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Goals of the *Africanus Journal*

The *Africanus Journal* is an award-winning interdisciplinary biblical, theological, and practical journal of the Campus for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME). Its goals are to promote:

- a. the mission and work of the members and mentors of the Africanus Guild Ph.D. Research Program of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston;
- b. the principles of the Africanus Guild (evangelical orthodox Christian men and women who are multicultural, multiracial, urban-oriented, studying a Bible without error in a cooperative way);
- c. Christian scholarship that reflects an evangelical perspective, as an affiliate of GCTS-Boston. This is an interdisciplinary journal that publishes high quality articles in areas such as biblical studies, theology, church history, religious research, case studies, and studies related to practical issues in urban ministry. Special issues are organized according to themes or topics that take seriously the contextual nature of ministry situated in the cultural, political, social, economic, and spiritual realities in the urban context.

Scholarly papers may be submitted normally by those who have or are in (or are reviewed by a professor in) a Th.M., M.Min., Ed.D., Th.D., S.T.D., Ph.D., or equivalent degree program.

Two issues normally are published per year.

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Life of Julius Africanus

Julius Africanus was probably born in Jerusalem, many scholars think around A.D. 200. Africanus was considered by the ancients as a man of consummate learning and sharpest judgment (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 6:128). He was a pupil of Heracles, distinguished for philosophy and other Greek learning, in Alexandria, Egypt around A.D. 231–233. In A.D. 220/226, he performed some duty in behalf of Nicopolis (formerly Emmaus) in Palestine. Later he likely became bishop of Emmaus (Eusebius, *History*, VI.xxxi.2). Origen calls him “a beloved brother in God the Father, through Jesus Christ, His holy Child” (*Letter from Origen to Africanus* 1). Fellow historian Eusebius distinguishes him as “no ordinary historian” (*History*, I. vi.2). Eusebius describes the five books of *Chronologies* as a “monument of labor and accuracy” and cites extensively from his harmony of the evangelists’ genealogies (*History*, VI. xxxi. 1–3). Africanus was a careful historian who sought to defend the truth of the Bible. He is an ancient example of meticulous, detailed scholarship which is historical, biblical, truthful, and devout.

Even though Eusebius describes Africanus as the author of the *Kestoi*, Jerome makes no mention of this (*ANF* 6:124). The author of *Kestoi* is surnamed Sextus, probably a Libyan philosopher who arranged a library in the Pantheon at Rome for the Emperor. The *Kestoi* was probably written toward the end of the 200s. It was not written by a Christian since it contains magical incantations (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* III.412).

The Greek text of Africanus’ writings may be found in Martinus Josephus Routh, *Reliquiae sacrae* II (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974 [1846]), 225–309, and Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, Karl Pinggéra, eds., William Adler, trans., *Julius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 15 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

The extant writings of Julius Africanus may be found in vol. 1, no 1, April 2009 edition of the *Africanus Journal*.

Other Front Matter

Editorial Team for the issue: Cassidy Jay Gossage, Ruth Martin, J. Saemi Kim, Seong Park, Nicole Rim, John Runyon, Aída Besançon Spencer, William David Spencer

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Summary of Content:

This issue is concerned with issues of ethnicity, women, abuse, marriage, natural catastrophes, disabilities, and biblical doctrines and interpretation.

THE AFRICANUS GUILD



L to R: Quonekuia Day, Mark Chuanhang Shan, Jennifer Creamer

“If not for the Africanus Guild, I would not even think of getting a Ph.D. and would not have had the chance to teach my own course at Gordon-Conwell, and be trained to be a Bible teacher, and for this I am most grateful.” –Benjamin Fung

Benjamin Fung’s Ph.D. was received from North-West University in South Africa 2017
Quonekuia Day and Mark Shan are Ph.D. candidates with London School of Theology.
Jennifer Creamer received her Ph.D. from North-West University in 2016.

The Africanus Guild is a support program set up to assist selective, underrepresented constituencies to pursue research Ph.D.s from North-West University and London School of Theology. The Guild is especially oriented to the multicultural, multiracial urban scene. Accepted students are mentored by a Gordon-Conwell faculty member. Candidates may complete the Th.M. at the Boston campus and then apply to the Guild.

Blindness to the Whiteness? Reflections on Race Awareness among Theologians and Biblical Scholars in American Evangelicalism¹

JOHN JEFFERSON DAVIS

In a 1993 *Christianity Today* article titled “Racism and the Evangelical Church,” Billy Graham was quoted as saying, “Racial and ethnic hostility is the foremost social problem facing our world today.”² More than a quarter century later, the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020, by a white police officer who pinned Floyd, an African American, to the ground and held him with his foot upon his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, caused national outrage and re-ignited a continuing debate on systemic racism in America. The evangelical community has been challenged to rethink its attitudes on race and racism. I have been awakened to my own lack of knowledge and concern, as a professor in an evangelical seminary, about issues of racial justice – rightly considered America’s “Original Sin.”³

In the course of trying to re-educate myself by doing fresh reading in the areas of the history of slavery in America, Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights movement, the “New Jim Crow,” and critical race theory, this question arose in my mind: “Is Billy Graham’s judgment – as the most prominent evangelical in the modern period – that racial hostility is the ‘foremost social problem facing our world today’⁴ reflected in the actual research and teaching priorities of theologians and biblical scholars in American evangelical seminaries and Christian colleges?” To explore this question, I decided to conduct a “race awareness audit” by doing a content analysis of articles published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* during the fifty-five years from 1962 to 2017, and by examining the chapters on the doctrine of sin in twenty-five systematic theology texts published by evangelical and Reformed theologians from 1878 (Charles Hodge) to 2017 (John McArthur).

The purpose of this “audit” was to find out how often topics such as race, racism, racial discrimination, and *institutional* sin were addressed by the authors published in *JETS* or by the theologians in their systematic theology textbooks. I was shocked – even appalled – by what I discovered. In this article I will 1) share the results of this content analysis; 2) reflect on the significance of these findings for the teaching of evangelical biblical scholars and theologians; and 3) make some recommendations for needed reforms in the evangelical movement as a whole – both in its theology and its practices.

Blindness to the “Whiteness”? An Interim Report on the Findings

I reviewed the titles of articles published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* from the years 1962 to 2017, using the indices in the bound journals that were available to me in the stacks of Goddard Library at Gordon-Conwell. These were also the years during which the Civil Rights movement and the social turmoil of the 1960s were so prominent in America’s national life. *JETS* was established to be the flagship scholarly journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, focused on the doctrine of inerrancy and the defense of the inspiration and authority of the Bible against modernist

1 I wish to thank William Spencer for his valuable editorial assistance in the revision of this article and its preparation for publication.

2 *Christianity Today*, October 4, 1993, p. 27.

3 Cf. Jim Wallis, *America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2016).

4 It is to Graham’s credit that before the Supreme Court in 1954 struck down school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*, that he insisted in the spring of 1953 that his Chattanooga, Tennessee crusade not be segregated, and that blacks and whites be seated together. See Giovanna Albanese, “Christ Makes All the Difference,” *Decision*, February 2021, p. 36. This public act against racial segregation was followed in Graham’s subsequent ministry. Like his predecessors Moody and Sunday, however, Graham focused on personal rather than institutional sin in his evangelistic preaching.

Bible critics. The contributors to this journal were the biblical scholars and theologians who were presumably the key trainers of pastors and preachers of American evangelical churches. What issues and concerns were the focus of these scholars – and which issues were ignored?

In my review of the 1,577 articles published in this period, I found that only *four* articles dealt with topics of race, racism, racial discrimination, slavery, Jim Crow, or segregation – amounting to approximately *two-tenths of one percent* of the total! Even this paltry percentage does not tell the full story. Of those four articles, three dealt with slavery – Rupprecht (1963), Yamauchi (1966), and Pierce (2006) – but all three focused on slavery in the ancient world, and did not relate their research to twentieth or twenty-first problems of race and racism.⁵

Other contributors to *JETS* did address issues broadly related to social justice, e.g., Finley (1985), Henry (1982; 1992), Warden (2000), Erickson (2003), Vogt (2008), and Harbin (2011), but all were silent on racial justice.⁶ Only *one* article out of 1,577 – B.W. Fong, “Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation According to the Principles of Eph. 2:11-22” (1995) – brought the study of Scripture and Christian theology to bear directly on the issues of race and racial justice in modern America – less than one-tenth of one percent of all the articles published in *JETS* during this period. During a period of history when American society was being convulsed by scenes of Bull Connor’s police dogs and water cannons attacking protesters in Birmingham; riots and burnings in Watts; and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, the flagship academic journal of American evangelicalism was largely silent on one of the greatest social justice issues of our time.

The second part of this “racial awareness audit” consisted of a content analysis of twenty-five American evangelical and Reformed systematic theology textbooks⁷ published from 1878 through 2017. The topics generally treated in systematic theology – for example, God, creation; sin, the image of God, the person and work of Christ, salvation, atonement, and so forth – should provide the basic categories which shape and structure the content of sermons that preachers preach. Blindspots in these categories will produce blindspots in the teaching and preaching of seminary graduates and future pastors.

The authors of these texts and dates of publication were: Charles Hodge (1878); Robert Lewis Dabney (1878); William G.T. Shedd (1883); A.H. Strong (1907); Louis Berkhof (1932); Carl F.H. Henry (1947); Louis Sperry Chafer (1947-48); H. Orton Wiley (1952); E.J. Carnell (1959); Oliver Buswell, Jr. (1962); Emery H. Bancroft (1976); Dale Moody (1981); J. Rodman Williams (1988-92); Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (1990); James Leo Garrett (1990); David Wells (1993, 1998); Stanley Grenz (1994); J. Kenneth Grider (1994); Wayne Grudem (1994); Robert Reymond (1998); Norman Geisler (2004); Michael Horton (2011); Millard Erickson (2013); John Frame (2013); and John McArthur (2017).⁸ These writers constitute a representative sample of the theology texts written

5 Arthur Rupprecht, “Christianity and the Slavery Question,” *JETS [Evangelical Theological Society Bulletin]* 6:2 (1963) 64-68; Edwin Yamauchi, “Slaves of God,” *JETS [Evangelical Theological Society Bulletin]* 9:1 (1966) 31-49; Timothy M. Pierce, “Enslaved to Slavery: An Application of a Sociological Method to the Complaint Motif,” *JETS* 49:4 (2006) 673-97. In the final sentence of his article, Rupprecht states that “... we have too long superimposed the viciousness, perpetual bondage and race hatred of slavery in the American South on conditions [of slavery] in the Roman world” (68), but makes no connections to modern American racial issues.

6 Thomas Finley, “An Evangelical Response to the Preaching of Amos,” *JETS* 28:4 (1985) 411-420; Carl F.H. Henry, “The Bible and the Conscience of Our Age,” *JETS* 25:4 (1982) 403-407; “Reflections on the Kingdom of God,” *JETS* (1992) 39-49; Duane Warden, “The Rich and Poor in James: Implications for Institutional Partiality,” *JETS* 43:2 (2000) 247-257; Millard Erickson, “Evangelical Theological Scholarship in the Twenty-First Century,” *JETS* 46:1 (2003) 5-27; Peter T. Vogt, “Social Justice and the Vision of Deuteronomy,” *JETS* 51:1 (2008) 35-44; Michael A. Harbin, “Jubilee and Social Justice,” *JETS* 54:4 (2011) 685-699. Erickson (2003) does note the “remarkably Euro-American” orientation of contemporary evangelicalism, which is “quite Anglo, middle class, and male as well” (22), but makes no specific reference to race or racism.

7 Several of the authors considered in this list – Carl Henry, E.J. Carnell, and David Wells – did not write complete systematic theology textbooks, but their extensive theological writings and prominence in American evangelicalism warrants their consideration in this “audit” of racial awareness.

8 The texts examined were: Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, v.2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 repr.; orig. 1878); Robert Lewis Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972; orig. 1878); William G.T.

for conservative, Reformed, and evangelical seminary students in America from the late nineteenth century down to the present, and represent a variety of denominational perspectives – primarily Baptist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, dispensational, Nazarene, and Wesleyan-Holiness.

The racial awareness audit focused on two questions: Does this text discuss institutional or corporate sin as well as personal sin? Does the author relate the doctrine of sin to issues such as slavery, race, racial discrimination, or segregation in the history of American church and society? The results – as in the case of the content analysis of *JETS* – were quite disappointing. Of the twenty-five evangelical theologians examined only 20% made reference to the *institutional* dimensions of sin.⁹ Only four of the twenty-five (16%) made any specific mention of race, racism, racial discrimination, slavery, or segregation. And on three of the twenty-five (12%) – Lewis and Demarest; Garrett; Erickson - discussed both institutional sin and racism or racial discrimination to any significant degree. These theologians – who happen to be Baptists – would deserve passing grades for this audit; the twenty-one others who made *no* mention of race or racial discrimination would deserve a “notation” or failing grade.

In twenty-one of the texts – including the ones written by conservative Reformed and Presbyterian¹⁰ theologians – a seminarian could have studied the doctrine of sin without ever

Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, v.2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1883); Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, v.1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993, orig. 1947-48); H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, v.2 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1952); Edward John Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952) and *The Case for Biblical Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969); James Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962); H. Emery Bancroft, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6v. (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1976-1983); Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 3v. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988-1992); Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, v.2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); David Wells, *No Place for Truth Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) and *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000; orig. Broadman & Holman, 1994); J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesley-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998); Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, v.3, *Sin and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004); Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. ((Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2013); John McArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017).

9 This focus on individual sin to the neglect of institutional and corporate sin reflects both American individualism in general and evangelical individualism in particular. In *Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford, 2000) Emerson and Smith comment on the evangelical “freewill individualism” worldview fostered by revivalism, pietism, and anti-Social Gospel fundamentalism (76, 77); consequently, racism tends to be interpreted as “... individual-level prejudice or discrimination and nothing else” (88). And Dennis Hollinger concluded that the “... Evangelical ‘social’ ethic is primarily a personal ethic in social clothing. The understanding of the church’s mission has little place for a real proclamation of social justice, other than generalities”: Hollinger, *Individualism and Social Ethics: An Evangelical Syncretism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), (116). Hollinger’s conclusion regarding the lack of specific preaching on social justice issues such as race is supported by the content analysis of articles published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, as reported below, n. 13.

10 E.g., Hodge, Dabney, Shedd, Berkhof, Buswell, Reymond, Frame, and Horton. Dabney was a staunch Five Point Calvinist, but defended slavery both before the Civil War – and after it: see Daniel Kleven, “Providence Is No Excuse: Exposing a Reformed White Supremacist,” *Desiring God*, January 15, 2018, accessed at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/providence-is-no-excuse>. I wish to thank my colleague Rodney Cooper for bringing this article to my attention.

Benjamin B. Warfield is a notable exception to this “Reformed silence” on race. While he did not write a systematic theology, Warfield did specifically address racial discrimination in his published writings (e.g., his 1888 article, “Drawing the Color Line”), and in 1913, while Warfield was acting president of Princeton Seminary, overruled a faculty policy (apparently supported by J. Gresham Machen, Warfield’s junior colleague) mandating the social separation of blacks and whites, and allowed a black student to live in the student dormitory at Alexander Hall: see Fred G. Zaspel, “Reversing the Gospel: Warfield on Race and Racism,” *Themelios* 43:1 (2018) 25-33.

being reminded or made aware of the fact that racial discrimination and racism had ever been pivotal social justice issues in American church and society. And so it appears that not only were most white evangelical leaders sitting on the sidelines during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s,¹¹ but also that many conservative evangelical theologians during this period were *silent* on matters of race. Why this silence and neglect of racial justice as a theological concern? And what are the implications of this silence and neglect for the teaching of theology and for the evangelical movement going forward? These are some of the questions to be explored in the section to follow.

Why the Silence on Race? Some Reflections

Before probing reasons for this silence, we need to restate why greater racial awareness should remain an urgent priority for American evangelicals. Many white evangelicals seemed to believe that racial discrimination in America has receded – after all, the Civil Rights movement and the two-term elections of Barack Obama signaled, did they not, that progress has been made? Indeed, there has been some progress – but at the same time, Dylann Roof’s murder of nine African Americans in Charleston’s Emanuel AME church in 2015, the 2017 white supremacy march in Charlottesville, the involvement of white nationalist extremists in the January 6th assault on the Capitol – all point to the unmistakable persistence of white racism in America.

Renewed, sustained attention to matters of race is demanded *morally, methodologically, and missiologically*. Morally, the biblical teachings regarding restitution and expiation¹² require that restitution be made for the labor and property that was stolen from enslaved African Americans, before the Civil War, and during Reconstruction and Jim Crow. Expiation must be made for the innocent blood shed in the 4000 and more black lives lost in lynchings and race riots – both in the South and the North. That which has been stolen must be restored, and expiation for the shedding of innocent blood must be made – lest this nation remain under the curse and wrath of a righteous

This lack of attention to matters of race is reflected also in the writings of the holders of the Andrew Mutch Chair of Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theology: Roger Nicole; David Wells; Richard Lints; John Jefferson Davis. Nicole’s classroom and writing concerns focused on the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture and the doctrine of the atonement. In *No Place for Truth* (1993) and in *Losing Our Virtue* (1998), David Wells focuses on the accommodation of the churches to the marketing and therapeutic cultures but has little or no discussion of racism or racial discrimination in America. In *The Fabric of Theology: Renewing the Evangelical Mission* (1993), Lints engages with issues of the Enlightenment, modernity, and postmodernity – but not race or racism. However, James Cone is cited twice in a list of 238 authors in the bibliography. In *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (1984), Davis does make reference to issues of race (“A Changing Social Order,” 28-31) but has no extensive discussion. Only in the fourth edition (2015) of his *Evangelical Ethics* did Davis include a chapter on “Slavery, Race, and Racism in America.”

In the Mission Statement of Gordon-Conwell and the Commentary on this statement there are multiple references to “social responsibility,” but these references are abstract and lack specificity. The words “race” or “racism” or “racial discrimination” are absent from these documents, and the word “Blacks” occurs only once, in the Preamble, p.3: “Blacks, for example, have often associated with it [the term *evangelical*] social apathy if not opposition to those who are poor and oppressed.” Elsewhere, the document is silent.

