be put in place to protect both the participants and researchers if research may be conducted in participant’s homes. The committee suggests that possible safety protocols for the researcher may include (1) taking a mobile phone to participant’s homes or (2) arranging to have telephone contact with a colleague/supervisor before and after visiting a participant (<a href="#">see section 5.1.2 under Processes of Research Governance and Ethical Review in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research</a>).</p>
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## **Researcher's response**

### **a) Interview Locations**

Participants are free to choose one of the three locations suggested by the researcher.

1. One of the offices at the parish of St. Peter's Anglican Cathedral situated at 27 King William Road, North Adelaide in South Australia.
2. One of the rooms at Flinders in the City: located at 182 Victoria Square, Adelaide in South Australia.
3. Office and library at Bethlehem Lutheran Church situated at 170 Flinders Street, Adelaide in South Australia.

### **b) Safety Protocols**

The individual interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder that translates voice into words. The researcher will remind the participants that the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The pastors of the church of the participants and the supervisors of the researchers will be aware of the time of the commencement and the end of each interview. The researcher will have his mobile and inform his supervisors and the pastor of the Church (by messaging) the location of the interview, time of commencement and end of the interview.

## Information Sheet

Mr Charles Dufour  
School of Humanities and Creative Arts  
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

School of Humanities and Creative Arts Dean of School Nominees: A/Professor Ian Ravenscroft  
Archaeology, Languages, Philosophy, Theology, Tourism 8201 3942  
ian.ravenscroft@flinders.edu.au  
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

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### INFORMATION SHEET FOR CHURCHGOERS ABOVE 18 YEARS OLD

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**Title:** How Ordinary Churchgoers understand God's forgiveness of sins through textual analysis of liturgy in light of John 20:19-23.

#### Researcher

Mr Charles Dufour  
Theology Department  
Flinders University  
Mobile: 0413 454 313

#### Supervisor(s):

School of Humanities and Creative Arts  
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

#### Dr Steve Taylor

School of Humanities and Creative Arts  
Flinders University,  
Tel: (+61 8) 8416 8424

#### Dr Vicky Balabanski

School of Humanities and Creative Arts  
Flinders University,  
Tel: (+61 8) 8416 8424

#### 1. Description of the study:

This study is part of the project entitled '*How Ordinary Churchgoers understand God's forgiveness of sins through textual analysis in light of John 20:19-23*'. This project will explore the understanding of the forgiveness of sins as recorded in the Gospel of John 20:19-23 by following the five steps below:

- 1.1 The thesis will analyse the textual liturgy of forgiveness of sins used by selected Christian churches for reconciliation and forgiveness of sins.

1.2 The thesis will focus on aspects of forgiveness of sins in John 20:19-23 through a careful consideration of the central theological key of the hermeneutic analysis of the scholars. It is worth noting that the selected scholars do not neatly correspond to the denominational traditions with which they are associated. The denominations have been influenced by the modernist insight that biblical scholarship crosses denominational boundaries.

1.3 The thesis will listen to various theological voices of laity in light of John 20:19-23.

1.4 The thesis will conduct a theological conversation regarding the agreements and disagreements of the four scholars, the four church analytical liturgy of the forgiveness of sins, and participants' theological discussion in the individual interviews

1.5 Finally, the thesis will identify commonalities and differences among the four churches, scholars' theology, and participants' theological understanding of the narrative of John 20:19-23.

This project is supported by Flinders University Theology department.

## **2. Purpose of the study:**

This project aims to find out the reality of pastoral care in the selected churches by

2.1 Comparing the commonalities and differences of the textual analysis of John 20:19-23 of each selected Christian denomination.
2.2 considering the prevailing theological insights that unite and divide the four churches
2.3 Understanding the narrative interpretation of John 20:19-23 with the aim to listen to experiences, aspirations, and theology of forgiveness of sins that is dormant in the hearts of Churchgoers.
2.4 Identifying how the practices of forgiveness of sins in the selected churches can best help churchgoers to benefit the grace of God's

<p>mercy. Hence, it will suggest a pastoral model of forgiveness of sins to the selected churches that includes Churchgoers' authentic voices in the celebration of God's pardon in consistence with the contemporary needs.</p>
<p>2.5 The pros and cons of the selected of focus groups will be a source of new insight and knowledge to the discipline of Practical Theology.</p>
<p>2.6 Listening, respecting and maintaining the differences of each selected churches will not only reduce the theological tensions but also increase understanding and safeguard the identity of each selected church.</p>

### **3. What will I be asked to do?**

3.1 You are asked to voluntary participated in the research project by reading and understanding all the information provided.

