

TLS

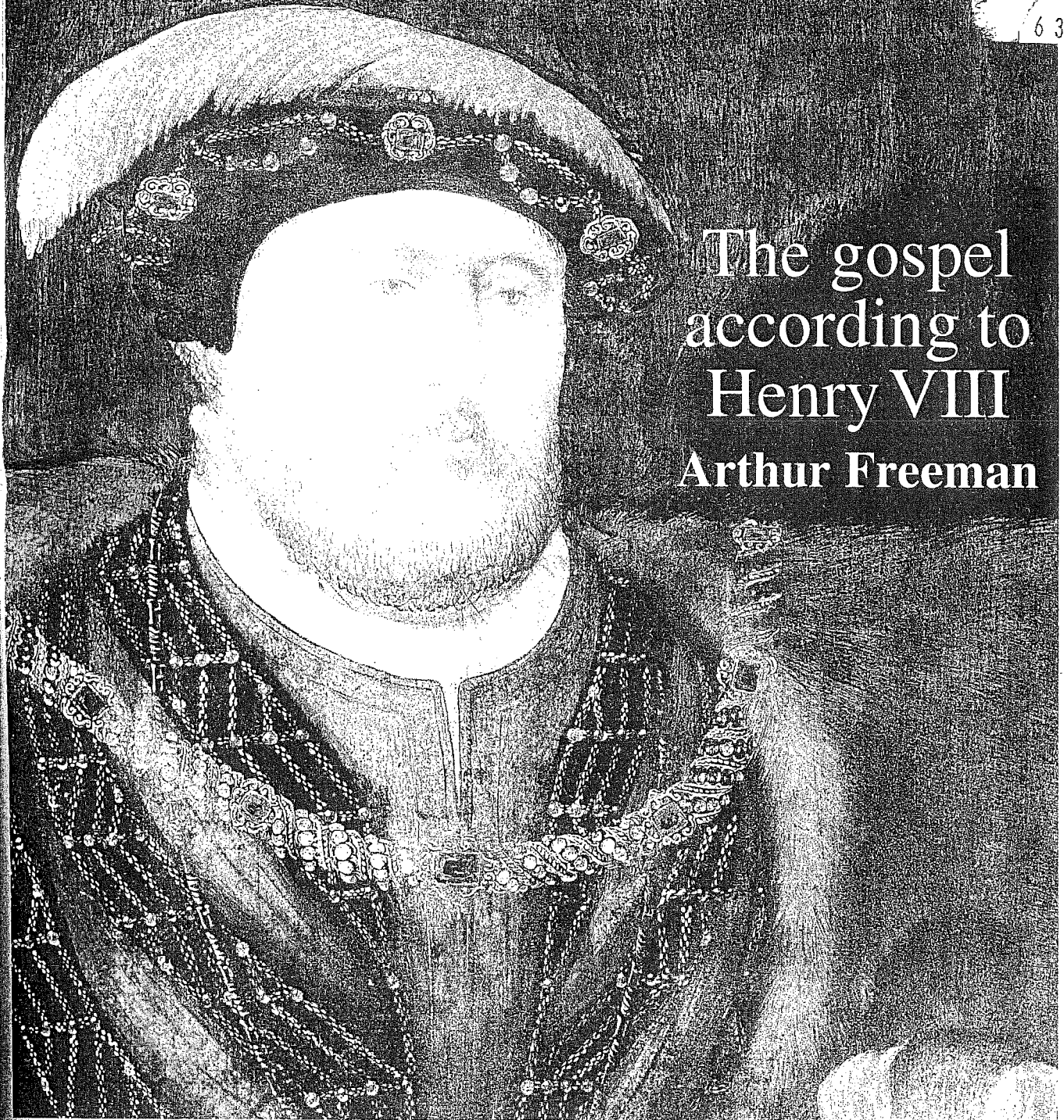
Julian Bell From Flatford Mill to Menin Road
Tom Shippey Vietnam's heart of darkness
Bernice Martin Christian Britain resurrected
Roger Scruton What cannot be forgiven?