For many years racial justice issues were addressed by Dean Borgman and Wesley Roberts in their course Christianity and the Problem of Racism, as well as by Stephen Charles Mott and others in their classes. The subject index for Mott’s textbook, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) has 25 page references to racism, segregation, and the civil rights movement.

11 Curtis J. Evans, “White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement,” *Harvard Theological Review* 102:2 (2009) 245-73. Evans notes the challenge of Reinhold Niebuhr to Billy Graham for Graham to preach on racial justice in his evangelistic crusades (255); the weaknesses of Carl Henry’s belief that racial discrimination could only be overcome by individual Christian behavior and personal regeneration (266); and the primarily negative and disparaging coverage of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement (268) in *Christianity Today*. In his August 1963 “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed his disappointment with the white church leaders who had been “... more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.”

12 On restitution of stolen property: Luke 19:8; Exod 22:1-15; Lev 6:4,5; Num 5:5-10; on expiation for an unsolved murder: Deut 21:1-5. On the subject of reparations, see William A. Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). The authors present an extensive history of previous proposals and programs for reparations, and strong arguments for its moral basis and logistical feasibility.

God who reveals his wrath from heaven against *all* the unrighteousness of humanity – not just personal and private unrighteousness. Methodologically, these findings concerning scholarly silence reveal the need for serious re-examination of evangelical assumptions concerning the nature of contextualization, biblical authority, Christology, and the nature of salvation and the gospel itself. Missiologically, American evangelical missionaries cannot with great credibility proclaim abroad a gospel that promises to break down the dividing walls between the races (Eph 2:14-18), while here at home, churches remain largely segregated along the racial divide of black and white.¹³

Why, then, the silence? Of the multiple reasons that could be in play, one is surely the *specialization of knowledge* that is characteristic of modern higher education and the theological academy. Modern theological education mirrors the specialization (and fragmentation) of the nineteenth century German research universities and doctoral programs that were the context of Schleiermacher's theological curriculum.¹⁴ Systematic theology, biblical studies, and ethics are now separate academic disciplines, and biblical exegetes and systematic theologians are generally not expected to develop the contemporary ethical applications of their studies in their textbooks and journal articles.¹⁵

While true, this is hardly the whole story. This embarrassing neglect of racial justice concerns points to serious blind spots in evangelical understandings of *contextualization* itself. Contextualization can be misconstrued as something that missionaries need to do to communicate the gospel in non-Western cultures – or as something that characterizes only “contextual” theologies such as Black, feminist, womanist, Latinx, or Asian. “They are doing ‘contextual’ theologies – while I am just doing ‘theology’.” Not so fast! It is now becoming apparent that many white theologians and exegetes have not been sufficiently self-critically aware of their own social context and the influence of their own (privileged) social and class locations on the issues that they select for scholarly research and publication.¹⁶

In my own (98% white) socioeconomic and geographical location – Hamilton, Massachusetts – in my day to day lived experiences, I do not need to give much thought to such issues as police brutality – but young African American males do not have such “cognitive luxury.” Problems that may not be part of our immediate environment and daily lived experiences – drive-by shootings, incarceration, food insecurity, poverty, racial slurs, microaggressions, racially segregated and inferior schools, poor housing, polluted air and drinking water, etc. – I may tend to ignore, and are less likely to be the chosen subjects of my textbooks and journal articles. I am freed to focus my time and attention on the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs: self-esteem, social validation, the meaning of life, and “peak experiences.” My consciousness is shaped more than I

13 The racial segregation of American churches documented by H. Richard Niebuhr in 1929 – generations ago – in his classic work, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: World Publishing, 1957; orig. 1929, Henry Holt and Company), remains largely in place today: Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

14 For the historical development and current problems of fragmentation in theological education, see Edward Farley, *Theology: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

15 But what about evangelical preachers and homileticians? Should they be expected to make connections between the biblical texts and current social issues such as race relations? A review of the titles of articles published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* from the year of the journal's founding in 2001 through 2017 found that of the 182 articles published during that sixteen period, *not one* article had a title that contained the words “race,” “racism,” or “racial discrimination.” There were two articles – one-tenth of one percent – that indirectly related to matters of race and ethnicity: Matthew Kim, “Preaching that Exegetes Ethnicity: A Blind Spot in Homiletics,” *JEHS* 11:1 (2011), and Bryan Lorrirts, “The Multi-Ethnic Preacher,” *JEHS* 13:1 (2012). Evidently, there was little interest among most of these authors for dealing with race or other controversial social issues from the pulpits of evangelical churches.

16 In my early years as an assistant professor of theology at the Hamilton campus, I was part of an informal discussion with James Cone and my colleagues Roger Nicole and Eric Lemmon. Cone had been invited to speak to the seminary community that day. I can remember thinking at the time that I had problems with Cone's “Black theology” – from the perspective of my own evangelical theology. My theology was just “theology.” I was not critically self-aware at the time that I was doing *white* theology – or at least, a theology not critically aware of the influence of my white social, geographic, and class location!

may be willing to admit by my location in the (privileged, white) dominant culture, and I may too easily remain untouched by the concerns and problems of subordinated cultures and social classes.

Received evangelical understandings of contextualization also need greater self-awareness of how *history* – the history both of America and the evangelical movement itself – has limited our understanding of the gospel and racial justice. The neglect of racial justice issues reflects the continuing impact of the modernist-fundamentalist controversies, that caused evangelical scholars to engage primarily in modernist Bible critics and not voices from the Black church as theological conversation partners.¹⁷ The influence of the Scofield Reference Bible and dispensational eschatology has pushed the attention of many in conservative American Protestantism away from active concern for social and racial justice in the present toward speculations about the time of the “Rapture” in the future. Systematic theologies and biblical commentaries that are not adequately informed by the many tragic facts of American history – the lynching, murder, brutalization, and robbing of Blacks and Native Americans – crimes against humanity perpetrated by “Christians” and non-Christians alike – run the risk of continuing a scholarly silence that avoids or minimizes calls for social justice and restitution in the present.

Greater race awareness among white evangelical scholars should provoke critical reflection on how the doctrine of the *inerrancy* of Scripture has actually been applied - or not applied - in matters of social righteousness in church and society. This doctrine was the defining issue for the founding of the Evangelical Theological Society in 1949, on the basis of the one sentence statement of belief, “The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs.”¹⁸ The biblical scholars and theologians whose articles are published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* are expected to be supportive of this doctrine. From the time of its inception to the present, the membership in the Evangelical Theological Society has been predominantly white, male, and middle class, and in recent years, with heavy representation from the more politically and socially conservative (white) Southern Baptist and independent Bible churches.

The contributors to *JETS* have done able service in their articles defending the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture in response to the criticisms of modernist biblical scholars. As previously noted, the primary conversation partners for evangelical scholars in the modern period have generally been white, male, liberal Protestant biblical scholars and theologians – to the neglect of racial and ethnic minority points of view and concerns. This defense of biblical truth has largely been a defense of *propositional* truth – with a neglect of *enacted* and practiced truth. Propositional truth is indeed important, indeed necessary, for the defense of the gospel – but not in itself *sufficient* for salvation, Christian obedience, or discipleship. Propositional truths such as “Jesus is Lord” and “Jesus died for our sins and was raised by God from the dead” are essential for saving faith. But James the brother of Jesus reminds us that, while it is good to affirm a propositional belief in monotheism (“You believe that there is one God,” James 3:19), we must not forget that “faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 3:17); faith without deeds does not save anyone (James 3:14). Jesus warned the crowds that not everyone who called him “Lord” (a propositionally correct belief) would enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who *did* the will of the Father (Matt 7:21). In giving the Great Commission to his disciples, Jesus

17 Only relatively recently have I come to realize how much I needed to incorporate the perspectives of Black theologians such as Howard Thurman (*Jesus and the Disinherited*), James Cone (*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*), Esau McCaulley (*Reading While Black*) and Jemar Tisby (*The Color of Compromise*) in my own theological work at Gordon-Conwell – the beginning of a paradigm shift.

18 This statement was amended in 1980 to require orthodox Trinitarian belief, with the addition of a second sentence, “God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory”: “Reports Relating to the Forty-Second Meeting of the Society,” *JETS* 34:1 (1991):141. The Society’s founding committee, meeting in Cincinnati in 1949, was chaired by Edward Dalglish of Gordon Divinity School.

commanded his followers not just to teach Bible *content* (correct beliefs about the Bible and doctrine), but to teach to *obey* (correct behavior) all that he commanded (Matt 28:20). The apostle Paul's doctrine of justification by faith and imputed righteousness was not only a proposition to be believed, but a truth to be enacted in the social relationships of Jews and Gentiles (and today, in the social relationships of Black and white Christians). Peter drew back from table fellowship with the Gentiles in Antioch, and Paul rebuked him for not "... *acting* in line with the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14).

Much of Christian history in general and the history of American evangelicalism in particular has been characterized by a focus on correct propositional belief as the primary marker of Christian identity. The controversy with Arianism in the fourth century and the development of the creeds in response to it focused on correct doctrinal beliefs and had the effect of lessening the emphasis on life change more prominent in the catechetical practices of the pre-Constantinian church.¹⁹ This growing emphasis on a propositional understanding of truth and correct beliefs was furthered by the Reformation controversies over justification, the Mass, and papal authority by the rise of Enlightenment atheism and modernist biblical criticism and by the rise of modern science and Darwinian biology that challenged traditional Christian understandings of the biblical texts. This turn toward an almost exclusive emphasis on Christian truth as correct belief must be challenged and corrected by a more biblical understanding of truth. The epistemology of Jesus, Paul, John the Baptist, Moses, and the prophets does not disconnect *cognition* from *volition*, orthodoxy from orthopraxy, or "faith" from obedience.

Correct propositional beliefs about the inspiration and authority of the Bible did not prevent owners of slave labor camps in the American South from defending slavery and from abusing and torturing their slaves. American evangelicalism today should not abandon its defense of the inerrancy of the Scripture but take to heart its failure to apply the Scriptures to the socially unrighteous practices of our own time and culture – especially, but not only, issues of race and racial justice. Otherwise, we will not be acting "in line with the truth of the gospel."

In the last several years, my reading of Black theologians such as James Cone and Howard Thurman have led me to recognize serious limitations and blind spots in my own white evangelical understanding of the person and work of Christ – and even of the message of the gospel itself. For example, reading Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* has alerted me to my relative neglect of the concrete humanity of Jesus and its implications for systematic theology and social ethics. First published in 1949, with Jim Crow segregation still in full force, Thurman, as a member of a socially subordinated group in America, called needed attention to Jesus' social class and social location. Unlike the apostle Paul, Jesus could not appeal to Caesar as a Roman citizen when, like Paul – and like so many socially disadvantaged African Americans - he was falsely accused, arrested, and placed on trial. Jesus did not have the right to vote and was a less-privileged person, with no great wealth or influential social connections, living in a country dominated by a foreign occupier. Unlike Paul, Jesus was neither university educated nor formally educated by and ordained by a leading rabbi. He was not born as a priest or Levite, with the higher social status in Jewish society they enjoyed – much less the even higher social status and privilege enjoyed by the chief priests, members of the Sanhedrin (such as Nicodemus and Gamaliel), and the scribes and teachers of the law.²⁰

19 This point has been documented in the seminal work on discipleship and catechesis in the early church by Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016). I would like to thank my colleague James Singleton for drawing my attention to this valuable study.

20 For Jewish social classes and statuses in Jesus' day, see Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969, 1975), pp. 147 – 267, "Clergy, Lay Nobility, Scribes, Pharisees."

Jesus was not born into the landed aristocracy but was an artisan²¹ who worked with his hands – like plumbers, electricians, carpenters, or auto mechanics today. In his ministry, Jesus did, of course, interact with the higher status teachers of the law in Jerusalem – and with the even higher class individuals after his arrest. But many of Jesus’ “conversation partners” and social contacts were with those “outsiders” of lower social status: Galilean peasants; women (including a Samaritan and a Syro-Phoenician woman), tax collectors, and non-observant Jews. Their life experiences and concerns were reflected in Jesus’ teachings, and his ministry was not limited to “evangelism,” but was a “social gospel” that connected with working class concerns of health care, food insecurity, insufficient income, unfair taxation, and government-inflicted brutality (cf. Luke 13:1: “Galileans ... whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices”). Few of the articles in *JETS*, on the other hand, engaged with the existential concerns of the working class, much less the urban underclass.

For much of the history of Christian theology, the concrete humanity of Jesus and his social class and location have received far less attention than has his divinity. The Apostles’ Creed passes immediately from “... conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary” to “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Without a doubt the crucifixion and atoning death is absolutely crucial theologically, but it is sad indeed that so much of Jesus’ Galilean ministry – preaching, teaching, healing, exorcisms – is passed over in silence – hidden, so to speak in the single comma between “Virgin Mary” and “suffered”! The Nicene Creed, developed to combat the Arian heresy, is even more emphatic and explicit regarding Jesus’ divinity (“Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father ...”), but like the earlier Apostles’ Creed, passes over most of Jesus’ (adult) humanity and Galilean ministry in silence. The Definition of Chalcedon (451) truly confesses that Christ was “fully God and fully man,” but the full humanity of Jesus is dealt with in a very abstract and not concrete manner. The concreteness of Jesus’ humanity – and his very human ministry to the socially disadvantaged – has been more adequately theologized in the Black church experience than by many middle class white theologians – who are not as close to Jesus’ social location as many in the Black churches.

Reading James Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* has brought to my attention – in a rather uncomfortable and unsettling way – some of the deficiencies in my received white evangelical understandings of the person and work of Christ. Because of his own personal upbringing in a Jim Crow Arkansas and Southern Baptist religious milieu, Cone has seen the parallels between the execution of Jesus – the lynching of an innocent man, falsely accused, the victim of mob action and unjust judges and laws – and the lynching of thousands of falsely accused African Americans in the South and elsewhere. Cone’s social and class location, and that of most Black churches – has been closer to the social location and circumstances of Jesus’ execution than that of most white, middle class biblical scholars and theologians.

Cone’s Christological perspective as a Black liberation theologian challenges me to see Jesus not only through the lens of his *priestly* work, but through a *prophetic* lens as well. In much of the history of Christian theology since the fourth century, when Christianity became the state enforced religion of the Empire, and the religion theologized by the educated and more socially privileged members of the dominant culture, this priestly image of Jesus and his work has been predominant, culminating in the supposed sacrifice of the Mass, with Jesus as both priest and victim. In the era of Christendom, Jesus tended to function primarily as a priest-victim-confessor, as a chaplain to the powers that were, rather than as a prophet who spoke truth to power and challenged the status quo.²²

21 Ken M. Campbell, in his detailed study “What Was Jesus’ Occupation?” *JETS* 48:3 (2005) 501-19, makes a convincing case that the term *tekton* is best translated “builder” rather than “carpenter” (as rendered by Tyndale and most English translators), and that Jesus would have worked with both wood and stone.

22 In the context of a more privatized American religion, Jesus can function as more of a “chaplain” or “therapist” for those in the more privileged strata of the social order – rather than as a “prophet” who “speaks truth to power.”

Biblical and systematic theology at its best has, of course recognized the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king – the fulfillment of the three major leadership offices in the Old Covenant.²³ In the New Testament, Jesus’ image and actions are depicted with prominent attention to their prophetic dimensions. In his evangelistic sermon to the household of Cornelius, Peter testifies to Jesus’ execution and resurrection, but precedes this with the account of how “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power [like Moses and Elijah and the prophets], and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:38²⁴). The work of Christ culminated in his priestly sacrifice and resurrection but was not limited to it. The crowds who heard Jesus’ teaching and preaching perceived him to be a prophet in the tradition of Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets, or John the Baptist (Matt 16:14). Jesus as a prophet spoke truth to those who occupied positions of power and influence in Jewish society – to Herod Antipas, to Caiaphas, the high priests, the scribes and teachers of the law, and to Pilate. It was the perception that Jesus was a threat to those with religious and political power – and not his priestly mission to be a sacrifice for sin – that prompted his execution/lynching.

Viewing the atonement – the death of Christ – through the eyes of the Black church,²⁵ so to speak – can help white Christians to remember that the doctrine of sin should focus not only on personal and private sins but should recognize the public and institutional expressions of sin as well. Jesus was indeed God’s true High Priest, as the writer of Hebrews makes abundantly clear, but his priestly sacrifice was made not literally offered within the precincts of Herod’s Temple, but in the very public place – Golgotha – of Roman executions.²⁶ The righteousness of God is not only a righteousness in private behavior, but a righteousness demanded for public officials as well. “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights, and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people” (Isa 10:1,2). “You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts ...Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts” (Amos 5:12,15). Jesus was a righteous man who was executed through a miscarriage of justice perpetrated by judges who failed to uphold the standards of Jewish and Roman law. Evangelical theology and preaching should not forget that the original context of the atonement was not just a private, priestly setting, but a very public context embedded in laws, court proceeding, and the abuses of governing officials holding social, political, and military power.

And last but certainly not least, greater engagement of white evangelical scholars with the Black church experience can produce a deeper and more biblical understanding of the *gospel itself*. The “Good News” that Jesus announced and embodied was not just about “vertical” relationships and the forgiveness of personal sins but was also and integrally about the public arrival of the *Kingdom of God*. The arrival of the Kingdom in Jesus manifested God’s intention to bring relief from public and social sins – from the sins of political and religious rulers; from the effects of unrighteous laws, judges, courts, and wealthy oppressors. “Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mark 1:14,15).

Jesus was in fact the true messiah of Israel, a messiah who would uphold a kingdom with justice and righteousness (Isa 9:7), who with righteousness would judge the needy and with justice

23 In the *Institutes*, Calvin devoted a full chapter to Christ’s three-fold office: *Institutes* II.15.1-6; cf. also *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q&A 23: “Q. What offices does Christ execute as our Redeemer? A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.”

24 Bible quotations are from the NIV 2005 unless otherwise noted.

25 The recent book by Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020) is a fine example of such a “Black church” biblical hermeneutic.

26 Just as lynchings in a Jim Crow America were instruments to punish and intimidate African Americans who violated the social norms of White supremacy, so crucifixion was the Roman instrument for punishing and intimidating Jews, non-Roman citizens, and members of the lower social classes who challenged Roman supremacy.

give decisions for the poor (Isa 11:4). The Messiah as envisioned in Isaiah is not just a “chaplain” or “therapist” who brings personal comfort, but a righteous ruler who administers just courts, righteous laws, and a just criminal justice system. “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people!” (Isa 10:1, 2).

