



The Healing of Nations: The Promise and Limits of Political Forgiveness

Mark R. Amstutz

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How does one forgive an international political transgression as deep as genocide or apartheid? Forgiveness is often conceived of as an element of personal morality, and even at that it is difficult. This book argues that it is also an essential part of political ethics, especially when dealing with collective wrongdoing by political regimes. In the past, a retributive justice demanding prosecution and punishment of all past offenses has kept the international community away from moving on to the next step in regime change. Here, Mark Amstutz takes a restorative justice approach, calling for nations to account for crimes through truth commissions, public apology and repentance, reparations, and ultimately forgiveness and the lifting of deserved penalties. The distinctive feature of forgiveness is the balance it strikes between backward-looking accountability and forward-looking reconciliation. The Healing of Nations combines a theory of the role of forgiveness in public life with four key case studies that test this ethic: Argentina, Chile, Northern Ireland, and South Africa. Amstutz uses the hard cases to illustrate the promise and limits of forgiving without forgetting.

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