The Rhetoric of Forgiveness Versus The Desire For Revenge:
The Role of Religious Speeches in Peace Building in Indonesia

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KEYWORD	ABSTRACT
Peace Building *Rhetoric of Forgiveness* *Religious Speeches*	*The purpose of this paper is to discuss the rhetoric of forgiveness and the desire for revenge, including the advantages and disadvantages of both in life and interaction between humans, and in the effort to resolve conflicts and create peace. The study in this paper is based largely on literature research, observing religious interactions, and collecting notes and records of religious speeches in Indonesia. In addition to examining the controversy that covers the usefulness of forgiveness and the benefits of the desire for revenge, this paper would like to show that forgiveness is far more beneficial than the desire for revenge, especially in a conflict-prone plural society like Indonesia,*

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INTRODUCTION

Every year, the majority of Indonesians celebrate *Idul Fitri* (literally means the feast of breaking the fast) also called *lebaran*, to mark the end of a holy fasting month of *rhamadan*. An intriguing and important ritual participated by all Muslims during the *Idul Fitri* is the verbal expression of "apology and forgiveness," mostly uttered in Arabic "*Min al-aidin wa al-fa'izin*" (literally means "may your return be victorious"). Based on my observation during a *lebaran* in several Indonesian communities, many non-Muslims also visit their Muslim friends and participate in this ritual of forgiveness. Families and friends take turns in asking and giving forgiveness regardless of whether they really made any mistakes or not. Many who barely know each other also casually ask and offer forgiveness.

Indonesians appear to be very eager and generous when it comes to apology and forgiveness. In delivering speeches, for example, Indonesian speakers usually ask for forgiveness at the beginning, and especially at the end, of their speeches in case they make mistakes or offend the audience. This and the *lebaran* verbal rituals may suggest that Indonesians regard apology and forgiveness as an important part of their daily interaction and community life. However, this does not mean that members of the Indonesian communities always practice forgiveness and, thus, can prevent most conflicts from taking place. As a matter of fact, various violent and difficult-to-solve conflicts in Indonesia, including those involving religious groups, are on the rise in the last decade.

Perhaps, apology and forgiveness is easily implemented in personal relationship, when there has been no serious misdeed done, and when the parties involved still have to interact with each other. When transgressions or simple misunderstandings turn into serious conflicts, the conflicting parties are less likely to meet, let alone giving or asking for forgiveness. While forgiveness as a religious virtue has been widely preached and well accepted, religious rhetoric which emphasizes punishment for wrongdoers is also widespread,

encouraging resentment and desire for revenge. That is why Gopin (2000) argues that religions can be used as both foundations for peace as well as sources of conflicts.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the religious rhetoric of forgiveness and desire for revenge, including the benefits and disadvantages of such rhetoric in human daily life and interaction as well as in its roles in peace-building. This study will be based mostly on literature reviews, discussions on the power and influence of religious rhetoric in the life of the people, and my observation on various forms of religious speeches and communication in Indonesia. In addition to the discussion on the controversies surrounding the usefulness of forgiveness and desire for revenge, I will argue that, although some form of constrained desire for revenge may be useful, the benefit of forgiveness outweighs that of resentment and revenge especially when it comes to building peace and resolving conflicts in a plural society such as Indonesia. In addition, I will show that religious discourse tend to be loaded with the rhetoric of good and evil, which not only easily leads to hatred and encourages the desire for revenge, but also provide the language and symbolism for violent conflicts. In this paper, I will also propose ways of enhancing the religious rhetoric of forgiveness and restraining the rhetoric of resentment in Indonesia. Finally, I will propose that Indonesian religious groups with their powerful leaders and influential preachers expand the discourse of God's mercy and forgiveness to enhance the role of religions in building tolerance as well as creating peace and reconciliation in Indonesia.