In much white American evangelical gospel preaching, personal and private sins have been disconnected from public and social sins and from a central aspect of the message of Jesus: the Kingdom of God.²⁷ The arrival of the Kingdom of God meant that Yahweh, the saving God and King of Israel, was arriving to be again present to and acting for his people. The rich biblical background of the Kingdom of God is found, of course, in Yahweh’s redemptive acts in the Exodus and in bringing his people back to the land from exile in Babylon – a new Exodus. Both actions were *public* acts of redemption – from actual (not just spiritual or metaphorical) slavery in Egypt, and from actual deportation and exile under Babylonian and Persian rule. In both cases, the “Good News” was that the righteous King was engaging not merely with the interior lives of his people, but with their social and political circumstances as well, and dealing powerfully with specific government rulers as well. Yahweh saved his people by acting in judgment against Pharaoh, and in mercy through Cyrus (Isa 45:13: “I will raise up Cyrus in my *righteousness* ... He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free”).

The disconnect of the “gospel” from its biblical context of the arrival of the Kingdom of God in much evangelical preaching has also been fostered by a faulty dispensational theology in which the kingdom announced by Jesus has supposedly been “postponed” – until the end of the “church age” and the return of Christ. Jesus’ Kingdom has not been postponed – but rather inaugurated – and the Holy Spirit has not deserted the church on earth! This faulty dispensational understanding of the Kingdom must be rejected so that the full, public righteousness of God can be proclaimed to the “rulers of this age.”

A white evangelical preaching of the “gospel” should not be based upon a “canon within the canon” consisting primarily of John 3:16 and the book of Romans – but should also include the book of Exodus and Amos and Micah and Hosea and Isaiah and the preaching of John the Baptist. God is a God not merely of personal righteousness and the interior life, but also a God of public righteousness and societal justice. The “gospel” of much white evangelicalism is not *evangelical* enough. The gospel preaching of Billy Graham, so to speak, needed to be integrated with the gospel messages of Martin Luther King, Jr. and W.J. Seymour²⁸ – to connect with a fuller range of canonical Scripture and with a broader social stratum of people who need to hear a message of biblical redemption.

Some Concluding Recommendations and Reflections

I will conclude by briefly offering some recommendations and reflections in three areas: the need for white American evangelical scholars to have a deeper knowledge and awareness of America’s racial history; the moral case for reparations to the descendants of slaves and those harmed by the lingering effects of racism; and the need for American evangelical theologians and biblical scholars to have a deeper and more biblical understanding of the Kingdom of God and of

27 Early in my tenure as a Gordon-Conwell faculty member, I wrote a letter to our board chairman, Billy Graham, encouraging him to address the issue of abortion – both a private and public policy matter - in his evangelistic meetings. Graham took the time out of his very busy schedule to respond to me in a personal letter, but explained that as an “evangelist,” he did not consider it wise to focus on controversial social issues. This focus on the more “private” sins was also the practice of his predecessors such as Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday.

28 The return of the Spirit – for so long absent in the life experience of Israel during the Intertestamental period – and a conscious reception of the Spirit in conversion (cf. Acts 2:38) – are both integral parts of the advent of the Kingdom and early Christian experience.

the gospel itself.

It has been well said that, if the divisions in American society are ever to be healed, Americans must first find a way to agree on a common set of facts. Similarly, before meaningful and substantive racial reconciliation between Black Christians and white evangelicals can occur, white evangelicals must extend their awareness of racism beyond the somewhat more recognized facts of slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights era – to such lesser-known areas such as racism in the North; the complicity of white churches in sustaining white supremacy; the history of so-called “scientific racism,” racist immigration laws, the eugenics movement, and anti-miscegenation marriage laws in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the economic benefits from slave labor reaped by the wealthy in both the North and the South; the continuing impact on wealth inequality between Black and white families caused by postwar home loan discrimination by banks, real estate brokers, and state courts and governments; the extensive social science research that shows how implicit racial biases continue to disadvantage Blacks and people of color in the criminal justice system, housing, hiring, and education; and not the least – the ugly and uncomfortable history of lynchings and race riots – in both the American South and outside it . Without a greater shared pool of historical knowledge, it will be difficult if not impossible for Black and white Christians to come to agreement about the extent of racial discrimination in the present, or how these problems can be resolved.

The literature on these topics is vast, of course, and I will only note some sources that I have personally found valuable in my recent reading and research. On the history of racial attitudes of American whites toward Blacks: Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1882* (1968); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (1971); and Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (1961).

On the history of the Black churches: Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (2002), and C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (1990).

On how both North and South benefited from slave labor: Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (2014), and Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank, *How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (2005).

On discrimination in home mortgage lending and wealth inequalities: Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017).

On the history of how white privilege has been embedded in American federal, state, and local laws from 1787 to the present: Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (2006).

On the history of white concerns for racial purity and aversion to race-mixing: Jane Dailey, *White Fright: The Sexual Panic at the Heart of America's Racist History* (2020).

On the complicity of white churches in maintaining white supremacy: H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But ... Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (1972); Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (2019); Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (2020).

On the over-incarceration of Black men in American prisons: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2012).

On the evidence for continuing and pervasive implicit racial biases, and their harmful impact on policing, hiring, housing, education, and the criminal justice system: Jennifer L. Eberhardt, *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do* (2020).

And on the under-recognition of the value of the Black experience in white theology, as previously mentioned: Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949); James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011); and Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (2020).

Without a deeper knowledge of the history and persistence of racism and white supremacy in America, evangelical scholars will lack both the background and motivation to help their students relate the teachings of Scripture to the real-life racial problems of modern American society.

My second recommendation is that the faculties of evangelical seminaries and colleges begin series of discussions and debates on the subject of *reparations*. Restitution is a biblical concept and command (Luke 19:8; Exod 22:1-15; Lev 6:4,5; Num 5:5-10), and expiation must be made for murders for which no one has been held accountable (Deut 21:1-5). There is a moral obligation to make restitution for stolen goods and damaged property. Generations of African American slaves were deprived of their freedom, and the just compensation for their labor was stolen from them. Recompense cannot be rendered to those long dead, but compensation could be rendered – as an act of justice and acknowledgement of the harms that had been done – to their yet living descendants. God would honor such a gesture – however symbolic it might seem – and just reparations could contribute to the healing of longstanding divisions caused by the racial injustices of the American nation.

An excellent basis for such discussions is the comprehensive study, previously mentioned, of William A. Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2020). Darity and Mullen present a thoroughly researched and compelling case for reparations – reviewing the extensive history of the subject, legal precedents in other nations, ethical considerations, and the pragmatic challenges for concrete implementation. The authors do not write from an explicitly Christian or biblical perspective, but their general argument is consistent with biblical moral principles.

Many in white evangelical churches will react with defensiveness and skepticism to any proposals for reparations. Some might say, “We are in favor of the idea of biblical reconciliation between Blacks and whites and have engaged in such discussions.” Perhaps so, but before genuine reconciliation can occur, full recognition of the past wrongs done must occur, and true reconciliation must be based on justice – including just restitution for that which has been stolen.

Others might say, “These ‘stolen wages’ were stolen too long ago; too much time has passed; it’s time for us to just ‘move on’.” The reply to this excuse is that biblical law does not place a time limit on the obligation to make restitution; an unpaid debt is still an unpaid debt – just as a law once passed remains in force until repealed, and a valid will and testament remains valid over time unless properly voided by the testator or by the courts.

Many might object, saying “I never owned slaves, or profited from slavery, or I just arrived to the U.S., and I do not consciously hold any racist beliefs – so why should I pay for past wrongs that I did not personally commit?” These objections certainly seem plausible, but they are not decisive, for several reasons. I may not have been directly involved in the slave economy, but I and later generations, in both North and South, have benefitted indirectly from a nineteenth century economy subsidized and enriched by the cotton picked on the slave labor camps of the South and processed, shipped, distributed, and financed by textile mills, banks, and shipping firms in the North – as well documented in the previously cited studies of Edward Baptist and Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank. As an American citizen, I have benefitted from the inventions and sacrifices of previous generations – from the Salk vaccine; the telegraph; the telephone; surgical anesthesia; electrical generation and transmission lines; central heating and air conditioning; smartphones and personal computers; from the sacrifices made by American soldiers on the beaches of Normandy

– the list goes on and on. If I now benefit from social goods that I did not create, should I not be willing to make a contribution voluntarily to alleviate problems that I did not personally create? Consider the voluntary baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan River: Christ voluntarily identified himself with the sins of his people – sins he had not personally committed – and sacrificed himself to help clean up a mess that he had not made. Christians can make reparations to the descendants of slaves not as a matter of direct personal guilt, but as an act of corporate solidarity, and out of *gratitude* for the unmerited grace that we ourselves have received from God.

Local churches and denominations could make a beginning by voluntarily setting up scholarship funds or endowments that would benefit those who have been disadvantaged in various ways by racial inequities. For example, in 2019, Virginia Episcopal Seminary of the Episcopal Church in America created a \$1.7 million endowment fund, the income from which is to be allocated to descendants of enslaved people who worked at the seminary and to African American alumni who are serving at historically black churches.²⁹

Third, and finally, white evangelical theologians such as myself need a deeper encounter with the racial history of America and the experience of the Black church in order to have a deeper and better understanding of the *gospel itself*.³⁰ Several years ago, I was arrested by the comment of Richard Twiss, a native American theologian, on Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 12:21: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’” Twiss went on to observe, “It may be difficult to hear or accept, but I believe that because of clashing cultural worldviews, the Anglo expression of Christ and his kingdom has said to the Native expression of Christ and his kingdom, ‘I have no need of you. I don’t need your customs, your arts, your society, your language, concepts or perspectives.’”³¹ I began to realize that for most of my academic career I had, in practice, been saying to our Black and Native American brothers and sisters in Christ, “I don’t need you! Our white institutions may need you to help us check the now culturally fashionable ‘diversity boxes,’ but I don’t need to know much about your history, your pain, or your theology. You need to learn from my theology, but I don’t need to learn from yours.”

I am gradually and belatedly coming to see that I *do* need “their” theology – to recapture the Kingdom context of Jesus’ “Good News” preaching; to have an understanding of the righteousness of God that is not only a private, imputed righteousness, but also public, enacted righteousness applied in laws, police forces, courts, juries, criminal justice systems, prisons, schools, housing, health care, and jobs; to overcome my own evangelical history of separating an evangelistic gospel from the biblical demands for systemic justice; for not expecting a cheap and easy “reconciliation” without doing the hard work of repentance and restitution.

So white evangelicalism needs a better and more fully biblical gospel. We need to have the humility to recognize that in the very area in which we have taken so much pride theologically – that we have defended the “truth of the gospel” – that we in fact and in practice have fallen short of the mark. The postwar white evangelical movement needs redemption and reform. Our tradition needs a “better gospel” missiologically – both domestically, to redeem the tattered image of American evangelicalism, and abroad, to rebut a postcolonial critique that our message is a “White

29 As noted in Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p. 225.

30 Elsewhere, I have argued that the evangelical theology also needs a deeper encounter with the Orthodox tradition, so that the Reformation Protestant emphasis on forensic *justification* can be better integrated with the Orthodox (and Pauline: Rom 8:30) emphasis on *glorification* through union with Christ: John Jefferson Davis, “Salvation Reconceptualized: Is Our Western Gospel Big Enough?” in *Practicing Ministry in the Presence of God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), pp. 125 – 149. It is beyond the scope of this essay, but I also believe that the usual evangelical understanding of the gospel and conversion need to be better integrated with the Pentecostal emphasis on a conscious awareness of the reception of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38: “Repent; be baptized, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”).

31 Richard Twiss, *One Church, Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), p. 57.

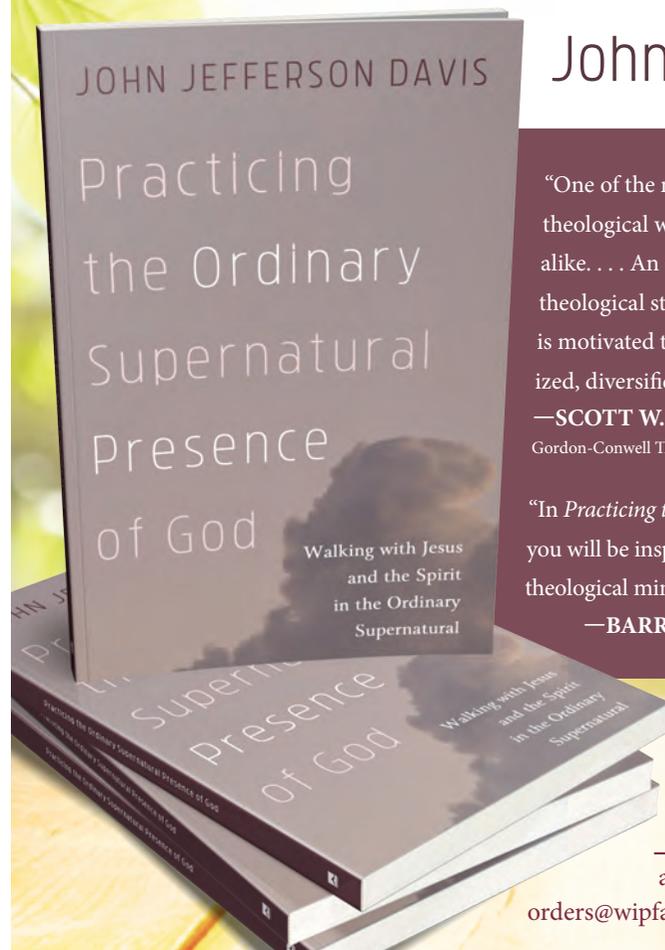
man's religion" and to halt a continuation of the long and tragic history of Western colonialism and white supremacy over black and red and yellow and brown peoples.

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Practicing the Ordinary Supernatural Presence of God

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Crossing Over: Abraham as a Model for the Sojourner

OLGA SOLER

My premise is simply this: as strangers and sojourners in a foreign land, Hispanics in America have challenges, but we also have an essential function and a unique theological voice that we must share for the good of all. This is similar to the story of Abraham who is a model of the immigrant and sojourner in ancient times. I write this article in light of my own Hispanic and Native American, bilingual and multiracial background.

In the Middle Bronze age when Ur of the Chaldees was at the height of its civilization, people didn't immigrate if they could avoid it. War or business might take them on a journey, but they were devoted to the home of their origin and, if possible, they would return. To survive, or prosper, one had to remain with one's clan for there were dangers and marauders behind every date palm and rock formation. Besides this, venturing away from your people and supports also had the stigma of punishment. Banishment was the worst verdict for a criminal outside of execution. It was in fact another kind of death sentence. No one wanted to be an outcast.

If your clan outgrew its land, it would have to buy more, but, if people would not sell, one had to either move on or gather the tribe's able men and arm them for the acquisition of new territory. Fighting was the way you increased your turf. In such a barbarous culture, a city gave one greater protection because if the wall that usually surrounded it and the numbers of people within that supported it. People in the city usually did pretty well. If you were rich and you lived in a city, you were at the top of the social structure. Abraham was in this category of person.

Abraham had everything in Ur, status, protection, property, wealth, servants, and kin, but something happened to Abraham. He heard a Voice that identified itself as God, and he believed. Further, he believed so entirely that when the Voice commanded, he did not hesitate. This Voice told him his own story and filled his soul in a place where it had always been hungry. It filled him with wonder that could not be compared with anything he had ever experienced.

The Voice had to be followed wherever it led. When it led him over the Euphrates and the Jordan Rivers to Shechem, he became an "*hevre*,"¹ which means *one who crosses or passes over*. The Strong's Concordance definition of the word is as follows and lends it a certain intimacy that indicates passing over is not a superficial thing and potentially produces new life: "*`abar* (aw-bar'); a primitive root; to cross over; pass over; travel through; used very widely of any transition (literal or figurative)."² The word "Hebrew" comes from *eber* and it could mean the descendants of Eber, but the name itself comes from the verb '*aber*, which means "moving beyond this side."³ One who does this is one who has moved beyond the comforts of home into the cryptic unknown, or one who has crossed over.

We hear Abram called by this title, for the first time in Genesis, perhaps as an insult,⁴ at the battle of many kings in the Valley of Siddim: "One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew" (Gen 14:13).⁵

1 https://linguistics.stackexchange.com/questions/2297/what-are-the-origins-of-the-word-hebrew#comment51243_2304; BibleSoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary, BibleSoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, 2006.

2 Strong's Concordance, OT:5674.

3 *Abraham is called "the Hebrew" (ha-ivri) because he came from "across the river" (the Euphrates). "Across" is me'ever, again using the same root. This idea is continued metaphorically in that Abraham and his family stood against the rest of the ancient world in terms of monotheism and ethics.* -- Havartz, May 10, 2017. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/cultuel/premium-1.534695>.

4 "offensive•dated, old-fashioned and sometimes offensive term for Jew of the Hebrews or the Jewish people." Definitions from Oxford Languages. <https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+of+the+word+hebrew&coq=definition+of+the+word+hebrew&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j0i22i3019.5370j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>.

5 All the Bible quotations are from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated.

The word itself was tied to the covenant God made with Abram. The first case of narrative use of this verb is in the mysterious vision of the burning fire pot traversing the cadavers of animals to seal the Suzerain covenant between God and Abram. This was Genesis 15:17, "...there appeared a smoking furnace and a flaming torch that passed between these parts."

When South Americans or Mexicans first crossed over the Rio Grande or Cubans crossed over the Atlantic to get to a better life in America they were called, "wet backs." It was not meant to be a flattering or descriptive term. They were addressed this way by people who had displaced the original Native Americans by force. People who, essentially, believed that unless you came into a country with an army to conquer you were illegal and, hence, worthy of infamy.

Unless you were nomadic back in Abraham's time you would not travel without being provoked by dire necessity. Today, people move far more easily, but on the index of modern stresses, a move still ranks high. Uprooting is never easy, and it takes its toll on everything. If people move, it is still because their need is great. Moves, like all transitions, breed uncertainty and insecurity. Rejection and insult are often part of what comes with entering new territory.

