

The Execution of God: Encountering the Death Penalty

Jeff Hood

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Hood finds human-shaped hope even in the desperate landscape of a death-penalty-obsessed culture.

Jeff Hood's *The Execution of God: Encountering the Death Penalty* doesn't just make the case that God is dead, but that each of us killed God.

Hood is a Baptist preacher from Dallas. He is also a death-row activist. *The Execution* looks at the origins of the death penalty from a biblical perspective, arguing that God is the ultimate murderer.

This is heady stuff, masterfully combined with cringeworthy specifics about the world inhabited by the people on death row. Images abound of incomplete final meals, pain, and the crimes themselves. Hood's own story passes through the book as well, giving a clear understanding of why someone would devote himself to a topic so tough.

Hood uses all of a preacher's tools to make his case, including argumentation, impassioned appeals, clever wordplay, and theology. He argues, convincingly and painfully, that each time the government puts a prisoner to death, it is also killing God.

This is in-your-face, aggressive theology at its best. It's grimy, gritty, and has no trouble holding its audience's feet to the fire. Evil, as presented here, is not just what humanity does, but what it leaves undone—or that, by allowing the death penalty to stand, each of us is also to blame.

A consideration of the state of theology, which puts theology on trial alongside American culture, proves to be one of the best parts of the book. Theology, because it colors the way people understand and talk about God, is said to fall short too—something that clearly needs to change.

There is hope here, but it is a human-shaped hope. Jesus is very much a man in this book, and less an otherworldly savior. Hood's hope is that people will be able to see Jesus that way, not just when they consider innocent people, but when they look on people who have committed unthinkable crimes, as well.

The Execution of God is a systematic theological postmortem of a world said to kill God on a daily basis.

JEREMIAH ROOD (September/October 2017)

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