Forgiveness versus Desire for Revenge

Forgiveness may be defined as a process and effort to remove unrelenting attitudes of retaliation, feeling of anger, and grudge after being wronged. Forgiveness does not have to be unilateral, nor is it the same as condoning or forgetting the attitude and behaviors of those forgiven (Enright, 2001). Forgiveness has been widely viewed to play a very important role in the success of peace-building efforts (e.g. Govier, 2002), and has been commonly perceived positively that it has become a "god term" whereas its opposite, revenge, is regarded as a "devil term." Conflict resolution theorists and practitioners strongly advocate intervention using forgiveness as an important part of conflict resolution strategies and there are studies as well as success stories on the tremendous benefits of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not only crucial in preventing and resolving conflicts, but is also useful for people's well-being. Although many think that arguments for forgiveness come from religious groups, many proponents of forgiveness have based their arguments on social, health, and psychological studies. For example, forgiveness is found to be associated with better health (Toussaint, William, Musick, & Everson, 2001) and forgiveness also affects mental health and well-being as well as spiritual health (Worthington, Jr. 2005). Similarly, studies by Thorensen, Harris, and Luskin (2001) and Worthington, Berry, and Parrot (2001), suggest that forgiveness improves psychological as well as physical well-being throughout one's life. Other empirical studies on forgiveness also confirm that the ability and willingness to forgive others enable one to better handle and reduce stress as well as experience good health and a good life compared to those who are unable and unwilling to forgive (Maltby, Macaskill, and Day, 2001). To promote better health, some clinical psychologists have even developed psychotherapic programs that enhance people's ability to forgive others (Enright and Coyle, 1998).

In the socio-political and religious arena, there have been strong advocates of forgiveness. These leaders proved to have created a much better society than those that do not implement forgiveness for reconciliation and those that emphasize only the search for justice. A well-known example is Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who successfully campaigned for the spread of the rhetoric of forgiveness to prevent outright massive violent conflicts in South Africa. Tutu (1999) applies religious principles of forgiveness in social, ethnic, and political conflicts in South Africa. He led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), for which forgiveness was the only way to deal with the myriad of crimes against humankind committed by all sides in South Africa's gloomy history of apartheid. Forgiveness proved to be the only way that could help cease the never-ending trials, retribution, death threats, and threats of imprisonment. Only the discourse and campaign of forgiveness could entice the victims and the wrongdoers to willingly use the opportunity to face each other and tell their stories as part of the ritual of forgiveness. Tutu showed how letting victims and perpetrators face each other fostered courageous acts of penitence and forgiveness that serve as symbols for their nation and the world, allowing humankind to face the future with high hopes.

The Arguments for the Desire for Revenge

While many scholars and practitioners strongly advocate forgiveness, there are some who argue for the benefit of resentment or desire for revenge. Jefrey Murphy (1993, 2005), Susan Jacoby (1983), and Robert Solomon (1990), for example, provide justification for the desire for revenge, which may be similar to the justification for retaliation in various conflicts in many parts of the world including in Indonesia.

Murphy (1993) believes that it makes sense to develop the desire for revenge when one is wronged, and that resentment and desire for revenge after being wronged is generally approved of by most decent and mentally healthy people. The quest for revenge should be respected, acknowledged, and considered legitimate. Revenge should not be identified with vigilante or vendettas because it does not have to use illegal means nor should it be obsessive and excessive.

Murphy's (2005) arguments on the benefit of unforgiveness and resentment constitute his reaction against the Christian teachings of forgiveness which frequently resulted in unilateral, hasty, and uncritical forgiveness. Following Strawson (1974), Murphy (2005) argues that hatred and anger that drives the desire to witness the evildoer being punished constitutes a "vindictive passion", that is, "reactive attitude" which is natural and logical in the life of ordinary human beings. He asserted that being wronged means that one's self-respect is being violated, and he believed that expression of desire for revenge is necessary to maintain self-respect. This is important because self-respect is an essential part of human survival and happiness. Resentment and the desire to get even also constitute self-defense, because such attitude can prevent the wrongdoers from repeating the transgression. More importantly, desire for revenge and resentment is a rational attitude and act of human beings who need to maintain moral order. For Murphy (2005), a moral person is not only dedicated to conceptually believe in the right and the wrong, but is also responsible in implementing what is right, and making sure that the wrongdoer is punished.

Similar to Murphy (2005), Jacoby (1983) contends that revenge is natural and should not be delegitimized by unrealistic views based on Christian doctrines which preach to love one's enemy. Revenge and vindictiveness is fair, natural, realistic, and legitimate as long as they are constrained within the legal system. When one is wronged, one has the rights, and is encouraged, to express the desire for revenge by seeking justice through the court of law.