When you are at the bottom of the pecking order, respect must be earned. Those already resident seldom make that easy. They may even attack or defame the newcomer. How a newcomer feels and what he does with those defamations is part of his experience, and, when he declares that experience, it becomes part of his voice. The Hebrew Abraham⁶ by his obedience left his country, not for a better life but for the God he was coming to know and love. He turned the questionable title of "Hebrew" into an object of dignity and reverence. This became his story that changed the world.

Crossing over as an immigrant is one thing, but to serve the Voice which is God with legitimacy pleasing to Him one has to "crossover" in a different way. The Master, Jesus Christ, said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned: he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24-25).

Really crossing over from death unto life means embodying the living God. It means we are in Christ⁷ and we have Christ within.⁸ His words are more and more part of our own narrative, and his words do not go forth void.⁹ They always accomplish that which they have gone forth to accomplish. When our words are joined in humility to words of truth and justice, they will also accomplish that which they go forth to accomplish. It may not look that way at first, but it is His promise. There may be resistance, but the word rightly divided will make the impression desired by its Author. This should encourage us, even when we feel our words have fallen on deaf ears. What a true believer, who is an immigrant, has to say will often rankle against and disturb the status quo. It will do this because by its very nature it requires that the established powers shift in the groove of their comfort to make room for something new. We cannot expect this process of introducing a new voice into the arena of influence to be without friction.

Among the children of humanity, those who are comfortable and, especially those who are in charge, do not like to shift and change. They will resist anything that challenges their comfort, but to survive, as a species, we must adjust. We must adapt, and we must learn flexibility. Flexibility is a valuable talent that not only helps us to survive but enables us (if we allow it) to minister to many kinds of people.¹⁰

⁶ Abraham is called "the Hebrew" (*ha-ivri*) because he came from "across the river" (the Euphrates). "Across" is *me'ever*, again using the same root. This idea is continued metaphorically in that Abraham and his family stood against the rest of the ancient world in terms of monotheism and ethics. -- Havartz, May 10, 2017. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/premium-1.534695>.

⁷ Rom 8:1.

⁸ Gal 2:20.

⁹ Isa 55:10-11.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 9:22.

Perspective can inform wisdom. When we have crossed over we have seen both sides and this increases a perspective that was once, one sided. If we stay to ourselves we limit our point of view. Consulting God on His perspective in the Scriptures broadens us further and challenges us even more. God has seen all things from every possible angle as Creator and as incarnate Christ. This gives Him a superior vantage point in every way. Broadening our understanding by seeing things from a divinely informed perspective and the point of view of others, or by crossing over cultural boundaries, may therefore be in God's sovereign will for us. It will enable us to serve more effectively. If we stay to ourselves we have limited perspective. Therefore, God pushes us out of our little narrow ruts into a newly illuminated path that we may see and understand a broader world. This gives us an edge that those who have lived statically don't have.

Yes, we must adapt but we must not lose ourselves. Integration need not be the same as assimilation. We can work together with others and still maintain our unique voice. Why lose something as precious as that? Besides, trying to become the same as the dominant culture is a futile endeavor. The outlander (or in the case of the Native American the "inlander") is often considered a second-class citizen or "wannabe." Some can blend more easily because of color, but blending in is still a trap if it denies parts of ourselves. To deny who we are is to deny what God has made and loves. This can never be His will. He wants unity in diversity not "muddy soup."

Deep healthy roots make sturdier trees. This is also the reason why invaders seek to wipe out those roots. Babylon, Rome, and Colonial America all forced the natives they conquered to assume new names and take on the conqueror's language, customs, and religions. Slaves did not even have the luxury of staying in their family units but could be sold together or separately as the masters required.¹¹

This historically has not been easy for the Jew and the Irish and others who had to hide among their oppressors during inquisitions and persecutions. Nevertheless, those who know the value of their ancestry will not so easily relinquish it to blend in. In many ways our culture can stabilize us and give us a sense of worth and belonging. Those with darker skins who cannot hide by changing a name, and who were separated from family by violence or slavery, will be at a great disadvantage in every way as they navigate through oppression historically, and even today. This is why we must still affirm them in their humanity and offer them help and brotherhood.

On the other hand, though our individuality is important when we cross over, different cultures can work together and even marry and still maintain their unique cultural identity. They can then pass both histories on to their children as a valuable heritage. We as believers do not worship our ancestors, but we must give them honor. It is the commandment.¹² Even as Christians benefit from the faith of their ancestor Abraham, so we all benefit from the good in our parental stock.

A disproportionate number of Hispanic immigrants, through no fault of their own, come to the United States with disadvantages. Poverty, poor education, different culture, a history of oppression, and language may all be impediments. Natives of Central and South America as well as the Caribbean suffered much under colonialism. It has given us a kind of racial post-traumatic stress which still affects us today.¹³

Though the Dominican friar Bartolomeo de las Casas, who first defended the Indians, told the monarchs of Spain that the natives were the kindest and brightest of hosts, the conquistadors they sent caused a hemorrhage of human life among them, destroying them in numbers close to 15 million.¹⁴ Fascism, communism, and American Capitalism has added considerably to that number.

11 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forced_assimilation.

12 Ex 20:12.

13 <https://www.mhanational.org/racial-trauma>.

14 Bartolomeo de las Casas quoting Spaniards he was observing, ripping men, women and children to pieces, in his book, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. "Others, laughing and joking all the while, threw them over their shoulders, shouting, 'Wriggle, you little perisher.'" When las Casas wrote this in 1542, there were only 200 Taíno left on

If we can walk away from this at all, we must walk away with an unparalleled sense of justice, because we know what injustice looks like.

In the Hebrew there are two words for justice. One, *mishpat*, has to do with people's rights as in Exodus 23:6-7 which states, "Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits." The other word refers to Abraham when it is found in Genesis 15:6 which states, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." It appears that righteousness and justice go hand in hand with faith. If we are one of the faithful, we need to remember that.

All these things help us to help others but our challenge is to leave our flesh out of our polemics against this very injustice. The facts speak for themselves and we cannot afford to indulge bitterness as we fight spiritually. It is the devil's game to make victims so acrid they become perpetrators instead of ministers. While advocating for justice, we must release our animosity to Christ who empowers, comforts, and holds us. It is He who can work all things—even our disadvantages, together for our good.¹⁵ In Christ's hands obstacles can become stepping stones upon which we can rise spiritually higher. He is the God of Justice and this is after all His business. We are but His instruments.

So, we face challenges as immigrants. Abraham faced challenges too as he progressed on his pilgrimage, but his trust in the Lord made the journey an intense and supernatural one. At times, he feared and wavered as when the Egyptian ruler fancied his wife Sarah and Abraham told a half-truth to save his own life. The oppressor took Sarah away and Abram's hands were tied but God has resources we do not. The Hebrew cast himself entirely upon the grace of God and, lo, the Ruler was punished for his lust. Abraham amazingly walked free. His wife was restored and he received other gifts besides (Gen 12:11-19). Our impossibilities can be God's opportunities as the Lord Jesus has said in Matthew 19:26, "With human beings this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (TNIV).

Life gets complicated when we are dealing with the unexpected and we may make many blunders. Our blunders can produce complications. Again, our recourse is repentance and the Almighty who can put us back on course. Abraham had cause to repent of having fathered Ishmael with Hagar as in the end he had to send them away, but the child of promise came to Sarah as God had said and there was much joy (Gen 16, 21). All this taught him the cost of not trusting his God and prepared him for the ultimate test.

He was asked to show an audience of billions through the centuries what agony the Father in heaven would endure by sacrificing his Son. When he obeyed the Lord and attempted to sacrifice Isaac he did not realize this was so. He only knew that God had given the boy to him and that now he wanted him back. Isaac asked, where the lamb for the sacrifice was and Abraham in a stupor of grief spoke prophetically the only answer God gave him, "The Lord will provide for himself a lamb."¹⁶ The old prophet tied his son to the altar and raised the knife to kill him; then that same God prevented him and provided a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. This innocent animal died in Isaac's place. Abraham, who now knew the futility of disobedience, must have offered this poor beast, with delirious joy. Then down through the annals of history when the Christ, the true Lamb of God, was preparing to be offered in our place he was able to say, "Abraham saw my day and was glad."¹⁷ Abraham became a shadow of his God and Isaac a shadow of us all as Christ was substituted for us. The Hebrew did not know this was God's plan for him and we do not know what part our trials will have in the theater of life. We only know what the Scripture says

Hispaniola. Across the Caribbean, he claimed the Spanish were responsible for the deaths of 12 to 15 million indigenous people. - <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/10/14/here-are-indigenous-people-christopher-columbus-his-men-could-not-annihilate/>.

¹⁵ Rom 8:28.

¹⁶ Gen 22:8.

¹⁷ John 8:56.

that, like the apostles, “We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings” (1 Cor 4:9-10 TNIV).

Amidst our challenges we may or may not see the way God will use us, only that He is there. The One that is beyond nature alone sees all and can intervene on our behalf. Ours is but to put one foot in front of the other and follow the Voice, even if it leads us to a land of strangers who may or may not become friends. I had trouble reading and writing as a child but with the help of God I have ministered and traveled, written books and published them. Who would have thought such a thing was possible. When I cross over the last river I hope I will see some I have touched with the truth of grace because God is able to work with us despite many handicaps.

As immigrants, we are also at a disadvantage because we are required to make the adjustments into new society. “Speak English” does not always go down well. English, as languages go, is difficult. It has the rules of the many languages which have contributed to it and it is not always phonetic. French, German, Latin, Greek, and so forth have all made their contributions to it and left their challenging linguistic footprint upon it. It is difficult for Anglos to master it much more for a stranger to master the tongue. The very tones of English are not music to the ears of those who are exclusively Latin and hyper-phonetic or Asian and tonal.

When American interests have affected negative influences, in the native countries of immigrants, the command to “speak English” becomes emotionally difficult to endure and even more difficult to comply with. Imagine how learning German might have been received by the allied powers if Hitler had won the war. This may give you an idea of what this means to those who have suffered at the hands of those who speak English.

Learning English may be further complicated when it means historical and ethnically offensive things to the one learning it. Young readers may not know that English was the language which on radio, television, and film in the USA, humiliated and demeaned Spanish people for decades. I recall watching reruns of the film “Big Country” when I was a child. My father and I had a warm moment as we saw how decently Gregory Peck treated the Spanish servants on the ranch he was visiting. My father, who was an illiterate but hard-working Hispanic, observed that this was a good man, not like the other white men. The film was made in 1958, but it took almost half a century from there for Hispanics to be portrayed as anything but domestics, thieves, Casanovas, and hoodlums. Even “El Cid,” the icon of Spanish history, was played in a movie, not by a Hispanic, but by the Anglo, Charleston Heston.

We have been racially profiled and wounded, but as believers we are wisely encouraged to forgive and trust in the Lord as we fight injustice with peaceful and legal means.¹⁸ This is not something we say glibly. Forgetting and forgiving is hard work, and often only possible with divine help. This is especially true when the damage done still affects us today. Bitterness, however, only hurts us and we need to be about solving problems and not wallowing in resentments. Not mastering the English language will hinder our influence. Learning English need not mean our children will forget their native tongue. My parents were adamant about our speaking Spanish at home. Despite the fact that I was now more comfortable with English because of television and school, I learned to speak both languages, without accent, as my parents wisely required. I am eternally grateful for that. It has greatly enlarged my field of employment and my understanding.

Hispanics have been stigmatized as lazy, stupid, and ignorant. Even as the Egyptians in Bible times hated shepherds,¹⁹ and would not have them near, so we have been relegated to ghettos and barrios. Yes, early Hebrews, who were shepherds by trade, were shunned for it. Christ was also shunned, reviled, and rejected. Stigma was something historically associated with the cross and the marks in His hands and feet were called stigmata. We must understand that as his followers we

¹⁸ Acts 21:39; 22:25; 24:10; Rom 13:1-6; Matt 5:25, 38-42; Luke 18:2-8.

¹⁹ Gen 46:34.

will endure persecution and rejection. At the same time we must fight stigma by not living up to the expectations of those who reject us and by standing up peacefully for what is right.

The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. said we must have “conviction not conformity.”²⁰ This was from a sermon out of the text Romans 12:2, which states “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” King always held the line that peaceful protest was the way to bring about change and reminded minorities that while they were not to conform to the sinful world, they needed to be honorable. In other words, in order to fight stigma we must not give in and become that of which we are accused. The “renewing of our minds” includes not only a desire for righteous behavior but a dignity that comes from the value Christ has put on us by His holy sacrifice. He also reminded us that we need our brothers and sisters from the dominant culture and they need us.²¹ Some may consider us poor and treat us like failures, but, be assured, God does not see us that way. He never has and He never will. Even before we were believers He loved us.²² And now that we believe, He says to us, “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3). We are the vessels of eternal riches. We are his dear children and heirs of the kingdom as it is written:

“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29).

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Rom 8:17).

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet 2:9-12).

We as Hispanics are endowed with gifts vital to the world and to the church that can also help us through the difficulties of poverty. We are a collective-minded people. If we remember to help one another we will move forward. If we consent to the common culture of “fierce independence” that surrounds us, we will fail. It is the tactic of hell to divide and conquer. However, we will also fail if we capitulate to the culture of toxic dependence. The poor often give up and become indolent. We must encourage each other to keep going and to earn our way. We must maintain our culturally informed higher ground and maintain our *interdependence* to survive. “Each one should carry their own load” (Gal 6:5) as far as possible. Then we must, “carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) whenever the load has become too heavy. We need each other, we are family. We must not forget. This is practical and it is holy.

The early church started out with the concept of *aladdon*²³ or “one anothering.” The directives to help, love, and submit sacrificially to one another enabled these Christians to resist persecution and navigate endless troubles. It also facilitated unparalleled growth through prodigal hospitality. We cannot allow this to be purged from our culture. We Hispanics have always been a most hospitable people. Latin tribalism is more like the original biblical model for church than many other modern

20 Sermon Originally titled “*Mental and Spiritual Slavery*,” this sermon was composed during King’s early years assisting his father at Ebenezer. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/mental-and-spiritual-slavery-sermon-dexter-avenue-baptist-church>.

21 1 Cor 12:14-20.

22 Rom 5:8 – “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

23 *Aladdon* – *aladdon*-of one another (allele, allelomorph, parallel), Common Latin and Greek Roots and Terms, <http://webhome.cs.uvic.ca/~vanemden/greekLatin.html>. Rom 12:10; 13:18; Gal 5:13; Eph 5:21; Heb 3:13; 1 Pet.4:9; 1 John 3:11.

or institutionalized models. We can infect the multicultural church with it in a good way. As a single mother, I was upheld and empowered by the Christian family to raise my children, become educated, and move forward in life and ministry. Without them I might have been on welfare for years and my children might well have been on the street.

As we have seen, we as sojourners also have the gift of endurance. We may ask at times why the Lord has allowed so much suffering in the Native, Hispanic, and Black cultures. Similarly, the question is asked: “Why did the Lord allow Abraham to grow so old before he gave him the child of promise?” This is a source of much conjecture. The point is that many things are allowed to happen because in the end their reversal or fulfillment will give God the exclusive credit. If we could not do it and God could, it is a miracle. It is also important that God get the credit (glory) because, since the war in heaven, the adversary has perpetrated evil and blamed the Lord for it. It is our privilege to be employed in correcting that deception and shutting the enemy’s mouth: “Out of the mouths of babes and weaned infants he obtains perfect praise to still the enemy and the avenger” (Ps 8:2).

If Abraham had to wait a while so that God would get his due, in the end the wise old patriarch didn’t mind. He realized it was all for the good. So it is with us when we prove God right by enduring, and he comes through as only God can.

The testimony of my family which came from dire poverty and climbed out of the barrios of Puerto Rico, the slums of New York, and the darkness of depression, learning difficulties and addiction to a third generation of sane and educated children is all about the God who allowed us to wait. We endured by his grace and reaped the benefits, but most of all—our God was given his due of credit and praise.

Our journey informs our theology, but it does even more for us. It is a true saying that what doesn’t kill you might leave some scars but also makes you stronger. It does this by helping you to learn what your priorities should be. It teaches you to leave the unessential and superficial behind. Our poverty and our struggle teach us to cling to our God under all circumstances. This gives us a spiritual edge in the battle where only wounded soldiers can serve. Regarding our story and the enemy, the Scripture says, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Rev 12:11).

My advice to my compatriots is this:

By all means hone the language of the place you sojourn whatever your feelings about it. Learn to wield it like a sword that will carve the way for your unique cultural voice. Perfect your writing skills that make you a good communicator even if you need special help. Learn to make your point succinctly and passionately. Integrate and learn the ways of the place where you have been sent by God; while remaining who you are uniquely. Pray for this place as Jeremiah did for Babylon,²⁴ and don’t walk through it in fear but in faith. Don’t forget who you are and where you came from. Serve the believers with love. Do all you do, with all your might, and with patient perseverance, to the glory of God. Be a child of Abraham and make the most of crossing over.

Olga Soler is a director/writer and performer for Estuary Ministries. She attended the High School of Performing Arts, the Lee Strasberg Theater Institute, and the Herbert Berghof Studios in New York City. She holds degrees in education and communication with equivalent studies in theology and psychology. She wrote the curriculum for and conducted Discovery Groups for addicts at the Boston Rescue Mission. She served as artistic contributor to *An Artistic Tribute to Harriet Tubman* and author of *First Book*, *Second Book*, *Third Book* (about a time traveler), and the Frankie series—*Stigma*, *Pestilence*, and *Holocaust* (a modern-day Frankenstein) faith-based science fiction. Also, she is a contributor to House of Prisca and Aquila series (*Creative Ways to Build Community*, 2013; *Redeeming the Screens*, 2016; *Berkeley Street Theatre*, 2017; and *Empowering English Language Learners*, 2018). Ms. Soler is also the author of other books, including: *Just Don’t Marry One: Interracial Dating, Marriage, and Parenting* (contributing author), *Tough Inspirations from the Weeping Prophet*, *Apocalypse of Youth* (author), *Epistle to the Magdalenes* (author and illustrator), *Keeping the Dream Alive: A Reflection on the Art of Harriet Lorence Nesbitt* (contributing author), *The Commission: The God Who Calls Us to Be a Voice during a Pandemic*, *Wildfires*, and *Racial Violence* (contributing author), *Finding A Better Way* (contributing author).

