



An Ethic For Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics

Donald W. Shriver

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Our century has witnessed violence on an unprecedented scale, in wars that have torn deep into the fabric of national and international life. And as we can see in the recent strife in Bosnia, genocide in Rwanda, and the ongoing struggle to control nuclear weaponry, ancient enmities continue to threaten the lives of masses of human beings. As never before, the question is urgent and practical: How can nations--or ethnic groups, or races--after long, bitter struggles, learn to live side by side in peace?

In *An Ethic for Enemies*, Donald W. Shriver, Jr., President Emeritus of Union Theological Seminary, argues that the solution lies in our capacity to forgive. Taking forgiveness out of its traditional exclusive association with personal religion and morality, Shriver urges us to recognize its importance in the secular political arena. The heart of the book examines three powerful and moving cases from recent American history--our postwar dealings with Germany, with Japan, and our continuing domestic problem with race relations--cases in which acts of forgiveness have had important political consequences. Shriver traces how postwar Germany, in its struggle to break with its political past, progressed from denial of a Nazi past, to a formal acknowledgement of the crimes of Nazi Germany, to providing material compensation for survivors of the Holocaust. He also examines the efforts of Japan and the United States, over time and across boundaries of race and culture, to forgive the wrongs committed by both peoples during the Pacific War. And finally he offers a fascinating discussion of the role of forgiveness in the American civil rights movement. He shows, for instance, that even Malcolm X recognized the need to move from contempt for the integrationist ideal to a more conciliatory, repentant stance toward Civil Rights leaders. Malcolm came to see that only through forgiveness could the separate voices of the African-American movement work together to achieve their goals.

If mutual forgiveness was a radical thought in 1964, Shriver reminds us that it has yet to be realized in 1994. "We are a long way from ceasing to hold the sins of the ancestors against their living children," he writes. Yet in this poignant volume, we discover how, by forgiving, enemies can progress and have progressed toward peace. A timely antidote to today's political conflicts, *An Ethic for Enemies* challenges to us to confront the hatreds that cripple society and threaten to destroy the global village.

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