Robert Solomon (1990) also supported the desire for revenge, anger, and even hatred, because these emotions show our passion for justice. It is these emotions and passions that help create better justice. Justice calls for retribution, because being wronged is being treated with injustice, and thus anger, hatred, and vindictiveness is a form of desire to achieve justice.

Similar to Jacoby, Solomon (1990) argues that these vindictive passion and emotion should be contained and expressed legally. That is why we need the legal institutions to prevent these emotion and passion from getting out of hand and becoming cycles of violence.

In Defence of Forgiveness and Its Possible Implementation in Plural Indonesia

Despite the controversies over forgiveness versus desire for revenge described above, there are some similarities between the two conflicting sides. That is, each agrees that unilateral, hasty, and uncritical forgiveness is not acceptable and that the expression of revenge must be within the legal system. Proponents of forgiveness does not support condoning or forgetting the actions of the wrongdoers and forgiveness may require contrition, while proponents of desire for revenge emphasize the importance of limiting the expression of resentment in order to maintain justice and moral order. However, the emphases and starting points of the two arguments differentiate the focus and efforts of the two sides: one advocates more forgiveness for peace and well-being, while the other advocates expression of the desire for revenge to create justice.

While both forgiveness and the desire for revenge serve important roles in human communities, I will argue that in the case of Indonesia, forgiveness is more important than the desire for revenge for several reasons. First, Indonesian communities have been inundated by continuous multidimensional conflicts for so long that it is difficult to have corroboration and set the objective, acceptable standards to identify the wrongdoers and bring them to justice. Wrongdoers such as thieves and murderers can without doubt be arrested and punished based on universal human law, but whether or not a leader of religious sect should be punished depends on diverse subjective views. The justification for and rationalization of justice in Indonesia are often ambiguous, because many of them are based on traditional and religious values that tend to be

sectarian and biased. In this situation, only the attitude of forgiveness can help create better justice for all people regardless of their religious or ideological backgrounds.

Similar arguments can be applied to vindictive passion as an effort to maintain or improve order. In Indonesia, the passing of new bills can be very biased and partial, especially with the increasing fragmentation in politics and ideologies. New laws on controversial issues such as capital punishment, pornography, and polygamy may be passed due to the power and influence of major religious. Continuous resentment from the disgruntled groups can simply create tension and conflicts, while forgiveness can help encourage all parties to exercise patience and understanding. Forgiveness is especially crucial and vindictive passion is dangerous in a multi-religious community such as Indonesia where the notion of right and wrong is based on selective religious doctrines and sometimes on blind faith.

Second, after going through various crises for so long, Indonesian people who have been suffering from social and economic injustice tend to be emotionally sensitive, creating circumstances that readily triggered many conflicts and violence in the past few years. In this situation where people can cast unwarranted blames and identify the wrong scapegoats, it is more crucial to advocate forgiveness than to enhance resentment and unforgiveness, even for the sake of justice and moral order. According Witlevliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan (2001), the desire for revenge tends to be nerve-racking, making people prone to anger toward the perceived wrongdoers, and can lead to cycles of violence. Thus, advocating forgiveness can prevent the escalation of resentment, vindictiveness, as well as violent conflicts.

Third, forgiveness is more important than vindictiveness in Indonesia, because while vindictive passion can help maintain moral order, in this complex and plural society, there is always a question of whose morality. For example, a woman not dressing conservatively in some communities can be considered an immoral wrongdoer who violates the communal beliefs and norms, and, thus, deserves punishment. An expression of resentment against this woman, although aimed at demonstrating a desire to maintain morality, does not do justice to the woman who never intends to violate the law or offend anyone, especially if communities view her clothing as decent. In this situation where the laws may be biased and sectarian, advocating desire for revenge to maintain order and justice only creates more tension and conflicts. Forgiveness, on the other hand, enables people to be more patient, tolerant, and considerate of the differing views of sectarian as well as universal morality, and forgiveness can be rooted in and applied to both secular as well as religious life (Enright, 2001).

Finally, there are many violent conflicts that have caused a large number of deaths in some parts of Indonesia, including Maluku and Poso. In this situation, identifying the wrongdoers and the victims is not only time and energy consuming as well as confusing, but may also lead to further conflicts. Deadly conflicts such as those can ignite widespread desire for revenge, biased enforcement of the law, and a cycle of retaliation. Punishing the alleged wrongdoers may not eliminate the vindictive passion nor resolve the conflicts. Similar to the resolution of South Africa's conflicts, only forgiveness can help eliminate the desire for revenge and create long term reconciliation.