24 Jer 29:7.

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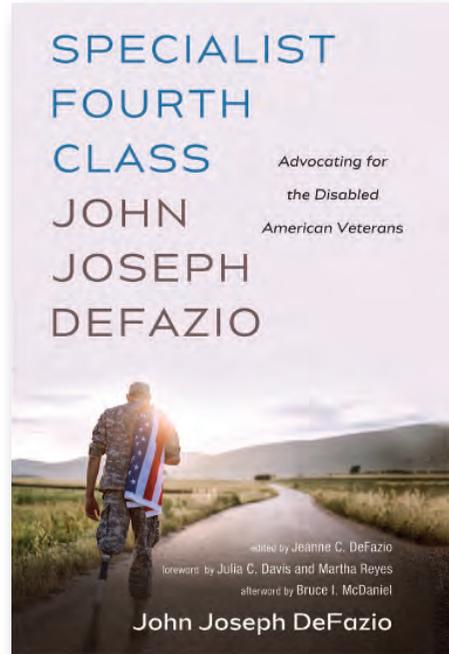
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**Review Article of *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* by Adonis Vidu
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021)**

WILLIAM DAVID SPENCER

Exploring the revelation of the nature of the God who created us is the central focus of theology. Thus, theologian John Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with this claim: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves,” since, “no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he ‘lives and moves’ [Acts 17:28].”¹ In effect, our very existence makes the study of God necessary to understand who we ourselves are: why we were created, what our creator expects of us, and what our destiny will be. Otherwise, the alternative is to endure baffled lives, wandering from one explanation to another, puzzling how we ever came to be here in this place in this time, always wondering whether we are missing something that would explain our existence to us before we just as enigmatically and suddenly cease to be. As a result, scholarship is inundated with tomes speculating about the knowledge of God, vast libraries of them and new ones endlessly appearing. Christians, especially, wonder, “Which books should I read to discover the truth about who God is?” This present volume is one of those books truly worth reading.

In its pages, Theology Professor Adonis Vidu of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has carefully put together a reaffirmation of a central doctrine of the historic, orthodox Christian faith and has done so with some muscle behind it. Eerdmans is to be congratulated for publishing this profound study. Its titular claim, “the same God” “works all things” “inseparably,” is a “dogmatic rule” of “Classical Trinitarianism” (xiii), embracing God’s triune nature and all of God’s work. This so far unique (xiii), book-length exposition is, consequently, itself, “grounded,” not on mere “speculative deduction,” but on “fidelity to scriptural revelation” (xiv).

How does one go about pursuing such a complex and intriguing topic, bringing the results to readers in some sort of comprehensible and engaging way? After potentially terrifying lay readers with an untranslated Latin clause in the first sentence of the introduction (xiii),² the author settles into managing his task well by following a clear and logical progression encased in a writing style that turns out to be accessible, interesting, and, at times, off-beat and even delightful. Consider this illustration:

If I may be permitted an inapposite analogy, the situation parallels crime cases in which there is empirical access to the effects of the criminal agency (say, a dead body) but not to the criminal himself. Solving a crime is a matter of discovering the agent behind the action, of attributing an action to a particular agent. Of course, one generally assumes that a crime has been committed by an embodied agent, who can (in principle) be apprehended. Not so in the case of divine actions (as our study will indeed reveal later on): The agent remains empirically inaccessible and only identifiable through his effects (12).

Having just, myself, worked for a number of years researching the pros and cons of imagery

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), bk.1, chap.1, sec.1 (p. 35).

² “*Opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*” in a rough translation would be: “The works [plural of *opus* = work] of the Trinity on the outside are undivided.” This sentence expresses the heart of this book. Worthy to note is that, after this challenge, our author becomes very reader-friendly, for example, translating key German terminology (see for example pages 9 and 27).

we use to explain God³ in what was often a desert of trackless miles of technical writing without any oases of illustrations in sight to depict God, I can assure present readers that encountering this sort of imagery is, to say the least, unusually surprising in contemporary scholarship. A bold image like this one recalls the daring of Jesus himself with his off-beat imagery like his tale of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8) or the shocking approval bestowed on a dishonest and crafty manager by his defrauded employer (Luke 16:1-15). Such analogies both in the Bible and the present work are startling and refreshing.

As for his logical progressions, Prof. Vidu understands that God is wholly other than we are and, therefore, true points of correspondence are hard to identify in our world. So, he chooses to begin by addressing the problem of language to describe a scripturally sound version of how the Trinity works together in our world. The reading he takes (what is called the “hard reading”) adheres closely to scriptural revelation. With welcomed frankness, he declares that “a critical mass of” alternative explanations and “objections” have so piled up “that it is wise for the defender of the rule to accept the burden of proof.” And he assures us, “We intend to do precisely that.” The “hard” position that he defends in this book, in understanding God at work, concludes that inseparable actions are just what the language suggests – unable to be separated into individualized and separated inputs (xv).

To muster his defense, he centers on these key questions: “the manner of the participation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the agency of the one God and second, the relation between the agency of the incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit” (1).

To examine these questions, chapter 1 begins with a comparison of observations by scholars who emphasize God electing emissaries to perform divine tasks and being regarded as God’s Presence in action. For example, consider Exodus 7:1, when God tells Moses he will be “like God” to Pharaoh and Aaron will be like Moses’s prophet. In other words, Moses and Aaron will be empowered to be like living analogies of God. Where the nuances come into play is that such analogic language does not imply that God shares God’s divine glory with another (Isa. 42:8), such as, for example, Plato envisions “young gods” completing the work of creation.⁴ Instead, Prof. Vidu points out that Christ and the Holy Spirit alone participate with the Father in creation, thus:

To Christ are ascribed precisely the selfsame actions that are operated by YHWH himself. However, to say that Christ assumes the operations of YHWH is only one side of the coin. Christ receives these works from the Father; the Spirit does as well, from the Father and the Son. Within the very unity of operation, a distinction is established between the Father, from whom the works originate, the Son, by whom the works are done, and the Spirit, in whom they are finalized (11).

Thus, the actions of the Persons of the Trinity are “inseparable.” The remainder of chapter 1 develops the ideas of an individuation in the Godhead that reveals Christ as “identified specifically with the one agent [YHWH] who is the object of Israel’s monotheistic devotion,” since Christ does not do creation alone, but within a relationship of inseparable operations with “unity in distinction and distinction in unity” in the work of the Trinity (11). The rest of chapter 1 explores the nuances implicit in these claims (since Christ becomes incarnate, while neither the Father nor the Spirit share this attribute). In doing so, the author critiques or affirms a variety of theologians’ responses. Seeing

3 Please see my book, *Three in One: Analogies for the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022), an analysis of imagery and illustrations we use to explain the Trinity, their benefits for teaching and evangelism and dangers when misused.

4 See Plato, *Timaeus*, in R.G. Bury, trans. *Plato in Twelve Volumes: Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, vol. 9, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929, 1981), 42.D (p. 93). For my critique of Plato’s suggestion and its impact on seminal, scholastic Christian thought, see the section, “The Pagan Genesis in Hierarchical Thinking” in William David Spencer, “Equal Leadership: God’s Intention at Creation,” in *Christian Egalitarian Leadership: Empowering the Whole Church according to the Scriptures*, House of Prisca and Aquila Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 61-68.

the Bible as supporting his stance that Christ is not a mere instrument, or secondary god (as per Plato's view), Prof. Vidu explains that "monotheism gets redefined around Christ. That means that the Old Testament deeds normally ascribed to God get to be attributed to Christ as well" (14).

Chapter 2 traces the history of the articulation and the challenges presented to the doctrine of inseparability in the early church. Nearly a century before Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, his successor Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, and their colleagues in the Nicaean party fought to preserve belief in the equal divinity of Christ with the Father, Pope Dionysius (d. AD 268) is cited as already complaining that some "preach three gods, since they divide the sacred unity into three different *hypostases* completely separate from each other." Therefore, he insists his constituents teach "that the divine Word be one with the God of all and that the Holy Spirit remain in God and dwell in him." This position, our author assures us, was "representative of the theological consensus of the first centuries" of the early church (53). The chapter unpacks such positive arguments defending the hard view of inseparability of actions and its high Christology against the negative arguments of the Arians and semi-Arians. Readers are reminded that monotheism is not monism. There is a plurality in the unity of the one God. Among those in the ancient church from whom Prof. Vidu draws insights are Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. Those whose ideas he questions or corrects are Eunomius, who espoused the Son having an inferior degree of divinity compared with that of the Father, Severus and the Monophysites, the Nestorians, Maximus the Confessor (AD c. 580-662) (who opposed Pyrrhus) and whose thought was subsequently opposed by John Damascene (AD c.675-c.749), who himself championed Christ having one rather than two wills in the incarnation. Of more contemporary authors, this chapter interacts with the varying thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Christoph Schwöbel, Colin Gunton, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, particularly on the topic of whether to emphasize the Persons or the unity of the Godhead.

Chapter 3, "Unity and Distinction in Divine Action," seeks to address a variety of challenges to the doctrine of inseparability of actions and affirms that this doctrine does not annul the revelation of distinction in the Persons of the Trinity. Instead, perfect unity of substance (ontology) and work which we can recognize (e.g., Jesus as the Person who dies and resurrects) allows us to perceive the one God at work in all (epistemology, the area of knowledge). Inseparability of action fosters a high view of all three Persons being co-equal and co-eternal. Our author cites Augustine to capture this truth: "The Trinity produced the flesh of Christ, but the only one of them it belongs to is Christ" (113). Readers should remember that God is wholly other than ourselves or anything else in this contingent (i.e., not of necessity to assure existence of all) and ephemeral world, and the book warns us, "Fundamental Trinitarian concepts such as that of 'person' remain analogical when applied to God" (96). This chapter references Bruce Marshall on the limits of language (94), and agrees with Chrysostom Koutloumousianos against the Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas on the necessity of positing the subordination of the Son and the Spirit if the Father is their Cause. Returning to Colin Gunton and citing Richard Swinburne's views, Prof. Vidu critiques some of the stances taken by Social Trinitarians that skate too near the thin ice of tri-theism.

Chapter 4 looks more closely at "Creation and Trinitarian Mediation" (126). The author summons up proof to counteract modern scholarship's "abandonment of the older Trinitarian consensus that stresses the inseparable action of the triune persons in the economy" to posit "the work of the Son and the Spirit is now understood to *mediate* the work of the Father," thereby favoring individuation of the Persons of the Godhead over their unity (127). Noting the thought of John Webster and returning to Augustine, Aquinas, Athanasius, and Basil, Adonis Vidu critiques the thought of Wolfhart Pannenberg in correlation to Colin Gunton's reviving of Irenaeus's view that "God is rational, and therefore produced creatures by His Word, and God is a spirit, and so fashioned everything by His Spirit."⁵ It is true that John 1:3 states literally that "all through him

5 See Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. Joseph P. Smith, S.J., Ancient Christian Writers (Ramsey, NJ:

[Christ] became,” (*dia* with the genitive = through)⁶ a phrase Paul repeats in 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1:16, however, Prof. Vidu has already pointed out in chapter 1 that Romans 11:36 also uses the phrase for the Father, so the phrase is not exclusive to Christ and its use for both the Son and Father supports the idea of inseparable activities in the creation (29-31).

Chapter 5 now explores more deeply the incarnation of the Son and the inseparable work of the Father and the Spirit in the Son’s redemptive mission. After using an analogy of a valet dressing an aristocrat to depict active and passive involvement in causing a change in the state of the world (160-61), this chapter examines “personal causality of the Son upon human nature” (163) by citing and addressing the thought of Richard Cross, Duns Scotus, John Owens, Oliver Crisp, Dominic Legge, returning back to Thomas Aquinas, Bruce Marshall, Karl Rahner, with reference to Catherine LaCugna, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Bruce McCormack to conclude that, despite concerns, “the doctrine of inseparable operations brings out the full religious significance of the incarnation” (178).

This leads the discussion in Chapter 6 to consider more deeply “Christology and Trinitarian Agency” (180). The examination reveals how a high Christology with a biblical understanding of the co-equal and co-eternal nature of God is supported by the doctrine of inseparable actions. In view of the apologetic nature of much of the discussion that has been ensuing, our author assures us that his addressing the issues arising “is not simply a necessary defensive maneuver for hard inseparability. Rather, it will lead to a constructive unpacking of the relation between the Father, Son, and Spirit in their common presence in Christ’s redemptive acts” (182). This goal he accomplishes by summoning up some of the scholars and their arguments he addressed earlier but presenting their views specifically on this particular aspect of the topic. He focuses on a “discrepancy between the modern and the patristic approach” (185) to how actions are understood, whether they define a Person, which is the modern approach, or if understanding follows the patristic approach, which perceived that sharing the same powers meant sharing the same nature. One can certainly see that latter reasoning in Athanasius’s *De Synodis*, which, although not necessarily referenced in this discussion, builds an entire defense on the divinity of Christ from the shared attributes and activities ascribed to both the Father and the Son in the Bible. For example, here are just two relevant proofs Athanasius offers from a long list he raises, first from creation, “the Operative Cause, *All things were made by Him, and whatsoever I see the Father do, I do also;*” and from redemption, “And again of God, Esaias [Isaiah] says, *Who is a God like unto Thee, taking away iniquities and passing over unrighteousness?* but the Son said to whom He would, *Thy sins be forgiven Thee,*” thus allowing Athanasius to conclude: “And in a word, all that you find said of the Father, so much will you find said of the Son, all but His being Father.” Here we see the unity and distinction completely balanced by Father and Son doing the same things.⁷

Chapter 7 centers in on the “Atonement” (217), as an inseparably accomplished mission, wherein, while Christ suffers on earth, the Father and Holy Spirit are both fully at work, since “in the cross of Christ not only do we find a reconciled Father, but also the indwelling Spirit” (218). To establish this point, our author addresses several issues and the arguments of several scholars. First, he applauds Kathryn Tanner for her “most creative and stimulating” work in *Christ the Key*, where she “affirms the fundamental principles of the doctrine of inseparable operations” by looking at the “pattern of trinitarian relationships” in the atonement that “can be drawn directly from the way they are narrated in the storyline” as the “unrestricted and genuine presence of God” is revealed “in the midst of the human circumstances of Jesus’s life, especially his suffering and death”

Newman, n.d.), A.5 (p. 50).

6 See *δία* in rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 223.

7 Athanasius, “*Epistle of S. Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria, concerning the Councils Held at Ariminum in Italy and at Seleucia in Isauria*” (a.k.a. *De Synodis*) in Athanasius, *Select Treatises of S. Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria, in Controversy with the Arians* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1842), chap. 3, sect. 20., para. 49 (pp. 148-50)

(218-19). Prof. Vidu, however, does raise questions about the implication of some of her ideas, for example, “Is there any Trinitarian basis for the claim that there is a direct divine punishment of Jesus – of the Son by the Father?” (221). Prof. Vidu also extends his interaction to the ideas of Bruce McCormack, who tries to balance the doctrine of inseparable actions with the “uniqueness” of “Jesus’s actions” (221). Such issues are raised as this chapter centers on trying to decipher the exact role of Jesus’s humanity in the Trinitarian work of redemption.

In a sense, such focusing in chapter 7 on an individual role of Jesus, while all the Trinity is at work in redemption, extends to chapters 8 and 9, which explore the Holy Spirit’s work in the mission of sanctifying human Christian believers, having being sent by Jesus (or by the Father, or the Father and the Son, according to an early east-west dispute, as this issue was being sorted out in theological thought). Chapter 8 examines the “Ascension and Pentecost” and chapter 9 “The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit as Love.” Chapter 8 reasons that the human role of Jesus is “the Adamic destiny” for it accomplishes “lifting human nature to its intended state,” exemplified in Christ’s “eternal priesthood” (278). See, for example, God’s intention that Abraham’s descendants bless the nations (Gen. 12:2-3). Chapter 9 then makes a final effort to demonstrate that the distinctions of the Persons of the Godhead are not “lost in a blur of inseparable triune causality” (317). Further, in the case of the Holy Spirit, Thomas Aquinas’s suggestion that the Spirit indwells believers through love (282) provides a basis for the relationship between God and humans. Unpacking that idea in the light of the book’s interpretive principle of affirming the hard doctrine of inseparable operations, however, comprises the rest of the chapter. A central concern about the Spirit’s indwelling humans is not to posit humans as “passive” (as is suggested was the case of Christ’s humanity in the incarnation, 294). To keep this from happening to humans, the Spirit’s “uncreated love” must produce a “created” love in humans (296), and in this way the Holy Spirit can indwell humans. John Owens captures this thought in his cited insight, “All gracious habits are effects of the operation of the Spirit, but not the well itself” (300). This may remind us of one aspect of the doctrine of imputed grace that God puts in the hearts of believers. God’s unfathomable grace becomes a spiritual reality guiding the lives of the elect.

Following this interesting discussion is a conclusion, which ends appropriately with a final specific affirmation, “The Spirit who binds us to Christ is not a being distinct from Christ, but the same God who works all things” (326). This statement brings the book full circle to its title, and is followed by a bibliography and indices of authors, subjects, and Scripture references.

What are my final impressions of this book? It is a ranging philosophical discussion of an essential doctrine of the early church in danger of being compromised today. At its heart, the book is also a careful apologetic work, openly defending this doctrine against “recent scholarship,” which “questions the very category of ‘uniquely divine actions’ by problematizing the precise nature of Jewish monotheism” (50). As we can see in such language, the book does not pretend to be “objective.” This is refreshing since, as a rule, I’ve noticed that those who claim “objectivity” are simply unself-examined. Everyone has presuppositions, whether they recognize them or not. The book has a point of view and defends it carefully. At the same time, it is respectful to those with whom it disagrees and includes a wider audience by using inclusive terms like “Godself” (e.g., 50-51). While it demands a certain background in philosophical discourse to be fully understood, the text is well written and worth the struggle of all who appreciate the importance of the topic. For those who take the Bible seriously, this is an excellent book that attempts to understand other positions, but not at the expense of scriptural revelation. As it is in essence a technical book, it is aimed at the Academy, and so would be helpful as a textbook for seminary students, scholars, pastors, and informed lay readers, and, of course, especially relevant to those who teach in the area of the doctrine of God. Of course, it merits a presence in every library that includes religious scholarship. From the historic inerrancy position, it is reportedly the only book-length discussion on this topic and, given its quality, it could fairly be called the definitive book on its topic.

