

Forgive Big Brother Seventy Times Seven Times?

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As the world begins Covid's postmortem analysis, the very voices whose mantras were "trust the science" and "safe and effective" are now shrugging their shoulders, saying, "We did our best." Emblematic of this new tune is a piece in *The Atlantic* entitled "[Let's Declare a Pandemic Amnesty](#)." Emily Oster, the author, helped fan the flames of fear and compliance for much of the lockdowns, only coming out with a "reasonable stance" late in the game as she joined the already loud clamor to reopen schools. Now, she argues, we should all forgive and forget, lest society fall into an endless cycle of acrimony and recrimination.

The concept of a "pandemic amnesty" is a tempting stance for many Christians. Certain Bible verses spring easily to mind. Were we persecuted unjustly for refusing the jab? Were we called all kinds of names because we declined to mask? Didn't Christ tell us to turn the other cheek, to suffer wrongs patiently? As for all the other things canceled, ruined, denied, or destroyed by lockdowns, fear, and mandates...Christ did tell Peter that we must forgive our brother seventy times seven times. So perhaps...a pandemic amnesty is the Christian approach?

But nothing could be further from the truth. A pandemic amnesty is not the Christian response to the past three years. Amnesty and forgiveness are not the same thing, for amnesty does not require contrition or reformation, while forgiveness is mercy in service of the truth. Nor should a Christian become a cultural pacifist, enabling the violation of human dignity in the name of charity.

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There are two parts to a “pandemic amnesty,” and each requires a different response from the Christian. First, there are the actual human beings involved—the family members who refused the company of their unvaxxed, unmasked brothers and sisters; the fellow parishioners and neighbors who let their fear drive them to hysterical ill-treatment of each other. And second, there are those representatives of institutional power who were responsible for the policies and narratives. The Christian response to these two groups must be significantly different.

Christian forgiveness is ultimately geared to repentance and reformation. Additionally, truth must always play a central role in forgiveness, lest our overlooking of an offence turn into permissiveness. If this were not so, the Church would, in the Sacrament of Confession, merely pardon us before we even asked for it. However, we must offer both contrition of the past wrong and a good-faith intention to avoid that behavior in the future. After all, when Christ forgives in the Gospels, He sends the repentant sinner off with the admonition, “Go, and sin no more.”

When it comes to the Covid-induced insults and poor treatment of our actual families, friends, and local communities, the Christian should indeed forgive—something that, I admit, I find difficult as I remember the bull-headed obstinacy and refusal to consider alternative evidence by many whom I hold near and dear. This forgiveness should not come with gloating or an angry demand that those who were wrong grovel before us, lest we be guilty of pride and the desire for revenge.

However, forgiving our friends and neighbors for their actions of the past three years must also involve our insistence upon self-reflection and reform. This is especially important because their actions did not simply harm us personally. If they had, we might be expected to forgive and forget. However, their fear led them to endorse a society-wide abuse of the elderly, children, and those who simply asked for the freedom to make

their own medical choices. Our forgiveness of our brother must, therefore, include accountability: go, and sin no more. Do not allow this to happen again.

It is true that Christ, on the Cross, asked His Father to forgive those who crucified Him because "they know not what they do." This is part of Emily Oster's plea—"We didn't know." With all the lies, cover-ups, and neglected facts of the past three years, many honest people could say that they did not know better at the time.

But Christian forgiveness is not a free pass to those who refuse to learn from the mistakes of the past to better insulate themselves from being ignorant accomplices in the future. This is especially important in democracies, where individuals must use their vote to punish the harsh overreach of elected officials and their nonelected regimes. Righteous accountability, not feel-good amnesty, is the order of the day.

This brings me to the second group seeking a pandemic amnesty: those representatives of institutions who used their power and influence to promote the Covid narrative and force lockdowns, closures, mandates, and social disgrace to those who would not toe the line. As is increasingly clear, these public officials and paid influencers did know vastly more than they now claim, and they either ignored the truth or altered it for their benefit.

These sorts lined their pockets while the globe suffered, partied at exclusive venues while people buried their loved ones over Zoom, and deliberately censored voices that complicated The Narrative. This group also includes those in power who perhaps did not know much but simply "followed orders" and dehumanized their fellow men and women because it was their job. How should the Christian respond to these sorts?

Let us be clear. Those agents of Big Brother are, in fact, public enemies, a menace to society and the common good. The past three years have

shown us that the administrative state and mainstream media are not friends of the people. The Christian is called not to grant amnesty under the guise of forgiveness, but, rather, to fight these agents of oppression and falsehood. To do otherwise is to be a pacifist—a mistaken reading of Christ's commandment to love our enemy that assumes that the Christian cannot righteously oppose orchestrated attacks on our communities.

Granting amnesty to the institutions and to their representatives makes the Christian an enabler of the dehumanization of society: loved ones forced to die alone, young children taught to fear human contact, neighbors encouraged to view each other as dirty and dangerous; suicides, drug overdoses, despair. As an elite economist, Emily Oster should have known what the lockdowns would do to society. As humans, we should have all known what denying our human community would do to each other.

Those who enforced the New Normal might plead with us that they just tried their best, that they did not know. But they have not reformed. The lockdowns have ceased for the moment. The mandates have been eased for a while. But those that enacted such failed policies are unashamed and unrepentant. And they are still in power. When the next Current Thing arrives, they stand ready to respond with the same heavy-fisted, anti-human ethos.

Christians should not forgive Big Brother seventy times seven times. We must not forgive him even once. For it is also a Christian duty to stand for truth and justice and defend the powerless.

[Photo Credit: Getty Images]

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