The Role of Religion in Forgiveness versus Desire for Revenge

If the argument put forward by proponents of vindictive passion for the sake of self-respect, justice, and morality is applied in religious life in Indonesia, it will only result in increasing tension and more conflicts, because each religion teaches its followers that their religious teaching is the most right and the others are wrong. Each religion will attempt to influence the others and those who do not embrace certain religion are perceived as sinners and often associated with the "enemies" who endanger the purity and truthfulness of the religion.

This view can lead to the portrayal of unforgivable enemies. In the name of defending the truthfulness of a religion, one group may judge other religious teachings to be wrong. A religious group claiming that those who have different religious teaching are wrong may also develop their vindictive passion, resentment, or revenge against the latter. In the case of the attack of *Ahmadiyah* group by Islamic Defender Front (FPI), for example, each claimed that their religious teaching was the right one and each might have vindictiveness based on their judgment of who is right and who is wrong. Conflicts such as this have never been totally resolved in Indonesia, because there is no clear law on judging the truthfulness of religious claims, in addition to the lack of law enforcement against violent action in the name of religion. Arguments for and against any of these two groups only further divide the Indonesian Muslims and reconciliation between the two groups is practically

impossible. Situations such as this only breed anger and increase the desire for revenge which is frequently warranted by religious discourses. These situations give the impression that religions inspire people to have increased desire for revenge and that religion does not emphasize God's mercy, love, compassion, and forgiveness.

According to Marc Gopin (2000), religion does have two kinds of potential: as a peace maker and as conflict generator. That is, a religion with all its histories, teachings and doctrines are loaded with symbolism which can be easily and readily used for creating loving, compassionate, and forgiving communities; however, it has also become the basis to express hatred and revenge as well as the main reason for many conflicts and wars. With the right motives, human beings are equipped with creative rationality to explore religious teachings through deep understanding of its texts and the resulting knowledge can be used to build peace and reconciliation. Religions can be exploited to create the most radical extremist and deadly militant groups, but it can also be used to form the most caring and forgiving religious communities. What Bishop Desmond Tutu has done with his TRC as described above constitutes an exertion to take advantage of a religious teaching that people have embraced and turn it into a major theme of a successful campaign for forgiveness to generate reconciliation processes.

Although the media tend to spread news of violent and extremist groups creating conflicts more often than those of loving and caring religious groups engaging in forgiveness and reconciliation, an extreme case of forgiveness carried out by Amish community truly captured the attention of the media worldwide. The world was stunned by Amish parents and community members, who had just experienced the overwhelming loss of their children, offering forgiveness and help to the family of the children's enraged killer. In most human communities, such mass killing could easily spark violent conflicts between the victims' families and the families of the enraged killer. However, the power of radical and unilateral forgiveness not only eliminated the potential for conflicts but at the same time created closeness among the two communities. Most of us would consider the Amish community's move irrational, defying justice and moral order. However, people expect religious groups (and not secular ones) to be the ones that can perform the acts of extreme forgiveness and can be expected to take extra miles to spread mercy and forgiveness, because the bases of religious institutions' actions are not only justice and morality but also compassion and mercy.

This story of forgiveness in the Amish community stunned us, because, while forgiveness is the center the Amish life, it has not been major part of human life experiences in general; nor has it become a central value of our families and communities. As a matter of fact, getting even is one of the oldest and recognizable human values contained in mythologies, modern stories, as well as ancient religious texts that have shaped our belief system (Ruth, 2007).

Perhaps one of the oldest mythologies that have shaped Indonesian cultural values can be found in the two well-known epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana (Anderson, 1996), which not only emphasize good versus evil, but also how the evil doers must be punished and eliminated. Throughout our lives and educational experiences, we have been accustomed to perceive that revenge is the natural, realistic, and justified way of responding to transgressors. Retaliation or getting even has been part of human culture which is continually reconfirmed by our modern media including literary works, traditional drama, movies, and legends where the most enjoyable and satisfying part of the story is when in the end the evil villains are punished or killed by the good heroes. Hollywood products which are enthusiastically consumed by the world also justify this human value where the good guy is the one who eliminates or kills the depicted villains.

