

ABSTRACT OF *FORGIVENESS AND POLITICS:* *A CRITICAL APPRAISAL*

(Submitted by Kethoser Aniu Kevichusa to Kohima Educational Society in partial fulfilment of the requirements for entry into The Gordon Graham Prize for Naga Literature competition 2018)

NAME AND DETAILS OF THE BOOK

Forgiveness and Politics: A Critical Appraisal. By Kethoser Aniu Kevichusa. Langham Monographs: Carlisle, 2017. Pages 300. £19.99 (₹2,330). ISBN-13: 978-1-78368-355-0.

INTRODUCTION OF THE BOOK

The book, *Forgiveness and Politics: A Critical Appraisal*, is a monograph that critically explores the relationship between forgiveness and politics. While the book is rooted in multidisciplinary scholarship, and draws from various academic disciplines, its primary field of enquiry is Christian Political Ethics. It is a focused study on one concept – namely, forgiveness – seeking to explore and demonstrate, through an academically rigorous process of philosophical reflection and practical deliberation, how forgiveness might be related to politics.

Forgiveness and politics are often assumed, both ordinarily and academically, to be unrelated and un-relatable. There is, however, an increasing body of literature from various disciplines challenging that assumption, and arguing for the role and rationale of forgiveness in politics. The book also argues that forgiveness and politics can be related, and that forgiveness has political import and purchase. It, however, argues that the standard approaches and proposals for relating forgiveness and politics are themselves conceptually inadequate and methodologically flawed, and offers an alternative proposal for the relationship between forgiveness and politics. In offering the proposal, the book revisits not only the biblical foundations of forgiveness, but also the concepts and practices of politics, justice, and reconciliation, arguing that these concepts and practices are themselves undergirded and sustained by forgiveness.

With regard to politics, it argues that the understanding of politics as the activity of dialogue and compromise, grounded in realism and with a view to reconciliation, necessarily requires forgiveness as an operative principle and practice. It also argues that the concept and purpose of justice, both distributive and retributive justice, is not necessarily in conflict with forgiveness, and that justice can in fact be authentically conceived and practised in a manner that is disposed towards forgiveness. With respect to the search for reconciliation in conflict societies, it argues that forgiveness is indispensable to the realisation of the standard elements necessary for reconciliation.

The research also studies two cases of forgiveness in the context of political conflict, namely Northern Ireland and Nagaland. With respect to Northern Ireland, it argues that a good case of forgiveness in politics is the peace process that culminated in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. With regard to the Naga conflict, it assesses the Forum for Naga

Reconciliation (FNR) process, and also argues that forgiveness in politics in the Naga context must essentially involve a move from war to politics and political negotiation.

PLAN AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

What is the relation between forgiveness and politics? This is the primary question that the book attempts to answer. There are a number of subsidiary questions: What are the foundations – in particular, the biblical and Christian foundations – of forgiveness? What does forgiveness refer to and mean? What does politics refer to and mean? How can forgiveness and politics be related or incorporated? What happens to the question of justice when forgiveness is incorporated into politics? How does forgiveness relate to reconciliation in politics? These are the key theoretical questions that this research deals with, and constitute the first half of the book. The first half of the book – chapters 2 to 5 – is considerably theological, philosophical, and theoretical in form and content.

The second half of the book – chapters 6 to 9 – is more contextual in form and content. The contexts that the book focuses on are the Naga political conflict and the Northern Ireland political conflict. The Naga context has been chosen because of the author's own personal experience, and because of his concern and interest in exploring how forgiveness might have political import and purchase in breaking the cycles of violence and conflict in Nagaland. The Northern Irish conflict is also studied in the book as an illustrator of the theoretical arguments and a comparator of the political realities in Nagaland.