3.2 To sign a Consent Form after you have understood the aim of the project.

3.3 To sacrifice an hour and half or two of your time for Individual Interviews. The Individual interview will depend on each participant engagement with the text. T

3.4 To choose a location for your individual interviews.

3.5 You will be asked to read the Gospel of John 20:19-23

3.6 The text of John 20:19-23

<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send

you.”<sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition).

3.7 Then answer the fourteen questions that constitute your individual interview.

#### **4. Interview Locations**

Participants will be welcomed to choose one of the two following suggested locations for individual Interviews:

4.1 Interview room at Adelaide State Library: Corner North Terrace & Kintore Ave, Adelaide: Participants and researcher will agree on day and time to meet in one of the quiet meeting room at the State Library. It is the responsibility of the researcher to book for the room beforehand and advise the participants of the number of the interview room.

4.2 Mantra Hindmarsh Square: Mantra Hindmarsh Square 55-67. Participants and researcher will agree on the date and time to meet at Mantra Hindmarsh Café.

4.3 Please be advised that the researcher’s responsibility is limited to the research project only. For any counselling sessions please feel free to contact the following organisations:

4.3.1 ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy): Phone: (08) 8363 1963.

4.3.2 Australian Counselling Association: Phone: 1300 735 030  
Call 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday or 9am - 5.30pm on Weekends (EST)

4.3.3 Lifeline counselling: Phone: 13 11 14

4.3.4 MensLine counselling: Phone: 1300 789 978

4.3.5 info@online-therapy.com

#### **1. What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?**

1.1 You will benefit and explore the breadth and length of the Gospel of John 20:19-23 through a series of questions. It will be an opportunity for you to reflect deeply on your theological thoughts in contrast to that of the church.

1.2 You will enjoy free expression of your faith experience without any coaxing at the same time contribute to a potential practical pastoral approach to God’s forgiveness of sins in the modern world.

1.3 Your confidentiality will be protected.

1.4 You will be privileged to contribute to the discipline of practical theology, pastoral ministry, and increase unity of the understanding of Jesus forgiveness of sins in the four selected churches.

1.5 Your concerns will be listened to and validated.



## **2. Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?**

We do not need your name and you will be anonymous. A sound recording will be made at each individual interview and transcribed. Any information that identifies you will not be transcribed. You can withdraw from the interviews at any time, without consequence, and you can ask for any part of your thoughts to be omitted from the research.

## **3. Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?**

3.2 You might be frustrated by some of the questions or even be challenged in your faith.

3.3 You might feel burdened by the donation of your time and travel expenses.

3.4 The subject of divine forgiveness of sins in John 20:19-23 needs your biblical understanding in that context.

3.5 It is possible that you may experience uneasy emotions while responding to the questions.

## **4. How do I agree to participate?**

4.2 Participation in the research is purely voluntary and refusal to participate is your prerogative. You can withdraw from the research study at any time, without any consequences.

4.3 You are free to approach the researcher for participation in the research project. The researcher will have a sign-up booth at the entrance of the church and all information regarding the project will be placed next to the notice board.

4.4 Once you agree to take part in the research project, you will then choose when and where to have the interview.

4.5 Remember to sign the Consent Form before the interview to ensure that you fully understand the aim of the research project.