Similar to secular media, religions also have their own texts, stories, anecdotes, and tradition that glorify the triumph of the heroes and the tragic death of the villains. Many religious stories describe severe punishment in hell, creating images that have been repeatedly portrayed in many religious speeches which encourage the justification and growth of desire for revenge or vindictive passion.

In modern Indonesia, the vindictive passion and religious stories of horrific punishment of the wrongdoers are also expressed and reconfirmed in the form of entertainment, such as movie series where the wrongdoers are severely punished after their deaths. The popularity of this show indicates that the gruesome punishment of the illustrated evildoers satisfy those who have vindictive passion against the perceived evil doers who have gone unpunished during their earthly lives.

The Rhetoric of Desire for Revenge in Religious Speeches in Indonesia

While many Indonesian religious speakers claim that the teaching of God's love, mercy, and compassion is central in their religions, in practice most religious speeches do not emphasize the importance of human forgiveness for each other. Although some sermons on the surface attempt to show the significance of compassion, a closer examination of many religious speeches reveals that the discourses are more loaded with language and symbolism that represent the idea of desire for revenge than with those of forgiveness. This section will discuss the rhetoric of resentment or vindictive passion that can be found in various religious speeches in Indonesia. For this purpose, following Burke's (1969) and Foss' (1988) theories of rhetorical analysis, terms and key words that represent vindictive passion are collected from various religious speech events. These include tape recorded sermons from mosques, churches, temples, and television programs as well as notes taken from Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists internet discussion, in addition to edicts (fatwa) issued by religious institutions and comments by leaders using religious terms, all occurring between 2003 and 2007.

The analysis of the key words or terms from the speeches is based on Burke's (1969) rhetorical theory of identification. In his theory of rhetoric, Kenneth Burke (1969) chooses the key term "identification" to differentiate his rhetorical theory from the notion of communication as overt persuasion. He believes that the most powerful persuasive strategies are not easily observable and most of the time rhetors rely on identification as persuasion and that identification is basic to human beings in their interaction with others and in forming groups. The basic nature of human group formation is to be united for particular reasons and separated from others for other specific reasons, such that since birth, people are continually in search for identity by dealing with this association and disassociation throughout their communication with others.

It is inevitable that religious speeches rely on identification because religion is about identification which differentiates a group of certain religious followers from another, each with its own prophet (hero), text, rituals, unique place of worship and other symbols. Religious identification is perhaps one of the most important identification for the Indonesian people, because, as typical religious people, Indonesians are both included in and at the same time excluded from certain groups by their religions.

Examination of collected key terms based on frequency and representativeness reveals that the following key terms associated with vindictive passion are usually used in antithesis: "reward" and "punishment", "right" and "wrong", "good" and "evil", "born again" versus "not born again", "believers" versus "non believers," "God" versus "Satan," "moral" versus "immoral," "obedience" versus "disobedience," "holy spirit" versus "evil spirit," "self-control" versus "out of control," and "heaven" versus "hell." Other messages are represented in key terms such as *kafir* (non-believer), "apostate", 'heretics' as opposed to "devout," "devoted," and "faithful."

The above antitheses are best represented by the terms "good" and "evil" as well as "reward" and "punishment" in that the good and the moral which is inspired by or comes from holy spirit will be rewarded, whereas the immoral and the evildoers will be severely punished. Another set of words "heretics," "*kafir*," "not born again," and "apostate" is closely related to what Burke (1969) labels as "common enemy". For the purpose of this discussion, therefore, the religious rhetoric of vindictive passion will be represented by the terms "good and evil," "common enemy," as well as "reward and punishment."

The Rhetoric of Good and Evil

As Burke's (1969) rhetorical theory suggests, since human beings are naturally united and, at the same time, divided, human's language and communication tend to simultaneously create unification and division. The rhetoric of good and evil is necessary for any human community to provide language and symbolism for uniting each human cluster and separating it from the others. This is especially crucial for religious groups. In religious speeches, nothing is more prominent than the rhetoric of good and evil (also represented in the use "them" and "us") being used to maintain and expand power and influence of one's group. Although the antithetical terms represented by the rhetoric of "good and evil" become effective strategies of affirming that one's group is right and the others are wrong, there is no universal norm, values, or standard that can be easily applied to judge which is which. For example, Osama Bin Laden may consider himself righteous and George Bush evil; on the other hand George Bush, relying so much on the rhetoric of good and evil himself, may be convinced that he is the righteous one and Osama Bin Laden the evil one.