DECEMBER 1, 2007 No. 5463 www.thetimes.com

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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The gospel
according to
Henry VIII
Arthur Freeman

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THIS WEEK



John Constable by David Gardner (1796)

The first bible to be printed in Britain had not merely a royal patron but also a royal editor – one who was bold enough to omit most of the Old Testament and to give a robust defence of his methods in a preface. In the Commentary section, Arthur Freeman suggests some of the reasons why Henry VIII has received so little credit for his pioneering popularizations of scripture, those judicious prunings, his easy-to-read typeface and handy quarto page size. A date of publication in the same month as Sir Thomas More's beheading was maybe one mistake.

The former Archbishop of York and long-standing TLS contributor, John Habgood, reviews a further selection of books from one of the most

found forgiveness in short supply when he opined on the mental inferiority of black people as observed by those who employ them. Jerry A. Coyne describes how the ruckus which Watson's friends had long feared has stained the legacy of the man famed for discovering the molecular structure of DNA.

Our art critic, Julian Bell, has been to Ghent for "the most exhilarating survey of British art that anyone is likely to see for a long time". John Constable is at its heart, squeezing Turner into some uncomfortable corners but allowing the space for Lewis Carroll's "bizarre" Alice.

Professor Jonathan Bate has written to point out that, if I had counted more carefully, Philip Davis's life of Bernard Malamud would have shared top spot in our Books of The Year last week. He is absolutely right.

PS

TLS DECEMBER 14 2007

Sorry!

There is a political fashion for easy apologies but forgiveness comes only from genuine dialogue

ROGER SCRUTON

Charles Griswold

FORGIVENESS

A philosophical exploration

272pp. Cambridge University Press. Paperback, £13.99 (US \$12.99). 978 0 521 70351 2

What is forgiveness, and what good does it do? How are we helped by offering forgiveness and how are we helped by receiving it? Can forgiveness be offered on behalf of another or must it always come from the victim? And is there always a victim?

The crimes of the twentieth century, now receding from human memory with the rapidity that guilt alone can generate, ought to have put those, and similar questions, firmly on the syllabus of anglophone moral philosophy. And if they haven't done so then we might at least hope (if hope is the word) that the daily spectacle of Islamists punching the air and generally making the kind of fools of themselves that people make when they cannot look in a mirror and see the thing they hate would have reminded us that forgiveness was planted in the heart of our civilization and runs like a golden thread through all the rules and maxims by which our ancestors were instructed. Christ taught that those who ask forgiveness must also grant it, and enshrined this maxim in the prayer that his disciples repeat each day. The love-one's-neighbour idea, which Jews and Christians believe to be the core of morality, is unintelligible without the context of mutual forgiveness.

The topic was introduced into an English-language philosophical journal by the Hungarian exile, Aurel Kolnai, in 1973, at a time when anglophone moral philosophers were analysing the "logic of moral discourse", and wondering whether it was different from the logic of "booh!" and "hurrah!". The idea that moral philosophy was really about the moral emotions and their place in human fulfilment, was an idea that Kolnai – steeped in the phenomenology of Max Scheler – had never doubted. Little by little, analytical philosophers came round to his point of view, with important articles by J. G. Murphy, Joanna North and others, and an agreeable book, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, in the form of a dialogue between Murphy and the legal theorist Jean Hampton (1988).

Meanwhile, psychologists influenced by the "positive psychology" of Martin Seligman had begun to emphasize the role of forgiveness in repairing psychic damage. One of them, Robert Enright, established a Forgiveness Institute at the University of Wisconsin, and jointly edited, with Joanna North, a cross-disciplinary book on the subject (*Exploring Forgiveness*, 1998). The book is introduced by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who has perhaps done more than any other public figure to emphasize the necessity for forgiveness in the healing of communities.

Archbishop Tutu was the brains behind the path-breaking 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and the work of this Commission has begun to influence anglophone moral philosophy, prompting

interesting thoughts on reconciliation in works such as Adam Morton's *On Evil* (2004). The Commission has also inspired many of the arguments, and provided some of the examples, in Charles Griswold's powerful study of forgiveness. Griswold is the leading authority on the moral philosophy of Adam Smith, concerning whose *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* he has written the definitive commentary, restoring Smith to his proper place at the summit of Enlightenment thinking. He has clearly been deeply influenced by Smith's account of the moral emotions and of their root in sympathy. But his book contains echoes too of Butler and

Aristotle, and also of Hegel, who saw forgiveness as a restoration of inter-subjective ties, a re-creation of a "we", where two "I's had sprung apart.

