The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice. Daniel Philpott, ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.

The contributors to *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice* are motivated by a desire to bring religiously grounded ideas and practices of reconciliation more squarely into the process of post-conflict political transitions. Though reconciliation and its foundation in restorative justice resonates naturally within the Judeo-Christian tradition, its potential to serve as a key component for political restoration following violent conflict has been under-explored as the result of an inclination to define forgiveness and reconciliation as personal activities divorced from the political arena.

The authors seek to overcome this reservation by explaining how reconciliation flows from a particular interpretation of liberalism as a political-theoretical construct (chapter 1), how religious understandings of restorative justice have been (unnecessarily) re-interpreted as retributive justice within Christianity (chapter 2), and how states have and can participate meaningfully in the process of collective forgiveness and reconciliation (chapter 3). Case studies of Germany's decision to open Stasi files to public scrutiny following the Cold War, a comparison of the truth and reconciliation processes in South Africa and Argentina, and the intra-faith reconciliation efforts that have grounded peacebuilding in Northern Ireland work to outline a far more robust role for restorative justice in political transitions while highlighting some very difficult challenges that must be faced by those individuals who both have suffered and perpetuated injustice in conflict and the significant responsibilities that must be born by the agents seeking to foster collective reconciliation as a part of post-conflict political transition.

Though it is clear the process is not easy, the authors remain convinced that prioritizing forgiveness and reconciliation—while not discarding accountability and restitution for wrongs done—is both possible and preferable to traditional punitive processes. Retribution, while certainly an understandable goal, is rarely possible in any meaningful sense following hostilities. How can perpetrators really receive their due for the horrors committed in many

of the world's conflicts? Even if it were possible, how does retributive justice enable victims, perpetrators, and society as a whole to rebuild the social bonds needed to heal and move forward into a state of peace? The authors of this volume contend that it cannot; only a process grounded in restorative justice—one that seeks explicitly to repair social fractures by identifying past wrongs and crafting a common vision for overcoming them—can provide a foundation sturdy enough on which to build real peace.

This brief summary does not do justice to the depth and richness of the individual chapters or the power of their collective argument. It is rare for edited volumes to contain so many chapters of consistent intellectual strength. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in a thoughtful, well-researched and argued volume on forgiveness, reconciliation, and restorative justice. Still, there are some shortcomings with the collection. The most troublesome is the book's Christocentric focus. There is some mention of non-Christian approaches to forgiveness and reconciliation (Alan Torrance's chapter on "covenant," "torah," and "right" as foundational within Judaism and how they are distorted in Christian theology is particularly notable for its insight), but overall the book examines forgiveness and reconciliation through an explicitly and exclusively Christian lens. There is a chapter devoted exclusively to interfaith perspectives on reconciliation, but at thirteen pages (including endnotes) it is by far the book's shortest and weakest chapter. Frustratingly, even it is written from a Christian perspective, discussing Islam, Judaism, and touching on Hinduism only as they relate to Christian principles. No sincere effort is made to understand how these and other traditions (Buddhism being the most obvious) conceptualize individuals' and communities' responsibilities to deal faithfully with conflict and injustice.

While not every subject can be addressed in every book, given the prevalence and particular virulence of inter-faith conflict, it is shame that this book limits itself in this way. Each of the authors could have brought even greater depth of understanding to their analyses had they made the effort to engage other traditions in a more significant way. Christianity gives us one approach for pursuing accountability and forgiveness. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism also have much to say on this issue. Judaism can contribute its ritual surrounding repentance and atonement, Islam its understanding of the greater jihad and Allah as the dispenser of judgment, and Hinduism and Buddhism their understandings of self-reflection and karma.

The argument is not for syncretism; it is for a deeper plumbing of how other faith traditions

instruct their faithful to hold themselves and others to account, and how that insight can inform the process of political forgiveness and reconciliation in post-conflict transitions across the globe. Comparative investigation could help break down the firewall identified in the beginning of the book between personal understandings of forgiveness and political understandings of justice. Certainly not all post-conflict transitions are occurring in states that would identify as liberal, and even when democratic transitions do follow war, not all of these transitions resonate with liberalism to the same degree found in the west.

Exploring other traditions' contributions to this subject with the same depth found in the chapters here would make a significant contribution to post-conflict peace building. It is truly regrettable this collection lacked that effort. At present, *The Politics of Past Evil* can offer guidance for states that identify as "liberal" or "western." As such, it does not speak resonantly to many areas of the world that currently face violent conflict.

With that reservation stated, the book stands as a deeply helpful contribution to our understanding of the role forgiveness and reconciliation can play in liberal post-conflict transitions. Its blend of theologians and historians make it appropriate for use in masters-level post-conflict reconstruction, religion and peacebuilding, and peace- and justice-related courses at either a seminary or university. The depth of argumentation leaves it less suitable for an undergraduate text, though it certainly will serve as a staple resource for my lectures on this topic.

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