Baumeister (1997) argues that for "evil" to exist, there must be an intentional action of an individual or group to cause the suffering of another as witnessed and judged by a third neutral party. However, the language

and symbolism of good and evil in religious rhetoric creates evil that is judged only by those particular religious group members. The use of the term "*kafir*" or "non-believer" and "heretic" for example, powerfully creates images of evildoers without any deliberate action from these alleged evildoers to do any harm and without any neutral witness or judge. On the other hand, one can be perceived as good and noble even if one is engaged in a premeditated action that clearly hurt these perceived evildoers. The increasing religious rhetoric of "good and evil" creates a growing biased perception and judgment about the identification of "good and evil."

As religious speakers continuously affirm each other on who the "good" and the "evil" are, they are taught not only to identify themselves with the "good" but also to associate certain other people with the "evil." Once the association of certain groups of people with the "evil" becomes more conventional, anything wrong happening in the righteous group may be blamed on these other group of perceived evil people, which is why the rhetoric of good and evil is in line with the rhetoric of "scapegoating" and "victimage" (Burke, 1969). This situation enhances the spread of the rhetoric of vindictive passion and makes it difficult to advocate forgiveness.

The Rhetoric of Common Enemy

When the rhetoric of good and evil turns into association of certain groups with the "evil," scapegoating and victimize lead to the identification of these groups as the "common enemy." For Burke (1969), "common enemy" is central in human communication, as the unity, the growth, and the survival of a group usually depends on the existence of common enemy in order to justify the belief and truthfulness of the group. This is especially important in the life of a religious group in a multi-religious community. In Christianity, the common enemy may be represented in the use of the terms "non-believers," in Islam: "*kafir*," in many religions: "heretic" or "apostate." A group consider "heretic" may easily become a "common enemy." Very often people not practicing any religion or belonging to different religions, called "non-Muslims," "non-Christians," or "non-Hindu" become representative terms for the "common enemy." The rhetoric of "good and evil" and the discourse of "common enemy" substantiate the notion of only one way to survive, that is, defeat or even eliminate the enemy, which is an important ingredient not only for resentment and desire for revenge but also for violent actions.

The rhetoric of "common enemy" is frequently used in most major religious speeches, some were blunt in naming specific groups; others use intrinsic language and symbolism to portray the wickedness of the outsiders. Some provide logical reasons for why the outsiders are the enemies, whereas others provide no clear justification for considering other groups as enemies other than the fact that they are different religious groups. Only by holding a different belief, any compassionate, loving, and peaceful groups can be portrayed as the enemies of certain religious groups, and create vindictive passion within the latter groups.

According to Burke (1969), the rhetoric of "common enemy" functions as an identification strategy, in that by confronting a group with a "common enemy," a rhetoric creates a sense of similarity among members of the group, hence, building a stronger unity within the group. However, this rhetoric can also strengthen the hatred against the portrayed enemies and intensify the attitude of resentment as well as vindictive passion.

The Rhetoric of Reward and Punishment

The rhetoric of "reward and punishment" is essential in the life of any religion which centers on morality. To maintain and improve morality, obedience, and loyalty, religious rhetors rely on the discourse of dos and don'ts complete with their rewards for following the rules and punishment for disobeying the religious laws. "Reward and punishment" is one of the most important rhetoric in practically most religious speeches which confront the religious followers with fear of punishment in order to do good things. While examples of the rewards can be very alluring, the punishment can be gruesome, as depicted in the horror film series showing horrid punishment of evil doers after death.

Since the examples of the wrongdoers are taken from the life of the Indonesian communities, it is not difficult for the religious audience to associate the wrongdoers deserving severe punishment with certain living members of their communities, thus, creating resentment and hatred against these assumed wrongdoers. One of the most common examples is the case of corruption which created anger among many Indonesian people. Some corrupt officials have been arrested, but others are still on the loose. Religious speeches which relentlessly portray God's punishment for the corrupt high officials and conglomerates have created vindictive

passion among religious followers. The vindictive passion is so strong that there are religious groups advocating *jihad* against Indonesian corrupt officials.