4.6 All the participants have the right to withdraw from the study whenever they feel appropriate.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet and we hope that you will feel free to choose whether to participate in this study or not.**

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (7255). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*

12.	<p><u>Permissions (item D8)</u> Please provide copies of correspondence granting permission to conduct the research from the following churches:</p> <p>St Mary Magdalene Anglican Church (Fr Stephen Clark / Archbishop Jeffrey Driver);</p> <p>Bethlehem Lutheran Church (Pastor Fraser Pearce);</p> <p>Pilgrim Uniting Church (Rev Sandy Boyce / Deidre Palmer); and</p> <p>St Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cathedral (Vicar General Fr Philip Marshall).</p> <p>Please ensure that all correspondence clearly outlines the specifics of what permission is being granted. If the documentation cannot be provided at the time of response to conditional approval, please confirm that it will be provided to the Committee on receipt. Please note that data collection cannot commence until all relevant permissions have been granted.</p>
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**Researcher's response**

I still am waiting for letters from the pastors of the above churches.

13.	<p><u>Data Transmission Protocols (item F10a)</u> Please explain what protocols will be used for the secure transmission of research data to other members of the research team and/or supervisor.</p>
-----	--

**Researcher's response**

Response 13. Data Transmission Protocols (item F10a)

At the completion of the thesis, the researcher will meet with members of the research team which consists of Dr Steve Taylor, Dr Vicky Balabanski, and Dr Tanya Wittwer at 34 Lipsett Street Brooklyn. At this meeting, the researcher will hand in the flash disk and hard copy of the thesis to the three members of the research team mentioned above. Then the supervisors, Dr Steve Taylor and Dr Vicky Balabanski will contact the appropriate person at Flinders University for a secure storage of the data.

14. . Data Storage Location (items F10d and F10b)

Item F10b indicates that electronic data will be stored on the Flinders University secure computer server; however the committee noted that item F10d indicated that the supervisors do not have access to the University computer servers; and so will store all the data in their offices in the Department of Theology at 34 Lipsett Terrace. The committee advises that the student's supervisors will be able to gain access to the Flinders University server. In addition, item F10b indicates that data will be stored on a flash-drive. Please confirm that data will be stored on the secure computer servers at Flinders University on project completion and confirm that data will not be stored on a flash-drive. The committee advises that storage on a flash-drive is not considered to be secure. Storage on the Flinders University computer server with password protection would be preferable.

**Researcher's response**

I confirm the following:

1. On project completion, data will be stored on the secure computer server with password protection at Flinders University.
2. Data will not be stored on a flash-drive and locked in the offices of my supervisors, Dr Steve Taylor and Dr Vicky Balabanski as previously planned.
3. Data will be clearly identifiable. Cf. *CHAPTER 3.2: DATABANKS: INTRODUCTION- Data identifiability*: with my full name and date of submission of the thesis.

Response 14. Data Storage Location (items F10d and F10b)

I confirm that on project completion data will be stored on the secure computer server with password protection at Flinders University rather than previously suggested that data will be stored on a flash-drive and locked in supervisors offices at 34 Lipsett Street Brooklyn Park.

**IMPORTANT**

- If you have more than 20 conditions to respond to please copy and paste to add more rows.
- If you have less than 20 conditions please delete the boxes that are not required before submission.

**Appendix D: Flyer for individual interviews**



GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001  
Tel: 08 (+61 8) 8201 3651  
Fax: 08 (+61 8) 8201 2784  
Email: [dufo0001@flinders.edu.au](mailto:dufo0001@flinders.edu.au)  
Mobile: 0413 454 313  
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/theology/>  
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

**FLYER FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

**How lay Churchgoers understand God's forgiveness of sins through  
textual analysis in light of John 20:19-23?**

The chief aim of the research project to this parish / community is to identify the theological threads of divine forgiveness of sins among Churchgoers as a community and as individual. To answer the question whether Churchgoers have been pastorally care for in this context.

Its Significant is to explore Christians' understanding of forgiveness of sins in the four mainstreams churches, namely, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Uniting Church in the city of Adelaide. This will assist to identify the commonalities and differences not only among the Churchgoers but also among the teaching of the churches.

Participation in the research project is voluntary and refusal to participate will have no effect to your relation with your Church.

A sound recording will be made of the individual interview which will be transcribed and any information that identifies participants will be discarded.

An amount of \$20 will be reimbursed to each participant as a token for generous time and contribution to the research project.

All relevant information is in Information Sheet, Letter of Introduction, the flyer and the Consent form.