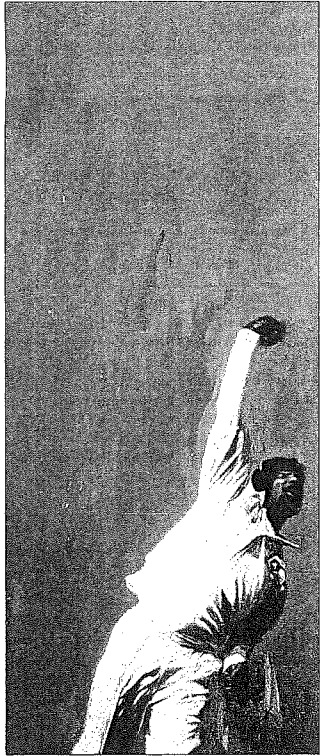
Griswold, who is no mean classical scholar, prefaces his argument with an illuminating discussion of *sungnome*, a term that does not quite mean forgiveness, but which serves to introduce the many ways in which the ancient Greeks both resembled us and differed from us in the difficult business of apology and pardon. His discussion of Aristotle and the Stoics left me feeling that a full book on this topic is long overdue, to set beside E. R. Dodds's *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951) and Bernard Williams's *Shame and Necessity* (1993) as proof that our common humanity can take on uncommon forms. I came away from this part of the discussion echoing Schiller's regret: "Schöne Welt, wo bist du?". Turning to the world in which we find ourselves, Griswold argues that forgiveness is both a process, whereby two people cope with an injury inflicted by one upon the other, and a virtue. He understands virtue in

the Aristotelian way, as a disposition, turned towards the good, and promoting the fulfilment of the person who possesses it. Virtues are the goal of moral education, and to this extent, Griswold implies, forgiveness can be learned and taught. But some things will remain unforgiven, and in all its occurrences forgiveness should be distinguished from forgetting, condoning or turning away in defeat.

Forgiveness is not achieved unilaterally: it is the result of a dialogue, which may be tacit, but which involves reciprocal communication of an extended and delicate kind. The one who forgives goes out to the one who has injured him, and his gesture involves a changed state of mind, a reorientation towards the other, and a setting aside of resentment. Such an existential transformation is not always or easily attained, and can only be achieved, Griswold suggests, through an effort of cooperation and sympathy, in which each person strives to set his own interests aside and look on the other from the posture of the "impartial spectator", as Smith described it. Crucial in this process are the "narratives" which the parties recount to themselves, and Griswold draws interestingly on recent work in "narratology" in his search for the crucial factor in the process of psychic repair. This is the factor that permits a voiding of resentment in the one soul, and a self-giving through contrition in the other. Each party's narrative is both an account of the injury, and an allocation of blame; ideal and reality, exonerating and fault, are all woven together, and forgiveness can be seen as in part an attempt to harmonize the narratives, so that the story comes to an end in a new beginning.

Griswold's arguments are deep, far-reaching and all the more effective for the many interesting examples, drawn from recent events and biographical accounts. He sets a paradigm before us, in which one person injures another, seeks forgiveness and then receives it. The injury and the seeking are as important for Griswold as the final forgiveness, and he rightly rejects the view that forgiveness is simply a "gift" that can be bestowed by the injured party whatever the state of mind of the one who had hurt him. You don't succeed in forgiving when you have shown no recognition of the fault, and you don't recognize a fault if you regard it with indifference, and without the natural resentment with which one moral being receives the injuries inflicted by another. The one who forgives changes his whole posture towards the one who had injured him, and cannot do this without the other's cooperation. Resentment must be felt; but resentment is a moral emotion, founded in judgement, and can, in the course of rational dialogue, be "set aside". In describing this process, Griswold draws fruitfully on Bishop Butler's classic exposition of the topic in his sermons.

Continued on page 4



3.12.07
London NW8

"Sunday in Kandy was all about Muttiah Muralitharan, as Sundays in Kandy usually are when there is a Test match on", wrote the *Times* cricket correspondent Christopher Martin-Jenkins in a report on the recent first Test between Sri Lanka and England (which the hosts won by 88 runs). In the course of the match, the off-spinner became the leading Test wicket-taker of all time, overtaking the not-long retired Australian Shane Warne's total of 708. Murmurings about the legality of Muralitharan's bowling action will persist (a congenital defect in his bowling arm means that he gives the appearance of not straightening it on delivery), as will debates over which of Warne and Muralitharan is the greatest slow bowler in Test match history. What is beyond dispute is that the thirty-five-year-old Muralitharan will remain the leading wicket-taker in Tests for many years to come, as his nearest rivals are all approaching retirement. As a member of the strife-torn island's minority Tamil community, he has always stressed the importance of cricket as a unifying force. This lifelike portrait, by Phil Hale, of the man who has earned the right to be called the greatest Sri Lankan, was unveiled at Lord's, the "home of cricket", on December 3.