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THREE IN ONE WILLIAM DAVID SPENCER

Analogies for the Trinity

Do our images of “one God in three persons” reflect God well?

Throughout history, Christians have pictured the relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through analogies. Such illustrations—some from the West but also from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and more—come freighted with theological ramifications that the church has rejected (heresies) or embraced (doctrines). In *Three in One*, William David Spencer shares a lifetime of insights from teaching within the global church, bringing fresh images and analogies of the Trinity to deepen our theological vocabulary.

Drawing from his extensive teaching in geographically and culturally diverse contexts and his artist's passion for evocative words and visuals, Spencer offers readers a rich, many-faceted, and practical exploration of the Trinity. Alongside historical and contemporary theology and biblical studies, he considers the strengths and shortcomings of various analogies used to explain the Trinity, such as these:

- Light
- Water
- The Celtic knot
- The totem pole
- Musical harmonies
- The human body
- The family

Readers of *Three in One: Analogies for the Trinity* will gain a personal understanding of the Trinity as well as tools for teaching about the Trinity in adult and children's ministry contexts.

William David Spencer (ThD, Boston University School of Theology) is distinguished adjunct professor of theology and the arts at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Boston campus (Center for Urban Ministerial Education). He has authored, coauthored, or coedited eighteen books, including *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God* and *Global Voices on Biblical Equality: Women and Men Serving Together in the Church*, as well as hundreds of publications in journals and periodicals. He has served in urban ministry for fifty-five years.

**Review of *Reconciling Places: How to Bridge the Chasms in Our
Communities* by Paul A. Hoffman
(Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020)**

RODNEY L. PETERSEN

Bridgebuilding, the topic of this book, is a term as old as the Church. The derivation of the concept comes from the Latin word “pontifex,” used since Roman times to denote the word for “bridge” and the suffix for “maker” (*pons + facere*). The term together with “maximus,” meaning “greatest,” was adopted by the Bishop of Rome as defining his office. Bridgebuilding is a term that is aptly connected with the work of churches and of reconciliation. In his book *Reconciling Places*, Paul Hoffman’s intent is to show us that bridgebuilding is a metaphor for reconciliation and that reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel.

Reconciling Places evolves out of Hoffman’s work in ministry. It is a handbook for intentional bridgebuilders, in other words, reconcilers or those who would bridge chasms. His intended readers are those concerned about the increasing polarization of our world around competing ideologies which function as idolatries. Hoffman’s method is to help people to understand their sense of place as defined by varying categories, including those of race, class, and sex (gender), aspects of which partisan politics and social media magnify into differences, a particular characterization of recent political debate. By this tendency, God-given diversity has been turned into polarizing difference (Gal 3:28).

Polarizing difference is a characteristic of our time. *Reconciling Places* comes out of a particular historical context arising from such polarization, a prayer vigil on June 1 in Newport, RI, commemorating the tragic death of George Floyd, May 25, 2020, and the endemic racism of American life. The vigil drew attention to four issues animating contemporary unease: the national elections, the pandemic ravaging the population, social anxiety and depression, and the struggle in contemporary churches and communities of faith to find the way forward for people of faith.

The first chapter focuses on place, in other words, “Our Place – the Divided States of America.” Hoffman offers four lenses through which we are able to see the beauty and the brokenness of our place as we are drawn to God’s future as a renewed heaven and earth: place as found in a concrete setting in space and time, an interactive dimension as we interact with others in other places, the sacramental or deep meaning of place, and finally an eschatological dimension as we become one with God’s future. These four dimensions, taken together, give us a picture of place. Hoffman’s journey takes us to the intersection of reconciliation and place. *By reconciling*, he calls Christians to live into their call and identity to be peacemakers, those who build bridges across ethnicity (racism), class, and sex (gender) differences. *By place*, he refers to embracing one’s locale which gives us our identity in a particular social and cultural location shaped by classism, racism, sexism.

The biblical narrative gives us the perspective required for reconciliation, telling a story in five movements, the story of a Creator, of a first creation, of alienation, of reconciliation, and of a final creation. That story is anchored in Jesus Christ through whom God the Father seeks to reconcile all things by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are led to comprehend the profound relationality of the triune God and the interconnectedness with his world. Hoffman writes: “If you are willing to embrace the theology of reconciliation offered here, I believe you will be equipped to act as reconcilers who build bridges in your context” (8). Each place is unique and important with its own aspects of Babylon (alienation) and of the New Jerusalem (reconciliation).

The second chapter is on, “The Foundation: The Relational Nature of the Trinity,” reflecting the subtitle: “How to Bridge the Chasms in our Communities.” It is here that Hoffman’s image of

bridgebuilding comes into play. Hoffman informs readers that construction engineers tell us most bridges have three major sections: a foundation, a substructure, and a superstructure. By analogy, the foundation is the relational nature of the Trinity. The substructure is a reconciling theology. The superstructure is made up of reconciling practices. He tells us that reconciliation starts with the character of the Trinity – understood best if read through a “relational narrative” which helps us recognize the relational DNA in God’s nature: “Reconciling is rooted in the character and personhood of the triune God and his relation with the created order” (10).

This is revealed in a specific narrative, the key lens to understand Scripture. While there may be numerous ways to interpret the Bible, Hoffman lifts up a missiological or missional interpretation, following theologian Martin Kahler who argued that mission is “the mother of theology.” This reveals the mission of the one triune God: the first movement in this reconciling narrative is in the identity of the Creator. Creation, the second movement, is the first creation made out of the love of the Creator. The third movement finds that first creation severed (Rom 5:12). It has been broken into four levels of alienation: human’s separated from God, then separated from each’s own self (psychological), from neighbor (social problems), from nature (ecological). This leads to a fourth movement: reconciliation through which the Godhead initiates a rescue operation starting with a covenant with Abraham. This movement is multidimensional, which offers a human role in the reconciling Initiative, with God, yet space given for human agency. The inward impetus is the Trinity: the source of all is relationship, God’s love seen as Father, Son, Holy Spirit (John 14:9-11). God’s outward facing roles are as Creator, Redeemer, with the Spirit as leader and reconciler in mission, following Lesslie Newbigin (74-75). All is relationship now as Spirit, the dynamic force and boundary-breaker, replaces the old order with a new order.

The third chapter takes us to “The Substructure: Reconciling Theology,” the connective tissue that binds the foundation and superstructure. Here we are taken to four great equalizing concepts as we live out the foundation and adopt God’s lens: 1) the imago Dei, 2) human sinfulness and the brokenness of creation, 3) the vast atoning love of Jesus Christ, and 4) his final judgment. This is the buffer that disperses the weight between foundation and superstructure. Hoffman writes, “reconciling is like building bridges across difference. Reconcilers must start with a strong foundation, one that is grounded in the relational nature of the Trinity. That brings us to a theology of reconciliation, which acts as the substructure in this paradigm” (83). This lens calls for four postures: 1) Humility, 2) Social inclusion – embrace: hospitality, 3) Identification with existing bridges, and 4) mutuality. This work connects to the bigger picture: God’s plan, God’s people, God’s assignment. God’s assignment is the task of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20), different in its sense of ministry, message of reconciliation, and identity of reconciliation from political models of conflict resolution (98), conciliation, accommodation or tolerance, and reconciliation. What is at issue, Hoffman writes, is less Civil War or WWII and more Reconstruction and the Marshall Plan; less election of Nelson Mandela and more the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. With Miroslav Volf, it is less thin or zealous Christian practice than repentance of the deformities in Christian intimacy and identity. With Richard Rohr, it is a move out of business as usual and finding that liminal space which is more the threshold to something new.

The fourth chapter, “The Superstructure: Reconciling Practices,” carries us to an emphasis on reconciling prayer, reconciling rhetoric, and reconciling communities/coalitions. Two overlapping convictions come into play here in an emphasis that unity does not imply uniformity and “we are better together...”. Being “better together” gives the book credibility. The strong points in his closing pages are references to many different Christian communities attempting to chart courses of church identity that are authentic forms of ministry in times of ecclesial suspicion.

A concluding chapter takes us back to a prayer rally promoting reconciliation and peace in the midst of national uproar and hatred. An outline of the structure of the rally gives recognition to Martin Luther King’s *Beloved Community* and a reconciling prayer to those gathered. Bookending

by rallies on June 1, 2016 (7, 10), and August 20, 2017 (131) gives the book a sense of currency and model for contemporary social engagement. Each chapter ends with *Questions for Reflection* and *Practical Next Steps*. Taken together with the setting out of which the book comes offers a form of theological engagement with social conflict which is not often found but always useful. This is a book that should be on every pastor's desk as we travel through a period of growing political unrest. The author's credentials will appeal to the followers of this journal and it should be a part of every seminarian's curriculum. The topic, bridgebuilding, is as old as the Church.

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**Review of *The Christians Who Became Jews: Acts of the Apostles and Ethnicity in the Roman City* by Christopher Stroup
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020)¹**

AÍDA BESANÇON SPENCER

The Christians Who Became Jews by Dr. Christopher Stroup provides the reader with an intriguing thesis: Luke’s aim in the book of Acts is to incorporate Gentiles or non-Jews who follow Jesus into the traditional Jewish ethnic identity. In effect, Luke strove to accomplish in a historical narrative what Paul did in the Letter to the Romans, to show that a Jew is not one outwardly through circumcision, but is one inwardly because “circumcision” is spiritual and not literal (Rom 2:28-29). The Apostle Paul highlights that true Jewishness comes through faith in Jesus, as genuine belief is modeled by Abraham, who believed in God and was reckoned as righteous before he was circumcised (Rom 3:24-4:25; 11:17). Professor Stroup compares the ancient manner of incorporating ethnicity with religious identity with similarities in the book of Acts. A separate goal for Stroup is to demonstrate that the book of Acts is not anti-Semitic or a polemic against all Jews and Jewishness. For him, “Jews” is not a unified term (pp. 2-3, 133).

In the introduction and chapter 1, Stroup presents his general hypothesis, the term “Jews” (*Ioudaios*) is used fluidly. In ancient times, ethnic, civic, and religious identities were connected, flexible, and varied in different rhetorical situations (p. 128). For Luke, “Christian” is a type of Jew, thereby legitimizing the place of Christians in the Roman urban setting or *polis* (p. 18). Luke distinguishes between Christian Jews and non-Christian Jews (p. 29). The designation “The Jews” is a religious category for Jews who do not accept the gospel (p. 31). Stroup also presents his presuppositions for the book of Acts. It was written by an anonymous author near the beginning of the second century C.E. from a Greek city under Roman rule (pp. 18, 39).

In chapter 2, Professor Stroup proposes that Luke deployed a Roman-styled population list in Acts 2:5-13 to redefine Jewish identity. Jewishness transcends ethnicity yet includes non-Jews, such as proselytes (p. 68). Acts 2 multiplies ways of being Jewish since Jews came from different *ethnē* or political territories and “proselytes” are included under the general category of “Jews” (pp. 42, 52). The goal of population lists is to unite people. He compares Acts 2 with the Sebasteion, a temple complex including visual representations of sixteen ethnic groups, from the city of Aphrodisias (first century, completed during Nero’s reign, p. 49). The reliefs in the Sebasteion identified Aphrodisians with Rome and distinguished them ethnically from other conquered populations (p. 51). Their goal was to unite Aphrodisians with Rome and give them a privileged place (p. 52).

In chapter 3, Dr. Stroup shows some similarities of rhetorical technique between the arguments of the Jerusalem Council and those of the Salutaris Foundation inscription of Ephesus (approved by the Ephesian Council 104 C.E., p. 72). In both, identity claims are made legitimate through reference to an ancestral deity, sacred texts, and a “mythic” history of an ancestral population (pp. 84, 94). Both texts expanded tribal identity (p. 80). In one, the Roman Salutaris seeks full acceptance by the Ephesians (p. 78). At the Jerusalem Council and earlier in the Cornelius episode, Gentiles (or non-Jews) become accepted or identified as Jewish.

In chapter 4, Stroup again refers to the Salutaris Foundation of Ephesus, but now, using civic topography, he compares the physical movement of the Salutaris’s processions in the city of Ephesus with the “literary” movements of Paul and his entourage in Acts. These movements unify the identity of the estranged group with the more powerful group, the Romans with the Ephesians, and the Christian non-Jews with the Christian Jews. Thus, in Acts, Timothy becomes a symbol of

¹ This review was first presented as part of a panel discussion for the Christ Among the Disciplines online conference Oct. 3, 2021.

the Jewishness of the Christians (pp. 112, 127), “God-fearers” or non-Jews who honor the God of Israel are represented as Jewish (pp. 115, 120). For instance, Proconsul Gallio in Corinth de facto treats the Christian group as a subspecies of Judaism (pp. 124-25). Christian identity becomes a type of Jewish identity within the Roman-era *polis* (pp. 104, 127), while Jews who oppose Paul are troublesome to the Roman political gatherings (p. 117).

Dr. Stroup has brought to our attention in *The Christians Who Became Jews* the importance of the fluid uses of *Ioudaios* in the book of Acts. It is helpful to keep in mind the categories of ethnicity, religion, and citizenship. In response, I did a word study of “Jew(s)” in Acts to verify his thesis. Of the 195 uses of *Ioudaios* in the New Testament, 40% (78) are in Acts and 36% (71) are in John (total 76% of the uses in the New Testament). The first introduction of the term in Acts indicates that “Jew(s)” is an ethnic and religious category, larger than language: “devout Jews from every nation,” referring to different nations and languages (Acts 2:5-11). Employing Dr. Stroup’s three aspects of ethnicity, religion, and citizenship, I found five basic semantic categories for “Jew(s)” that relate to his aspects:

1. *Ioudaios* is a synecdoche for an ethnic group that does not believe in Jesus, especially after Luke introduces this category in Acts 14:2. Religious sentiment is prominent. Luke begins many vignettes with first using “Jew(s)” as a general ethnic term with religious implications (e.g., 14:1), then, depending on the response to the gospel, using the synecdoche “the Jews” for unbelieving Jews (14:2).
2. *Ioudaios* refers to an ethnic group that includes followers of Jesus (e.g., 13:43; 16:1; 17:11-12; 21:20; 22:12).
3. *Ioudaios* refers to an ethnic group whose members are not citizens of a particular city (e.g., Acts 16:20 Philippi; 19:34 Ephesus).
4. *Ioudaios* refers to an ethnic group whose members may be citizens of a particular city (e.g., 21:39 Tarsus).
5. *Ioudaios* may refer to members of an ethnic group who strive to combine elements of Christian practice with those of non-believing Jews (e.g., 19:13-14).

Stroup’s categories support the importance of nuancing the meaning of “Jews.” However, I did not find any example where an ethnic uncircumcised non-Jew or Gentile explicitly is called a “Jew,” as Paul suggests in Romans (2:29; 4:11, 16-18; 11:17). Rather, Luke calls them “Greeks” (*Hellēn* or *Hellēnis*, 14:1; 17:4, 12; 18:4; 19:10, 17; 20:21; 21:28) and *tois seboumenois* (“devout persons or proselytes, God-fearing Greeks, as in Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7). Dr. Stroup has demonstrated that comparing the techniques of ancient Romans to those of New Testament writers is helpful. However, his argument might be more nuanced if he highlighted the differences as well between the Sebasteion and the Salutaris Foundation and Paul, such as the self-centered interests of the Aphrodisians and of Salutaris to obtain a better standing for themselves before Rome as opposed to Luke’s recording of the Jew Saul/Paul’s self-sacrificial efforts to *include* others, non-Jews, in his mission.

I do not think the historical Luke would be pleased to have his work included in the “mythic” category since he does not employ that word in his prologue (*diēgēsis* vs. *muthos*, Luke 1:1). Unlike Professor Stroup, I affirm Luke’s works to be what he claims at the beginning of his first book, the gospel of Luke, and reiterates at the start of his second work, the book of Acts: he has written a careful, thorough, detailed, well organized, reliable, comprehensive, orderly, accurate, truthful account of his investigation with convincing proofs based on eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3). Luke refers to his earlier work (the gospel) at the start of Acts (1:1). The early church overwhelmingly accepted Luke’s claims of authenticity. We have papyri^{45, 91} from the second and third centuries. The Muratorian Canon (CE 190) recognized Acts as canonical. First to second

century Papias explicitly cites the “book of Acts” and “Acts of the Apostles” (Fragments 3.10; 18.2). Second century Irenaeus of Lyons quotes and refers to people and events in Acts (e.g., *Against Heresies* I.23.1; II. 20.2; III.15.1). First and Second Clement (CE 96) and the Didache (CE 100) allude to Acts.² Early historian Eusebius summarizes that Luke, a companion of Paul, left us “two divinely inspired books, the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles” (*Church History* 3.4). When Stroup refers to “Luke’s Jesus,” “Luke’s Peter,” and “Luke’s James” (pp. 82, 88), those phrases imply a rhetorical work that may be “mythic” but not necessarily historically accurate. Consequently, Professor Stroup appears to have removed the divine call and historical basis of Luke’s works. A historical work can have rhetorical organization. But a fictional work, even historical fiction, is not a reliable historical document. Removing the historical aspect of the work flattens and simplifies Acts and removes its spiritual claims. There is now only one voice, the anonymous Luke, not the diverse voices of the historical figures of Paul, James, and Jesus.

Nevertheless, despite our different presuppositions, Dr. Stroup does not emphasize his biblical theories, rather he promotes his basic thesis. We all can benefit from his desire to show that the book of Acts is *not* against all Jews and that the Roman background can enlighten the biblical text.

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The Christian World Liberation Front

The Jesus Movement's Model of Revival and Social Reform for the Postmodern Church

JEANNE C. DEFazio

FOREWORD by Julia C. Davis
AFTERWORD by William David Spencer

This book is a retrospective and model for the postmodern church for revival and reform containing actual primary source quotations from all those involved. It is a unique primary source history of Jesus Movement reflections and not just another secondary book. There is nothing like it available on this seminal, significant, and influential ministry.