When? From September to October 2016. Provisional date and time as given above in answer 5. Time to be specified.

Where? You have three choices of where you would like to be interviewed.  
At your home: provide your physical address.

How long? About an hour and half to two hours.

#### How to minimise the risks?

Please focus on the questions at hand.

Avoid emotions and make use of your faith experience.

You might feel discomfort, however, take your time to engage with the text.

Please feel free to contact the following numbers for free counselling assistance.

ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy): (08) 8363 1963.

Life line counselling: 13 11 14

MensLine counselling: 1300 789 978

Salvation Army: contact number 08 8227 0199.

[info@online-therapy.com](mailto:info@online-therapy.com)

The researcher's responsibility is limited to the research project. You are free to contact any counsellors if you experience discomfort.

#### How to maximise the benefit of the project?

Engage with the text and suggest a beneficial way for divine forgiveness in your church.

Express your theological response to the text and that of your church.

Mention what is what is essential in divine forgiveness.

Point out what makes divine forgiveness of sins a reality in your church, what is vital and what is missing in that context.

**Appendix E: Consent form**



**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH  
FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

**How Ordinary Churchgoers understand God's forgiveness of sins through textual analysis of liturgy in light of John 20:19-23.**

I .....  
being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the individual interview for the research project on divine forgiveness of sins based on John 20:19-23.


1. I have read the information provided.
2. I'm not a relative or associated to the researcher either academically or socially.
3. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
4. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet, Letter of Introduction, Consent Form, and Flyer for future reference.
5. I understand that:
  - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
  - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.

- Whether I participate in the research project or not, or withdraw during the interview, there will be no consequences or ill-treatment to my spiritual well-being that is being provided to me by my church.
  - Whether I participate in the research project or not, or withdraw during the interview, or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on my progress in my church activities, or results gained.
  - I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the individual interview or the research project without disadvantage.
6. I agree/do not agree\* to the tape/transcript\* being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed.      \* delete as appropriate

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher's name Charles Dufour**

**Researcher's signature**  **Date.....**

*NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.*



## ***Appendix F: Research questions***

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

#### **1. The research questions that guided this study**

In the medical journal, Patton states: “good questions in qualitative interviews should be open ended, neutral, sensitive, and clear to the interviewees”.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned in chapter one, one of the objectives of this study is to identify the similarities and differences between espoused and formal theology. With this objective in mind, fourteen questions were formulated. These are the questions:

1. What is the meaning of the passage of John 20:19-23?
2. How do you understand by the word of Jesus to his disciples in John chapter 20 verse 23? “If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any are they are retained?”
3. From your faith perspective, how do you understand God’s forgiveness of your sins? Explain please.
4. Is there a particular moment or a particular word or gesture (sign) of a pastor through which you have experienced the pardon of Jesus? What is that word (s) or gesture (s)?
5. Does sin encourage you to pray? Or does sin prevent you from going to church? Explain.
6. Is there a time when you recall sins and ask for forgiveness as a Christian community?
7. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins, in your opinion? Look in verse 22 “Receive the Holy Spirit”?
8. In the context of your Church community, to whom do you go for the forgiveness of your sins? If you go to anybody, why? If you do not go, again explain why?

---

<sup>1</sup> Patton, How to use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation, M.Q 1987, 108-143. (London: Sage); Nicky Britten, Qualitative Research: Qualitative Interviews in Medical Research, BMJ 22 July 1995.

9. Who are the disciples to whom Jesus imparted the ministry of forgiveness of sins?  
Are there still people with that authority, and if so, who are these disciples in your community?
10. Does forgiveness of sins come through the priest / pastor of the Church? Can you elaborate on your understanding?
11. Has anything unexpected such as a moment of peace, joy and revelation ever happened to you during confession and absolution in the Christian community that has helped you to understand forgiveness of sins in a profound way?
12. Are there any changes or suggestions would you like to see in the liturgy of forgiveness of sins?
13. Is there any time you needed a pastor (priest ordained minister) for the grace of forgiveness of your sins?
14. Do you have anything that you would like your Church to implement in the understanding of Jesus' forgiveness of sins based on this Gospel?

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