

**Embodying Forgiveness:
A Theological Analysis**

L. Gregory Jones

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. xix + 313pp.

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RÉSUMÉ

Jones démontre que le pardon chrétien, non seulement comporte l'absolution du péché, mais a aussi pour but le rétablissement de la communion avec Dieu, avec les autres et avec toute la création. Il décrit le pardon comme une œuvre qui implique l'abandon du péché dans le cadre d'une amitié toujours plus profonde avec le Dieu Trinitaire et avec les autres, soulignant que la conception trinitaire de Dieu est cruciale pour bien comprendre la nature du pardon. L'auteur dénonce la dévalorisation du pardon dans une grande partie de la pratique "chrétienne" et examine avec beaucoup de sensibilité des situations dans lesquelles le pardon paraît impossible.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Jones argumentiert, daß christlich verstandene Vergebung nicht nur Schulderlass ist, sondern auf die Wiederherstellung der Gemeinschaft mit Gott, mit Mitmenschen und mit der ganzen Schöpfung zielt. Vergebung muß erlernt werden wie ein Handwerk und umfaßt das Verlernen von Sünde in tiefer werdender Freundschaft mit Gott und mit anderen. Dabei betont Jones, daß ein trinitarisches Verständnis Gottes entscheidend ist für ein richtiges Verständnis von Vergebung. Der Autor zeigt, wie in christlichen Kreisen Vergebung oft zur "billigen Vergebung" wird und geht mit viel Einfühlungsvermögen auf Situationen ein, in denen Vergebung unmöglich scheint.

In this thought-provoking book, L. Gregory Jones gently exposes the shallowness of much Christian thinking and practice in the area of forgiveness. His main thesis is that for Christians, 'forgiveness is not simply an action, an emotional judgement, or a declarative utterance though Christian forgiveness includes all those dimensions. Rather, forgiveness is a habit that must be practiced over time within the disciplines of Christian community. Jones argues that forgiveness has a central role in establishing a way of life which is a faithful witness to God's kingdom and underlines that

Christian forgiveness ought to be focused not so much on the absolution of guilt, but on the restoration of communion with God, with one another, and with the whole creation. Forgiveness is a craft which involves a process of unlearning sin in an ever-deepening friendship with the Triune God and with others.

The book consists of three parts with three chapters each. The first part opens with the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'a German theologian who struggled against the twin dangers of cheapened forgiveness and the eclipse of forgiveness in the midst of Nazi terror and the anemic responses to that terror offered by Christians in Germany.' His example reveals the cost of forgiveness as well as the struggle needed for developing the habit of truly Christian forgiveness. The rest of the first part presents the twin dangers as they are facing us today: the cheapening of forgiveness in what Jones aptly calls 'The Church's Psychological Captivity in Western Culture', and the eclipse of forgiveness among those who are convinced that forgiveness is an ineffective or even immoral response to the overwhelming power of darkness and violence.

The three chapters in the second part explain why a trinitarian understanding of God is crucial for an adequate account of forgiveness. Jones argues that 'the overarching context of a Christian account of forgiveness is the God who lives in trinitarian relations of peaceable, self-giving communion and thereby is willing to bear the cost of forgiveness in order to restore humanity to that communion in God's eschatological kingdom'. He highlights two central features of Jesus' ministry: Jesus did not require repentance prior to forgiveness and his forgiveness led to fellowship. The fact that forgiveness cannot be earned however does not entail an abdication of responsibility or accountability to other people. Those who are forgiven by Jesus are required and enabled to repent and to embody that forgiveness in a life that seeks to reconstruct relationships. Jones then shows that it is the Holy Spirit who makes 'Christ's universally significant judgement of grace particular by inducing our repentance as a component of God's forgiveness' and who guides us as we embody forgiveness in the particularities of our lives. The last chapter of the second part relates forgiveness to other Christian practices such as baptism, eucharist and confession.