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The discussion of Butler is one of the few places where Griswold acknowledges the special place of forgiveness in the Christian world view: he repeatedly emphasizes that his is a "secular" account, which depends on no theological premisses. A Christian might suggest that this has led to an unnecessary narrowing of Griswold's paradigm. Those who ask God to forgive them their trespasses are not petitioning an injured party: God cannot be injured. Yet he can forgive us, in the same way that "we forgive those who trespass against us". We ask God to forgive us in order to restore our relationship with him, and the process may be arduous and long. Here again, Griswold might have fruitfully studied what has been said about this process in the Catholic tradition – in particular concerning the need for confession, contrition, penitence and atonement, in order to attain that final homecoming into the place of love. Much that Griswold says tracks that process without explicitly acknowledging it. As a result he tends to overlook the enormous part played by penitence in restoring and deepening our affections.

A long chapter is devoted to the discussion of political apology, and the vexed question of whether collective acts can be forgiven by their victims, and, if so, by what process. Griswold's cases are complex, ranging from the University of Alabama's apology in 2004 for its exploitation of slaves in the nineteenth century, to the apology offered by Robert McNamara, as former Secretary of Defense, for the debacle in Vietnam. As Griswold points out, some of these apologies, uttered into the void, as often side-stepping responsibility as assuming it, and without any clear idea of the relationship that is to be renewed or the act of penitence that will renew it, have a vacuous air. Often they come across as attempts to avoid the more serious task of setting the record straight and executing justice. Indeed, forgiveness has a part to play in human relations precisely because the strict demands of justice would too often make it impossible to repair them. In the world of politics, however, real apology should always have justice in mind. In this context, the language of forgiveness too often softens and sentimentalizes the issue. As Griswold wisely says:

When forgiveness becomes the public rallying cry, played out on daytime television soap operas, encouraged by civic and religious leaders, and praised far and wide for its power to heal, its slide into confusion and vulgarity is inevitable. It becomes identified with "closure", it is sentimentalized and transformed into therapy, and the criteria for its practice are obscured. It melds into forgetfulness of wrong, and is granted all too easily, once the expected public theatrics are performed.

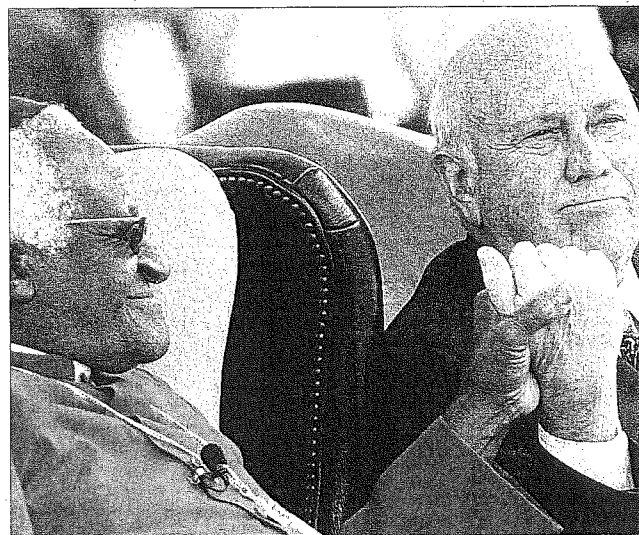
The criticism applies to much of the market in guilt-edged political securities, in which President Clinton made so successful a trade. Griswold's examples remind us that forgiveness must sometimes be hard, and penitence no less so, and that in the political arena it is not forgiveness but apology that counts. And he amplifies the thought in fitting words, concluding with an echo of Spinoza:

The reconciling ideals of political apology are substantive and noble, even though they are not intended to satisfy the soul's deepest yearnings.