After the introductory chapter 1, chapter 2 begins by outlining how the Bible is typically approached for the understanding and practice of forgiveness. It points out how and why they are inadequate for serving as basic methodological approaches to the Bible for the understanding and practice of forgiveness by flagging a number of hermeneutical questions that beset them. In the second section, the chapter outlines an understanding of the Bible as a metanarrative spanning from creation to new creation. Finally, the third section argues how such an understanding of the Bible is particularly fruitful for considering why forgiveness is a truly biblical ethic, and how such an understanding of the Bible can illuminate the concept and practice of forgiveness in political life.

Chapter 3 makes an attempt to sustain the claim that forgiveness and politics are intrinsically related. In doing that, the chapter begins by highlighting and responding to some of objections against the mixing of forgiveness and politics. The chapter, secondly, outlines some of the standard theories proposed for relating politics and forgiveness, and integrating forgiveness in politics. Following that, the chapter makes a sustained and extensive critique of the standard theories that attempt to relate forgiveness and politics, particularly demonstrating how these theories are guilty of a fundamental methodological error. The chapter, finally, proposes another approach for understanding the relation between forgiveness and politics, followed by some concluding remarks on the strengths of the approach.

In chapter 4, the book explores the relation between forgiveness and justice. The chapter begins by discussing how the apparent conflict between forgiveness and justice is commonly resolved. While appreciating some of these proposals for what they are, it demonstrates how and why they are untenable, especially in long-standing conflict situations. The chapter then points to some more promising proposals for understanding the relation between forgiveness and justice. Following that, the chapter makes a proposal

for how the tension between forgiveness and justice might be significantly relaxed. It does so by revisiting and revising the concept and purpose of justice itself.

The next chapter looks into the relation between forgiveness and reconciliation. The first section of the chapter gives a critical overview of the concept of reconciliation. The second section highlights and criticises three errors in relating forgiveness and reconciliation. The third section proposes how forgiveness and reconciliation are related by making use of, and critiquing and modifying, one of the most influential conceptual frameworks in reconciliation discourse today.

After the theoretical discussions of the first half of the book, the book moves into a more contextually-based discussion in the second half. The second half begins with chapter 6, which explores the discussion of forgiveness and politics in the context of the Northern Irish political conflict. The chapter begins by looking into how forgiveness has typically been understood in the politics of Northern Ireland. It appreciates them for what they are, but also points out their limitation vis-à-vis politics. In the second section, the chapter argues that the historic Good Friday Agreement of 1998 can be interpreted as a form of forgiveness in politics, and responds to some of the objections against reading it as such.

The next chapter, chapter 7, then turns to the Naga conflict and considers the question of forgiveness in politics and the Naga political conflict. This chapter begins by retracing the history of the Naga conflict, highlighting the historical, political, and religious contours of the conflict. In the second section, the chapter highlights and analyses the anatomy of deeply divided societies, and uses it as a lens for looking into the Naga conflict. The third section highlights some of the forgiveness and reconciliation processes that have been taking place in Nagaland.

Chapter 8 is an assessment of a particular reconciliation process in Nagaland, the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR). The chapter gives an account of the *modus operandi* of FNR, highlighting some of its salient practices, and giving reasons for its relative success. The chapter also offers points of caution, critique, and criticism.

In chapter 9, the book proposes that an understanding of forgiveness and politics, as discussed throughout the book, has immense bearing for the Naga political conflict. In doing this, the chapter argues, firstly, that the gradual move of the Naga nationalists from violence to political negotiations, both with the Government of India and among the various Naga nationalist factions, can be plausibly interpreted as a politics of forgiveness. Second, the chapter highlights some of the difficulties that stand in the way of a settlement of the Naga problem, and how a politics of forgiveness might help in easing some of the tensions. Third, the chapter explores how a case for political compromise on the issues of Naga sovereignty/independence and Naga integration might be made. Finally, the chapter explores how the question of justice might be approached in the context of the Nagas and their search for reconciliation.

The book concludes with chapter 10, which contains a summary of the arguments and findings, highlighting the contribution of the work to the existing body of knowledge and literature, admitting some of book's limitations, weaknesses, and imperfections, and recommending and inviting further study and contribution.