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JEANNE C. DEFazio is the author of *Keeping the Dream Alive: A Reflection on the Art of Harriet Lawrence Nisbit*, co-author of *How to Have an Attitude of Gratitude on the Night Shift* with Teresa Flowers, and editor of *Berkeley Street Theatre: How Improvisation and Street Theater Emerged as a Christian Outreach to the Culture of the Time*. She also edited *Specialist Fourth Class John Joseph DeFazio: Advocating for Disabled American Veterans*, *The Commission*, and *Finding a Better Way* and was the co-editor of *Creative Ways to Build Christian Community: Redeeming the Screens, Empowering English Language Learners, and An Artists' Tribute to Harriet Tubman*. She is a contributing author to *Christian Egalitarian Leadership*.

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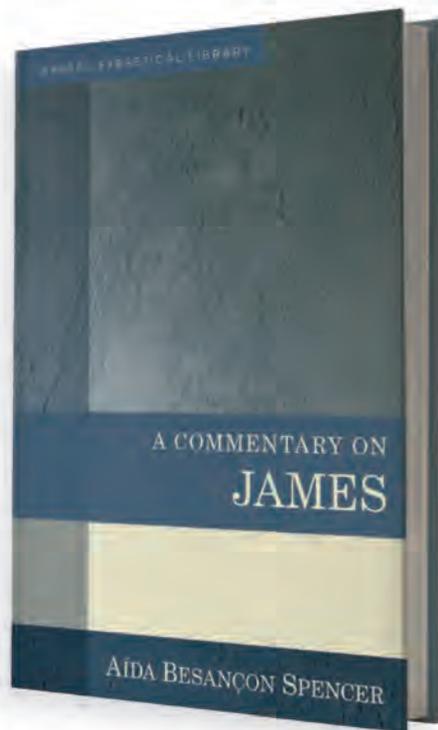
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2 E.g., I Clem. 2.2; 2 Clem. 1.1; Didache 4.8. See also *Polycarp Ep.* 1.2; Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 50.12. See also F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 10-21.



A COMMENTARY ON JAMES

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Aída Besançon Spencer (PhD, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is senior professor of new testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Her other publications include *Paul's Literary Style*.

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—Dean Borgman, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Review of *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings* edited by Todd A. Scacewater (Dallas: Fontes, 2020)

DAVID M. HARE

Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings (DANTW) compiles the work of many leading authors in both Discourse Analysis (DA) and New Testament scholarship, including: Robert Longacre, Stephen Levinsohn, William Varner, Ernst Wendland, and David L. Allen. Other authors include linguists, retired Bible translation consultants, and an array of professors and lecturers. Editor and author of four chapters in this work, Todd A. Scacewater holds a ThM from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a PhD in Hermeneutics from Westminster Theological Seminary and currently teaches at Wycliffe Bible Translator's flagship: Dallas International University.

Scacewater has two stated purposes for this work: 1) to display a variety of discourse analytical methods and 2) to provide useful analysis of the New Testament using these methods (pp. ix-x). Thus the principle audience of this book would be the student of the New Testament who wants a better understanding of DA and its application to New Testament interpretation.

Critique

One of the challenges to any such work is that, as a field, DA is still relatively young and even difficult to define. In the introductory chapter, Scacewater provides a helpful summary of DA as well as an overview of the history of the discipline and the major schools of thought. Each succeeding chapter begins with information about the methodological principles of the chapter's author followed by their application to a particular book (or in some cases several books) of the New Testament.

William Varner correctly states in his chapter on the Book of James that "discourse analysis is better described than defined" (p. 569). In this sense, DANTW is an invaluable resource not just for defining DA, but describing it and applying it. Several chapters read like step-by-step guides, a "how to" of DA with specific application to a text.

Stephen Levinsohn's chapter on Galatians is especially helpful in this vein. He begins with some specific information about the benefits of Discourse Analysis. One presupposition in DA that he specifically mentions is that,

choice implies meaning. So, when an author has the option of expressing himself or herself in more than one way, the ways differ in significance; there are reasons for the variations. (p. 297, emphasis his)

He moves on to a 6-step methodology for analyzing a text, which is then applied to the book of Galatians. As a student of DA, I have read many works by Levinsohn and this is by far the most accessible.

Considering the novelty of DA, I note the chapters in which authors acknowledge the limitations of their studies were without doubt the most helpful. Aaron Sherwood (a former professor and independent scholar of biblical studies) in his chapter on Romans admits that "discourse analysis is by its nature especially subjective, perhaps more than other interpretive approaches" (p. 193). This humility towards their own approach and towards the field of DA enables these authors to shine a new light on the text, without requiring an overhaul of biblical interpretation. Indeed, most authors in this text seem to recognize that DA is a helpful tool to be used in coordination with, rather than in place of, traditional methodology. In his chapter on Philemon, David L. Allen says that correct practice of DA in coordination with traditional

exegetical methods allows the analyst “to account for the textual features in a more thorough and holistic way” (p. 538).

For the uninitiated, it may be easy to question the need for DA and for a work like DANTW. Without doubt, students of the Bible have been analyzing and interpreting for thousands of years without such insight. Thomas W. Hudgens & J. Gregory Lawson help in understanding the benefit, when they claim, “The primary goal in analyzing any historical document is to identify its creator’s intent and interpret the contents of that document in light of that intent” (p. 362).

The student of the Bible, thus, approaches the text with a desire to understand the original author’s intent. Any first-year koine Greek student will tell you that the New Testament is filled with a sometimes perplexing variation in grammar and vocabulary. DA rejects the notion that such variation is accidental. Through detailed tracking and analysis, DA seeks to find patterns and recognize the underlying authorial intent in those variations. In his chapter on the Pastoral Epistles, Isaiah Allen (Bible professor at Asbury University) reveals that,

Understanding how passages relate to their larger contexts is one of the most important contributions of DA. Large-scale logical-semantic relationships at the book and multi-paragraph levels are frequently neglected. (p. 471)

The end result is a gathering of data that helps the reader understand what the biblical authors sought to emphasize in their writing. This does not supplant traditional analysis. Instead, DA makes up for a weakness in the traditional method, namely understanding intended meaning within the context of the text as a whole. The insights of DA tend to be subtle, helping the reader, for instance, to reflect upon the main intended thrust of a book. As an example, Robert Longacre’s analysis of Galatians leads him to believe that Paul wrote the letter focused on a single point, namely the understanding of saving faith (p. 330).

Ernst Wendland’s chapter on the Johannine epistles is certainly a highlight. While thoroughly academic, Wendland also proved to be delightfully devotional. After 42 pages of deep analysis and complex charting, he concludes with a personal note:

Speaking for myself, while diligently working through these Johannine epistles in the Greek text once again, I was greatly encouraged by the fact that, along with other fundamental Christological truths, through faith in the Son of God I am assured that I “have eternal life” (1 John 5:11–13). On the other hand, I have also been admonished not to take this gracious status lightly, but personally to become ever more vigilant to “keep [myself] from idols!” (1 John 5:21). (p. 693)

Such a statement is a refreshing reminder that biblical studies are never merely academic. As students and analysts of the biblical texts, we seek not only to understand the intent of the original authors, but also to obey it.

Conclusion

In regard to all that is mentioned above, DANTW is a vital resource for any NT exegesis or hermeneutics class. I envision a professor requiring a chapter for a class on exegesis of a particular book of the New Testament. In their chapter on Philippians, Hudgens & Lawson mention that, “discourse analyses sometimes lack...a clear investigative plan that would allow other researchers to reproduce the study or apply the same steps to similar research problems in different contexts with scientifically stable results.” (p. 361) Nearly every chapter in DANTW provides such a clear investigative plan which allows students not only to follow the analysis of the author(s), but also to apply the methodology to their own studies.

As one working in Bible translation, I will note that, while the application of DA to the understanding of the NT text is somewhat subtle, its import for the work of Bible translation is immense. In fact, when I first began working on text preparation for translation, I longed for

a single resource which could account for biblical discourse features but found none. While I am thrilled that DANTW is now available for such purposes, I eagerly await the Old Testament analogue.

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**Review of *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church: Theological Discernment on the Question of Same-Sex Union* by Darrin W. Snyder Belousek
(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021)**

MIRANDA KWON

Marriage, Scripture, and the Church by Darrin W. Snyder Belousek is essentially a very detailed and cautious argument confirming that, according to the Scripture and tradition, marriage is “man-woman monogamy” and that is “God’s will for sex and marriage” (284). Belousek then concludes, on account of “the consistency of this teaching in Scripture and the catholicity of this teaching in tradition” that “it is reasonable that the church today continue this biblical-traditional teaching” (284).

Prompted by the events that happened with regard to the question of same-sex union over the years within his denomination, Mennonite Church USA, Belousek pens this book for “the whole church” (xvi). The focus of the book is on the “theology of marriage and interpretation of Scripture.” But he acknowledges the “need for a compassionate pastoral approach” and that meeting such need is a “pressing challenge” (252). Therefore, while his motivation for writing the book is “personal and particular,” he nevertheless intends for the book to “partake of the larger debate and contribute to ongoing discernment within the wider church” (xvi).

Though not pretending to be “neutral” on the matter, he does seek to be “fair” with opposing viewpoints (xvi). He carefully assesses and analyzes the arguably “scripture-based arguments” in favor of sanctioning same-sex union, as well as those based on “tradition” and “the church.” He also uses terms that bear “positive connotations” in describing two opposing views: “traditional/traditionalist,” which connotes “holding fast to a valued heritage,” and “innovational/innovationist,” which connotes “advocating change toward a desired goal” (xiv). He is ever-polite in pointing out the holes and weaknesses in the innovationist arguments. When he presents the traditionalist view and elucidates and elaborates on the “biblical-traditional theology of marriage,” he also considers the possibility of the “innovation” of same-sex union being seen as a viable option from the perspective of the biblical-traditional theology of marriage. Ultimately, however, he seeks guidance from the Holy Spirit for discernment (Ch. 10).

The main body of the book is divided into four parts. In Part 1, after briefly surveying our *status quo*, Belousek ends the section with a quote from Winner (*Real Sex*, 20): “Our individual experience is corrupted; thus it must be interpreted by and refined by Christian scripture and tradition” (25). Believing that “the typical approach to the same-sex union question does not occasion biblical-theological consideration” (xvii), Belousek then frames the same-sex union question as “a matter of marriage” in Part 2. In doing so, the question of sin in the same-sex union, or at least direct dealing with it, is avoided, albeit the question remains as the elephant in the room.

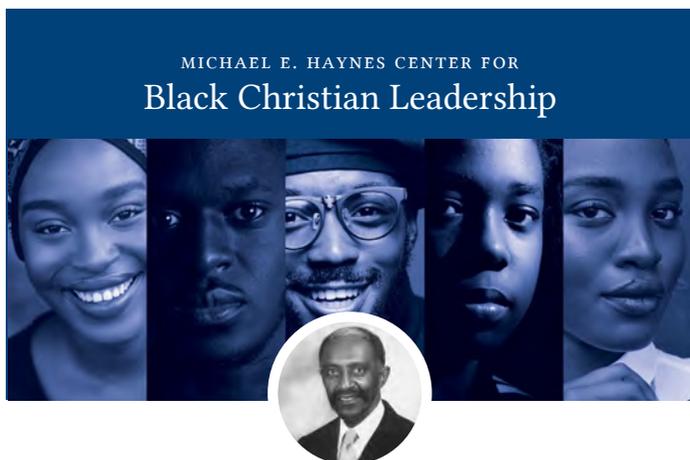
Treating same-sex union as a matter of marriage allows Belousek to consider the matter in “the wider context” and not to have the book focused “too narrowly” on biblical texts that “pertain directly to same-sex intercourse”—for example, “whether Scripture forbids same-sex intercourse” or if “same-sex intercourse [is] always sin” (xvii). Thus, in Part 3, Belousek engages fully with the innovationists, carefully assessing and cautiously rebutting their arguments point by point—those arguments based on appeals to “historical precedents” such as changes in marriage practices and comparisons to slaves and women’s ministry (Ch. 7), “biblical precedents” of inclusion or concession such as analogies to eunuchs and gentiles, and even Paul’s “proposal” in 1 Cor. 7:9 that “it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (Ch. 8). At the end of Part 3, Belousek comes to the conclusion that “innovationist arguments fall short of providing sufficient reasons that would justify altering the church’s catholic doctrine of marriage to sanction same-sex union” and that

“the catholic consensus that marriage is man-woman monogamy [is] a sound doctrine to which the church should hold fast” (253).

Belousek considers, however, the possibility that the Holy Spirit might be leading the church today in a new direction. Therefore, he seeks to discern from the Holy Spirit “which way to walk” in Part 4. Observing the discernment process of the Jerusalem Council which was guided by “both experience of the Spirit and interpretation of Scripture” (281), he proposes that we do likewise in our discernment—in fact, “we would be wise and do well” to do so—that is, discerning “both what is old and new in God’s will for the church today” (287). And how do we do that? Belousek suggests that we discern “what is new by listening to the testimonies of gay believers who are living faithfully and serving faithfully as followers of Jesus” (287), and “what is old by looking into the treasury of Scripture and tradition” (288).

This book would certainly be a welcome addition to the “treasury” of books for the traditionalists, though it may not get the same kind of welcome reception by the innovationists. As Belousek points out, the pressing challenge of the church today in which the majority are traditionalists is rather pastoral than theological. Though pastoral issues are beyond the scope of this book, what is perhaps at the heart of the matter can be glimpsed in the insightful words of Wesley Hill in the Afterword: “LGB members of our human family are searching for the love that is only found in Jesus Christ” (296).

Miranda Kwon (M.Div., 2020, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA), an immigrant from Seoul, South Korea, is a Th.M. candidate in Biblical Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA. Having first arrived in Boston more than thirty years ago, she is currently living in South Hamilton with her husband of eight years. She is licensed to preach in the American Baptist Church.



Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary is honored to announce the Michael E. Haynes Center for Black Christian Leadership. Inspired by Dr. Haynes’ legacy of Christian leadership in both ministry and the public sector, the center seeks to equip Black Christian leaders for ministry, the workplace, and the academy with a fourfold focus:

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The Quest for Gender Equity in Leadership

Biblical Teachings on Gender Equity and Illustrations of Transformation in Africa

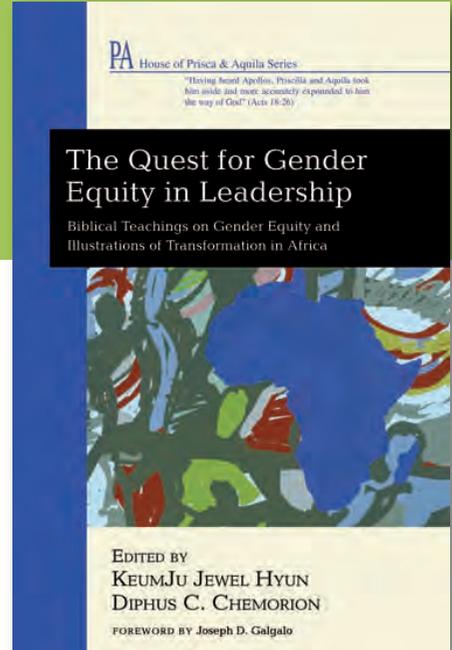
EDITED BY **KEUMJU JEWEL HYUN**
& **DIPHUS C. CHEMORION**

FOREWORD BY **Joseph D. Galgalo**

The call for gender equity in leadership has become a global concern. From a Christian perspective, all forms of gender prejudice are sinful because they violate God's intention for creating both men and women in God's image. Although many Christian authors have published books and journal articles to address gender-based injustice, very few publications have approached the subject from an African perspective. This book is meant to fill the existing gap. With a specific reference to the African context, this book explores the phenomenon of equity in leadership from various dimensions, such as African culture and traditional religion, church tradition, biblical interpretation, as well as from the perspective of contemporary socio-economic and political realities in Africa. By giving vivid examples of success stories of men and women working together, the authors have demythologized the view that women cannot be leaders. In addition, this book is intended for general readership by Christian men and women throughout the globe. For universities and colleges that teach gender studies as a subject, the book can serve as a class text or reference resource. Seminaries and theological institutions will also find it handy for training and mentoring Christians to promote equity in the church, ministry, business, and family.

KeumJu Jewel Hyun is founder and president of Matthew 28 Ministries, Inc., focusing on Christian women's leadership development and economic empowerment in Kenya. She is adjunct professor of Theology of Work at Bakke Graduate University and co-editor of *Some Men Are Our Heroes: Stories by Women about the Men Who Have Greatly Influenced Their Lives*. Jewel holds a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Ministries degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts, as well as a Master of Science degree in Nuclear Physics from Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea. She and her husband have two adult children and four grandchildren.

Diphus C. Chemorion, an ordained minister, is director of Postgraduate Studies and Associate Professor at St. Paul's University, Kenya. He is the author of *Community Participation in Scripture Version Design: An Experiment in Translating Jonah into Sabaot* and *Introduction to Christian Worldview: Meaning, Origins and Perspectives*. He also co-edited *Contested Space: Ethnicity and Religion in Kenya*. He holds a Master of Theology from Candle school of Theology, Emory University, and a Doctor of Theology in Old Testament from Stellenbosch University, South Africa.



ISBN: 978-1-4982-9333-4 | \$31 | 260 PP. | PAPER

"*The Quest for Biblical Equity in Leadership* is good biblical scholarship and engaging story-telling from a fresh African perspective that will provide new insights to readers from any continent."

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"This book . . . takes a particular issue of vital significance in the modern world—gender equity—[and] provides fascinating insights into a number of African cultures. It showcases some excellent African scholarship from both male and female theologians . . . and provides a fine example to the rest of the world of using biblical principles to critique culture from the inside. Congratulations to the editors and the writing team for producing such a useful compilation."

—MARY EVANS, Author; Former Vice-Principal and Old Testament lecturer, London School of Theology

"I have witnessed first-hand how Jewel Hyun embodies the quest for Biblical equity in leadership in Africa. Her faith-filled ministry in Kenya is a wonder to behold, and transformational to experience. As a result, the book in your hands is filled with Biblical wisdom and practical implications that will stand the test of time."