Many times the religious rhetoric portrays God's punishment for the assumed evildoers while in reality the assumed evildoers seem to live happily with no foreseeable punishment. These situations can without doubt encourage religious followers not only to have desire for revenge but also to potentially engage in vengeance and vendetta. It should not be surprising that violent attacks in the name of a religion directed at various groups considered the enemies of the religion have been inspired by the rhetoric of "reward and punishment."

The Limit of the Religious Rhetoric of Forgiveness is Some Religions

Although, as described above, many religious speeches focus on the key terms that can inspire and enhance vindictive passion among religious followers, there are other religious speeches that focus on forgiveness. The key terms commonly used in the latter speeches include: "giving," "sacrifice," "kindness," "patience," "endurance," "tolerance," "understanding," "compassion," "forgiveness," "mercy," and "love." These key terms are powerful words commonly employed to show the beauty and the nobility of each religion and thus corroborate that the particular religion is the best in the world.

However, these noble characteristics of religious teaching are not without limit. The first and important limit is that mercy and forgiveness is only for those who repent. This means that however moral, noble, and right a person is, unless that person repent and accept the religious teaching with full faith in the religion, that person will not be forgiven and that he/she will receive punishment. The unforgivable include anyone or any group that continues to differ from the basic tenets of the religion. Islam and especially Christianity clearly teach that those who do not accept their respective teachings are unforgivable. This kind of limit on forgiveness will continue to create vindictive passion not only against followers of different religions but also followers of various sects within one religion that are considered heretical.

The second limit is a matter of emphasis; religious speeches emphasize forgiveness of God to human beings and less emphasis on the responsibility of human beings to forgive other human beings. God's mercy is mentioned frequently for those who repent but rarely does it emphasize humans' forgiveness to others, except perhaps in Christian teaching with an extreme example of Amish's forgiveness mentioned above. The lesser emphasis on human forgiveness for other human beings suggests that humans are not demanded to forgive others especially if God himself is not forgiving to those who do not repent or are considered heretic.

Augmenting the Religious Rhetoric of Forgiveness for Peace Building

After examining many of the religious speeches in the past few years, I have come to the conclusion that the rhetoric of "good versus evil," "common enemy," as well as "reward and punishment" which undoubtedly amplifies hatred and the desire for revenge, is rampant in Indonesia as well as in the world. The expansion of this kind of rhetoric and the limited rhetoric of forgiveness might have helped create inter-religious tension and conflicts and have become barriers to various conflict resolution and peace building effort in Indonesia. To create world peace, therefore, it is urgent to enhance the rhetoric that reduces vindictive passion. This is important because when one is confronted with the challenges of building peace and resolving conflicts, scholars, policy makers, philosophers, and religious leaders agree that nothing can do more good for human than forgiveness (Helmick & Peterson, 2002).

Based on the discussion of the rhetoric of forgiveness and desire for revenge described above, there are some of the things that can be accomplished in order to enhance the rhetoric of forgiveness. First, it is important that all religious speakers have strong interest in exploring and tapping as much religious insights as possible for the teaching and campaign of forgiveness. For this purpose, speakers must have the right motive of creating peaceful society for all people, because motive determines the kind of rhetoric produced (Burke, 1969). More motives for creating peace and less motive for expanding one's religious groups' power and influence should help speakers focus, expand, and spread the language and symbolism of forgiveness and avoid the language and attitude of vindictive passion.

Second, religious leaders, preachers, and teachers can reduce the rhetoric of vindictive passion by avoiding the identification of "good" versus "evil." They should expand on the fact that there are border line cases where some people or groups are less evil or less good and the fact that good and evil is not absolute, because what is perceived as bad maybe somewhat good and it is possible that those who are now not good may

someday be considered as good. For this purpose, religious speakers should emphasize the understanding that ultimately only God knows and is the judge of who is good and evil. Emphasizing the fact that God is the supreme and ultimate judge should help religious speakers expose the negative aspects of being judgmental, thus avoiding classification of people according to what reward and punishment they should get. Allowing God as the ultimate judge also means avoiding religious followers from being involved in vigilante or vendetta when they see that the evildoers are not deservedly punished.