The third part shows how the craft of forgiveness encompasses people's whole lives and under the subheading 'living with others in the absence of reconciliation' addresses very

specific issues such as loving enemies, forgiving impenitent offenders etc. Jones interacts with theories and practices of forgiveness outside the Christian tradition and explores the implications of a Christian understanding of forgiveness in such situations as slavery in the USA and the holocaust in Europe.

In developing his own account of Christian forgiveness, Jones draws from a rich variety of Christian sources in true ecumenical breadth. His discussion of alternative accounts is fair and considered, and he shows a keen awareness of the destructive ways in which the language of forgiveness can be used as a weapon of abuse and oppression of others. His analysis interacts with examples from the world of literature and film which are well chosen and presented. The theological analysis is thus firmly embedded in our cultural world. Jones realises that discussing theology must involve the political and the social, the philosophical and the psychological, and goes about his task with sensitivity and with an evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture. I suspect that most readers will find points where they disagree with Jones, even after having heard his arguments, but they will be engaged in a process of thinking which might lead to a better understanding and practice of forgiveness. The book is profound, yet without being inaccessible not least as a result of the (fictive and real) stories re-told in the book. I recommend it warmly to all concerned with reclaiming a Christian vision and practice of forgiveness.

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Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary

R. Hess

Leicester: IVP (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries), 1996, 320 pp., £9.99 pb., ISBN: 0-85111-849-6

RÉSUMÉ

Ce commentaire apporte un bon exposé de la situation archéologique et géographique de la Palestine durant la conquête. Hess présente la stratégie d'Israël dans la conquête en expliquant la situation géographique et la valeur stratégique des lieux mentionnés. En ce qui concerne l'interprétation littéraire du livre de Josué, ce commentaire montre à nouveau combien la tâche est difficile. Néanmoins, Hess

parvient à identifier les principaux traits littéraires, tels que l'intrigue et les principaux personnages des récits. L'analyse de chaque passage est suivie d'une application homilétique, et ce commentaire montre ainsi au lecteur combien le livre de Josué est actuel pour sa vie chrétienne.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der vorliegende Kommentar bietet eine umsichtige Erklärung der archäologischen und geographischen Situation Palästinas zur Zeit der Landnahme. Hess illustriert Israels Landnahmestrategie, indem er die geographische Situation sowie die strategische Bedeutung der erwähnten Orte erläutert. Was aber die literarische Interpretation des Josuabuches betrifft, so stellt der Kommentar ein weiteres Beispiel für die Probleme dar, denen man dabei begegnet. Dennoch gelingt es Hess, die wesentlichen literarischen Merkmale, wie z. B. den Plot und die Hauptcharaktere der Erzählungen, herauszuarbeiten. Indem jeder Abschnitt mit einer homiletischen Anwendung abgeschlossen wird, zeigt der Kommentar dem Leser die Relevanz des Josuabuches für sein Leben als Christ auf.

This commentary contains partially literary and homiletic elements but is mainly an archaeological and geographical interpretation of Joshua. Hess regards 'the message that this book contains for the Christian' (p. 10) as of highest importance and regards the text as an accurate description of real events. These events serve as an example for the Christian today, be it as an illustration of an eternal truth, an encouragement, or a warning. These applications, however, often appear unnatural as they frequently seem to press a typological meaning on the text. Furthermore, some applications recur in the commentary. But since they are only given after the interpretation of each passage, they do not attract the main attention of the reader.

In line with the commentary series, the text is analysed passage by passage. Hess divides Joshua into the three sections: I. The conquest (1:1-12:24), II. The Israelite tribal allotments (13:1-21:45), and III. The conclusion: proper worship of God (22:1-24:33). Especially in the first section Hess focuses on literary and narrative issues such as the structure of the narrative, the usage of words, repetitions, and chiasms. Hess identifies the plot of the stories and works out the main character(s) and message(s). Thus he provides an overview of the stories which he sets in the larger context of