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I have not argued that political apology is the magic key that unlocks the secrets of reconciliation at the political level, and do not believe that is the case. And yet the part that political apology may play in civic reconciliation is neither trivial nor dispensable, and a community in which it is commended and practised is an accomplishment as difficult as it is rare.



Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former South African President F. W. de Klerk at a Reconciliation Day ceremony, December 16, 2005

I have one reservation, however, concerning the metaphysical underpinnings of this part of Griswold's argument. He assumes that we understand collective apology in terms of one-many or many-many relationships between individuals. But, as his example of the University of Alabama indicates, we are also faced, in these cases, with the distinctions between corporations and unincorporated associations, and between political bodies and crowds. Collective apologies can be offered only where there is collective agency – and that means corporate identity over time and a network of duties assumed and rights conferred in response to it. What kind of identity, and what kind of agency, is this? There is a genuine distinction between the guilt of the Nazi state and the guilt of the German people. The first was adjudicated in a court of law; the second lingered as a miasma and still lingers, only partly purged by reparations and ritual breast-beatings. The same problem is experienced today in the former Communist states, where controversial attempts at "lustration" seem somehow not to make contact with the real source of guilt – that monstrous and all-seeing corporate person, the Communist Party, which never assumed legal personality and never came before a court. Griswold veers away from the idea of corporate agency, however, and this obscures his discussion of those cases – like the apology offered by a former Secretary of Defense – where an officer speaks for the collective in a way that nobody could speak for all Muslims, for all prostitutes, or for all people who have shouted racist abuse at their fellow human beings.

That reservation connects with another,

also metaphysical. Griswold tells us much about forgiveness, about the mental processes involved in it, and the way in which interpersonal relations are shaped by it. But he does not ask the question: what kind of a being is it that can forgive? Dogs don't forgive, because dogs don't resent. Forgiveness is unique to rational beings, and is a gift of metaphysical freedom. Only the accountable being, able to take responsibility for his own actions and mental states, can forgive or be forgiven, and this way of overcoming conflict has next to nothing in common with the peace of the "pecking order", or the territorial settlements among badgers and bears. Of course, Griswold is aware of this, and insists on the place of responsibility in the logic of

resentment. But at a time when the evolutionary biologists are producing one phoney account after another, designed to show that human societies are constructed from the same ingredients as the tribes of apes, and

that "altruism" in people is just a later manifestation of the self-sacrificing instincts of the soldier ant, it is surely a duty of philosophers to point out that interpersonal harmony is achieved through attitudes and virtues that only a free and accountable being could ever exemplify, and that this means that no theory of animal society could ever be generalized to cover us. The study of forgiveness would be a good starting point from which to roll back the tide of debunking, and show the distinctness and the spiritual richness of the human condition. Of course, that would probably lead away from the "secular" approach that Griswold adheres to. But it would lead in a truthful direction.

In this book, the Cambridge University Press has placed the footnotes at the bottom of the page, and not gathered them up, as so many publishers incomprehensibly do, as endnotes. This is a great relief, for Griswold has a sharp nose for intellectual quarry. When interesting ideas start up from the thickets of his argument, he chases them to the bottom of the page and corners them like a pointer quivering at a fallen bird. Some people might find this irritating. But the high quality of argument and observation in the text is sustained equally in the footnotes, so that I set aside all resentment and forgave the author – on the understanding, however, that he will do better next time. As for his persistent, sometimes confusing and never truly comfortable use of the feminine pronoun – well, that can be forgiven too.

The Visitor

Native on waste ground,
rosebay willowherb
has overpowered Anderston –
patchy river developments,

old red light, the derelict
bakery tower a pigeon-haven;
and my lunchbreak terror
as a hovering half mouse

half insect fed
on blossoming fireweed,
plain air ruined, unreliable:
the Hummingbird Hawk-moth

fabric and fiction, the day
at a wrong angle to the mind.
Mediterranean Glasgow,
global warming: we know

what we should not know.
They find Angelika,
the Polish student,
under the floorboards of a church.

A. B. JACKSON

A SECULAR AGE

Charles Taylor

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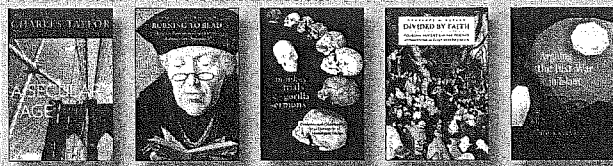
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