Third, religious speakers should avoid using language and symbols which directly or indirectly identify other groups or individuals as "common enemies," because association, syllogistic rationality, and generalization can wrongly identify highly moral and religious individuals as evil "common enemy." These include the use of judgmental terms such as "infidel", "heretics," or "apostate." To eliminate the tendency of scapegoating, all religious speakers should search for possible cure for any ills internally, through self-reflection searching for the possible cause of the problems within the religious group itself.

Finally, God's mercy and compassion, which is central in human's faith, should be reflected in human's forgiveness of others. In times where human beings are engaged in fierce competition for resources and success in all aspects of life (including economy, politics, and religion), love, compassion, and mercy should be the central theme of any religious speeches in order to help restrain the increasing vindictive passion as well as prevent conflicts and build peaceful communities.

Admittedly, that the above suggestions are not easy to implement, because those key terms and the representing rhetoric have become integral parts of current religious speeches. Each religion is naturally exclusive and must employ the rhetoric filled with the above antitheses, because it has to distinguish itself from other groups and, more importantly, convince the followers of its superiority over the others. However, Indonesian people are prone to get involved in conflicts because of disappointing and grudge-generating experiences due to suffering caused by poverty, economic and social injustice as well as natural disasters. This condition necessitates the control of rhetoric that leads to the portrayal of common enemies and encourages desire for revenge and the intensification of the rhetoric of forgiveness.

Due to the religiosity of the Indonesian people, they are greatly affected by religious speeches and the motives of their religious leaders. This is true because, the majority of Indonesian people trust their religious leaders more than their political leaders, indicating that they are more willing to follow and implement the proposition of their religious leaders than any other leaders. If the Indonesian religious speakers and leaders are highly motivated to disseminate religious rhetoric that are filled with more forgiveness and less vindictive passion, these leaders can help not only improve the health, well-being, and happiness of the Indonesian people, but also create more peace-loving communities.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have described the rhetoric of forgiveness and desire for revenge, including the benefits and disadvantages of such rhetoric in human daily life and interaction as well as in its roles in peace-building. As put forward by Murphy (2003, 2005), Solomon (1990) and Jacoby (1983), the benefit of the desire for revenge include to defend and/or maintain rights, self-respect, moral order, and justice. However, those advocating forgiveness believe that forgiveness does not mean condoning or forgetting the misdeed, such that justice and morality is still maintained. In addition, the desire for revenge to sustain moral order and justice is questionable not only because, in a country where there is no clear law enforcement such as Indonesia, it can go out of hand, but also because morality and justice can be very subjective. In such a situation, the desire for revenge due to subjectively perceived injustice can easily lead to vendetta, vigilante, or violent conflicts. While scholars argued against hasty, unilateral, and uncritical forgiveness, the benefits of forgiveness outweigh that of vindictive passion. This is especially true in a multiethnic and multi-religious country with potential sectarian conflicts such as Indonesia.

Based on examination and observation of various religious speeches, religious discourse in Indonesia tend to be loaded with the rhetoric of "good and evil," "common enemy," and "reward and punishment." The rhetoric of good and evil separate each religious group from other groups as well as place one's group on the good side and the other groups on the evil side. The rhetoric of common enemy which is widespread in human speeches identifies those who are the threats to the group's existence and survival, and, thus, justifies any resentment and hatred against them. The rhetoric of "reward and punishment" describes the punishment

of the portrayed enemies, and if the alleged enemies are perceived to have gone unpunished, vindictive passion can become widespread. Therefore, religious rhetoric of "good versus evil," "common enemy," and "reward & punishment" not only easily lead to hatred and encourages the desire for revenge, but also provide the language and symbolism for violent conflicts.

In order to enhance the role of religions in peace building, I have recommended reducing the rhetoric of vindictive passion and enhancing the religious rhetoric of forgiveness. This can be done by eliminating the language and symbolism of vindictive passion, preaching more tolerance and forgiveness toward the perceived evildoers and common enemies, as well as leaving punishment of evildoers to law enforcement and accentuating that God is the best judge of good and evil. In addition, religious speeches should emphasize God's mercy that must be reflected in the religious followers' forgiveness for others. This can be done if the motive of all religious speakers is focused on activating the role of religions in creating peace and reconciliation in plural Indonesia.