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Review of *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament* by Dorothy A. Lee (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021)

GRACE YING MAY

Pastors, scholars, seminary students, and seekers of truth about women in the church will find Dorothy A. Lee's *Ministry of Women in the New Testament* illuminating. Lee, the Stewart Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity College, University of Divinity, seeks to broaden the spectrum of leadership for women in the church based on her thoughtful study of the New Testament and early church period. An ordained Australian Anglican priest, she provides a thoughtful biblical apologetic for women's leadership, relying on the Scriptures, ancient writings and artifacts, and current scholarship. Her search for authorial intent and use of the historical-grammatical method reflect her high regard for the Scriptures.

In Part One of the book, Lee focuses on the Gospel authors and Paul's treatment of women. Her word study of *diakonein* highlights the importance of service in Mark's Gospel, comparing Peter's mother-in-law's ministry to that of the angels who minister to Jesus after his temptation (17). Lee understands *diakonein* as "ministry" when it applies to women as much as it does when it is applied to men and angels. Lee is also quick to point out that, when the gospel speaks of "crowds," women's presence is implied (33). In Luke's gospel, Lee sees Mary's annunciation as a prophetic calling, because structurally the passage parallels Isaiah's call narrative (41). Lee also posits that Mary Magdalene leads an inner circle of Jesus' female disciples just as Peter leads the male counterpart (47).

Asserting the power of the Cross to overturn worldly powers and inaugurate a new order, Lee identifies diverse women leaders in Jesus' movement (58). Joanna was a part of Herod's court, yet she was willing to join Jesus' followers who were largely Galilean peasants, a choice that likely carried a social stigma for her (49). Many house churches leaders were women, such as Mary, mother of John Mark, who was likely wealthy, owning a house "commodious enough to hold the community" (64), and Lydia, probably a Gentile, who opened her home "changing the status of Paul and Silas from outsiders and strangers to guests who belong" (65).

In Paul's letters, Lee starts with Romans 16 by identifying Paul's named female colleagues and highlighting Phoebe (101). Lee makes one error by assuming that names are shortened to form diminutives when in Latin, they are actually lengthened, as in the case of Priscilla (103). Her treatment of 1 Corinthians 11 is concise. Paul is not prohibiting women from the public ministry of prophesying or praying in the worshiping community but simply wants to prevent disruptive conversations during the service (121). Citing Morna Hooker, Lee points out that Paul accords women the agency or authority (*exousia*) to decide whether to wear a head covering. Paul's words should not be misconstrued to mean an authority under which she is subject, because nowhere else in the New Testament, or, as Lee states, anywhere in the Greek, is *exousia* used in such a manner (118). In First Timothy chapter two, Lee believes women are called to "quietness," not absolute silence (123) and submission to biblical teaching, not to men (125), because of women's general lack of education during the first century. Furthermore, Lee translates the verb *authenthein* as "to teach so as to dominate" (125); thus, Paul is not universally prohibiting a woman from teaching but only when it is done in a way that undermines another person. When considering the requirement of an elder to be "a husband of one wife" (lit. "one-woman man"), Lee understands this statement not as a requirement that all church leaders be male, but that all leaders be faithful and monogamous regardless of their gender. In Ephesians chapter five, Lee points out that Paul expresses a need for a radical re-ordering of the family, where the father does not wield absolute rule over the family members, and instead reframes marriage in terms of mutual service (132).

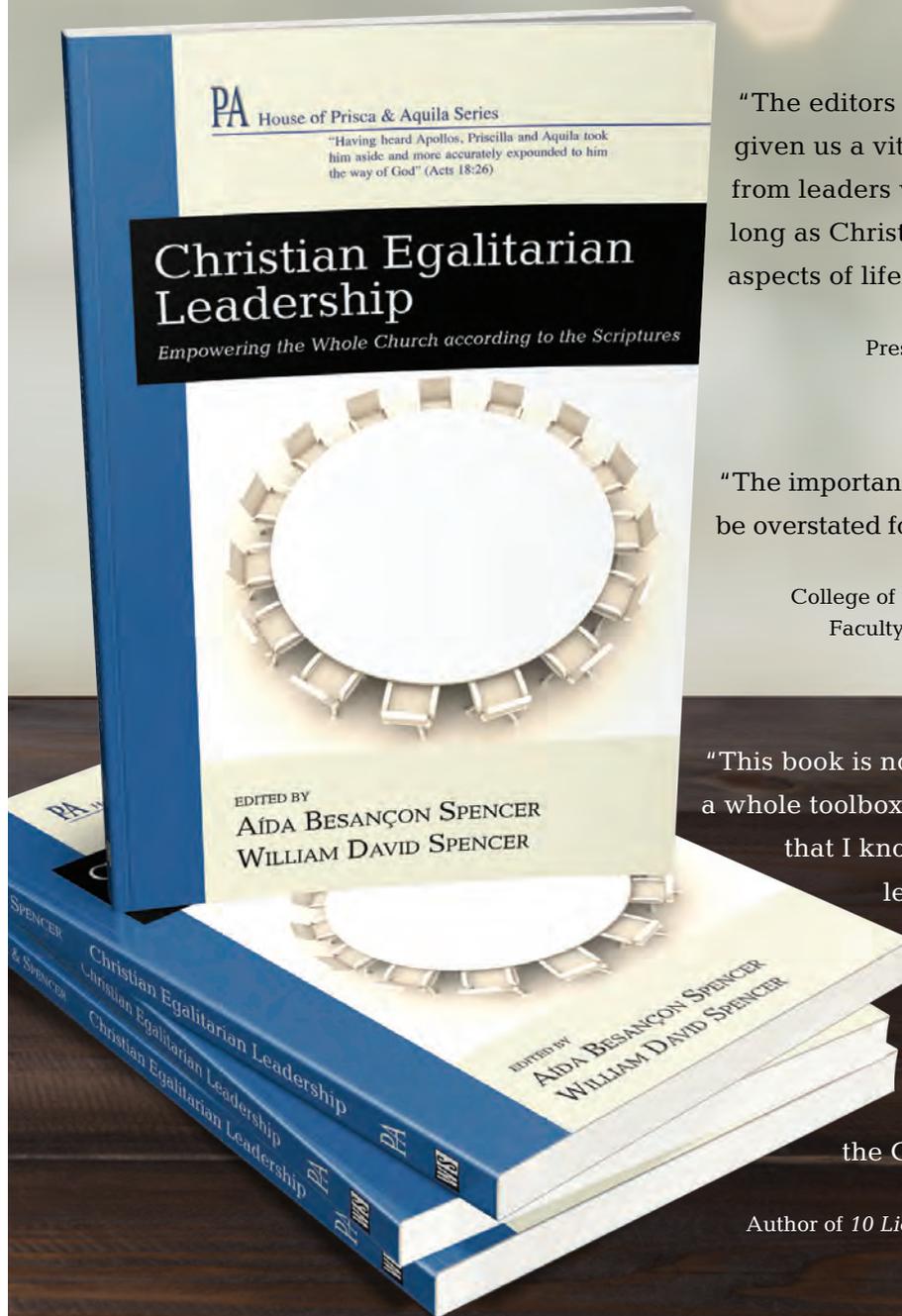
In Part Two of the book, Lee provides fascinating discoveries about the church from the first through sixth centuries. Inscriptions that have survived to the present day attest to ordained women, female bishops, and women liturgists at the altar (162, 164). Paintings and murals depict women in clerical attire with ecclesial symbols (164). Church history varied in the first centuries with women free to exercise their pastoral, sacramental, preaching, and teaching ministries in some traditions, while in others they were not (165). Lee also recognizes the effort to excise women from the annals of history and to cover women's presence in art.

Nevertheless, biblically, Lee opens up wonderful possibilities for women's presence and participation in the church that merit further exploration and underscores the "insistent presence and leadership of women in the early church" (64). Historically, Lee provides an ingenious key to understanding the early churches and invites us to focus on the "direction the text faces" instead of the cultural constraints on women of their context (73). Theologically, Lee reminds us that it is by virtue of our being made in the image of God that makes men and women equal (175), and it is Jesus' humanity, not his maleness, that is essential to our salvation (176). She cites Sarah Coakley, who argues that we are all capable of representing Christ, and baptism ushers believers into Christ's identity (180).

I would recommend Lee's book to inquiring seminarians and New Testament and church history professors at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and other evangelical seminaries who want to introduce their students to the rich soil of biblical and historical support for women in ministry. Lee acknowledges that there is debate about Paul's authorship of some of the pastoral epistles but chooses not to be embroiled in the controversy. Her solid scholarship and accessible writing style make her a welcome breath of fresh air for those who want to see sisters grow as church leaders, pastors, and co-heirs of grace in their homes. Lee senses an urgency to her message in light of the recent resurgence of "male headship" in the home and growth of churches restricting the role of pastor to men. She regrets that such practices deny the church of the gifts of sisters, and I would add reflect poorly on the God of the Scriptures who created men and women equal.

Grace Ying May is the Director of the Women's Institute and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at William Carey International University. Ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA), she has pastored churches in New York City and Boston. In 2011, she co-founded Women of Wonder (WOW!) and served as the Executive Director for seven years. She has taught about the biblical and theological foundations of women in ministry in seminaries in Asia, Africa, and North America. She authored "Women Discipling Men" in *Christian Egalitarian Leadership: Empowering the Whole Church according to the Scriptures* (2020) and "Appreciating How the Apostle Paul Champions Women and Men in Church Leadership" in *The Quest for Gender Equity in Leadership* (2016). Most recently she co-edited *Unlikely Friends: How God Uses Boundary-Crossing Friendships to Transform the World* (2021). Grace holds an M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a Th.D. (Theology and Missiology) from Boston University School of Theology.

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Review of Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims by Darby A. Strickland
(Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020)

JEAN DIMOCK

Is It Abuse? by Darby A. Strickland is written to benefit those in the church, both congregants and leadership, professionals and non-professionals, so all might have an understanding of domestic abuse and the men, women, and children involved. Throughout the volume, Strickland provides detailed and clear information concerning the victim's healing process and how helpers can best serve her, what scriptural approach and attitude are necessary to effectively help both the victim and her children so they may regain their power, and also how to approach and assess the oppressor so that he may repent. The victim, who is generally reticent about sharing her experiences of abuse, is helped and heard through Christ-centered counsel. Since approximately 95 percent of domestic abuse situations show men to be the offenders, the author uses language denoting the male as the oppressor, but states that the information in the book can also be applied to men when they are the victims. The author prefers using various forms of the term "oppression" to reflect the typical behaviors used by an oppressor to control his victim being addressed in Scripture (24).

Strickland explains that the desire for control and sense of entitlement motivates the oppressive personality and describes the harmful devices that define his repressive behaviors. Abuse is not solely physical, but also sexual, emotional, spiritual, and financial. We are called to work for "justice and righteousness" (28), to recognize and uncover the perpetrators of oppression, and then liberate the victims of oppression. The author uses the example of Jesus to affirm his love and compassion for the afflicted, His ability to recognize the broken, and His acceptance of those harmed by the oppressor.

The author describes the effects of abuse on the victim and encourages us to view her situation with wisdom and "new eyes" (90). She cautions us against blaming or judging the victim, which sounds like an unnecessary caution, but well-meaning people have made that dreadful error. Throughout, Strickland details how to help most effectively those who are oppressed.

In very organized fashion, the author lays out, chapter by chapter, what one must know to identify an oppressed woman and how to minister to her. To begin, there needs to be a determination of whether a victim is experiencing on-going oppression from one's spouse or dealing with more common marital struggles. Strickland describes the motivation behind oppression and what abuse does to marriage and victims. The hurting must be rescued and those doing the hurting must be exposed. While all interactions with the abused woman must come from a vantage point of love and patience, we need to keep in mind that a woman is most encouraged when a helper uses all the fruits of the Spirit.

Clarity is brought to the definition of oppression and the oppressor in domestic abuse situations. An oppressor deflects blame, justifies and rationalizes his behaviors, and ultimately seeks to control, which then hurts the victim. The perpetrator dethrones God and impedes Christian growth through a sense of entitlement and viewing himself as the most important part of the world. Victims then lack trust and experience confusion, unable to view their situation clearly. Often they mistakenly believe that their sin has caused their suffering, which it has not. The author uses Scripture throughout to affirm the victim, showing her that God has a heart for those who suffer. The author describes the effects of oppression to give the reader a better understanding of the victim's difficulties and so we may better see her heart and know the world she lives in.

The care given to the oppressed must be centered on both her and the Gospel. Strickland makes sure the reader understands that no two stories or situations are the same, but also provides a basic guideline to support and comfort the victim that keeps her at the center of her own story.

An entire section of the book is devoted to giving the reader a proper identification and understanding of the main areas of oppression: physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, and financial. In each case, the author provides information that helps the reader identify whether the victim is experiencing abuse in that particular area, describes the impact of that area of abuse and its dynamics, and explains how best to help the victim work through the abuse. Bathed throughout these chapters is the reminder that, to work effectively with a woman who has had any of these experiences, one must have patience, understanding, a loving attitude, and a willingness to listen well. Biblical truths applicable to the woman's situation are always brought to the fore, but in addition, poor theology and teaching as well as "misapplying the Bible" (195) must be corrected, as a spiritual abuser will use Scripture and church culture as weapons against his partner.

Strickland encourages the reader to remember the children caught in families where there is an oppressor. Victims are not only the women who are being abused, but the children in these families are fifteen times more likely than the national average to experience abuse by the oppressor (257). Children who live in a home where their mother is abused by an oppressor are themselves abused as the result of either directly or indirectly witnessing the abuse. The author delineates the long-term, spiritual, and relational impacts of childhood domestic abuse and how helpers can approach, support, and protect the children involved.

Finally, Strickland provides information concerning how best to approach the process necessary for a victim to leave her situation. The victim must make the decision in her time, if she makes the decision to leave at all, either temporarily or permanently. Each case requires God's wisdom along the journey of helping a victim of oppression and her children. We must remember that no two cases are exactly the same since no two victims are exactly the same.

Throughout the book are reflective questions and exercises that encourage thought about the book's content and also to help the reader remember what the author has presented. Every chapter includes scriptural encouragement for victims and helpers. Screening questions and inventories help clarify a victim's situation. Several appendices provide invaluable help and include how to make a safety plan with victims, how to educate the church concerning domestic abuse, what red flags to watch for during dating, and so much more. Strickland demonstrates that she wants the reader to be well equipped, logistically and spiritually, to help the oppressed.

Darby Strickland both counsels and teaches at the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation and is well-seasoned in her work with victims of abuse. She has used her experience to shape a very readable, informative, important, well-ordered book. There are relatively few footnotes, but where she received information from others, she chose highly reliable sources.

Strickland uses the correct term, "strangled," as opposed to the often-used "choked" when identifying the action an oppressor takes when he grabs his victim's throat with his hands. Strangulation is when the pressure is applied on the outside. Too often damage to the victim and even death can result. At least in the domestic abuse world, a person is not choked, but strangled.

Addressing the children in families where an oppressor exists does not always happen in works that describe domestic abuse. Incorporating children in her work is one of many inclusions that make the author's work complete. Understanding that healing happens in community is another concept that is often overlooked, but the author values and states its importance. We can gain understanding and tools when sitting with a helper, but healing occurs when those around us offer support, encouragement, empathy, and presence.

Having an index might be helpful to the reader as well as the researcher. Also, the next printing might include a correction or clarification on the chart included on pages 72-73. The section

describing the difference between anger in the self-worshiper (the oppressor) and God's anger is left with unfinished sentences.

The author wittingly or unwittingly shows us the importance of the church providing leadership to correct evil found in the community. Domestic abuse is a global problem. Viewing statistics from a wide range of researchers shows us that the family abuse statistics in the church are comparable to those in the greater community. Strickland's book, if taken seriously by the church, as should happen, will engage those in the church to help obliterate those appalling statistics and present a suitable witness to the community. Domestic abuse cuts across all cultures and denominations. Her book does as well.

While those experiencing oppression and those with the desire to understand the difficulties of domestic abuse so they are able to help victims, both women and children, will benefit from Darby Strickland's book, the oppressor will, as well, if he so chooses. *Is It Abuse?* should be included in seminary classes, particularly pastoral and general counseling courses, and made available to all those sitting in the pews, whether a part of church leadership or not. While *Is It Abuse?* provides an excellent resource for those who are not informed, those who are experts in the field of domestic abuse can also benefit from reading Strickland's book. Truly, the full value of this volume cannot be expressed adequately in a mere book review. One must read the book.

Jean Dimock received her M.A. and D.Min. degrees from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, at its Boston Campus for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME). Her doctoral research and thesis concerned domestic violence. She has worked as a domestic violence specialist since 2005 and served as a New Hampshire guardian ad litem. She works with women across the nation who find themselves in domestic violence homes, and also helps the children involved by giving the adults understanding regarding what their children are experiencing and why certain behaviors exist. Jean has also served as adjunct professor of both philosophy and psychology courses at Great Bay Community College in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Her professional duties provided information that led to contributing two different chapters for two different edited works: *Empowering English Language Learners: Successful Strategies for Christian Educators*, an edited work by Jeanne D DeFazio and William David Spencer, and *Christian Egalitarian Leadership: Empowering the Whole Church according to the Scriptures*, an edited work by Aida Besançon Spencer and William David Spencer. Jean is currently writing a book concerning domestic violence, *Domestic Violence: Identification and Restoration*. She and her husband recently moved to North Carolina, and they have two children, two grandchildren, and two felines.

Review of *The Commission: The God Who Calls Us to Be a Voice during a Pandemic, Wildfires, and Racial Violence*, edited by Jeanne C. DeFazio (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021)

JENNIFER CREAMER

Jeanne DeFazio, a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and editor of several books, including *Berkeley Street Theatre*, *Redeeming the Screens*, and *Creative Ways to Build Christian Community*, has a background in acting for both the screen and for the stage. She also serves as an Athanasian Teaching Scholar at Gordon-Conwell's Campus for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME) in Boston. Her recent book, *The Commission: The God Who Calls Us to Be a Voice during a Pandemic, Wildfires, and Racial Violence*, is an invitation to hear testimonies of the work of God in the lives of many individuals.

Ask anyone what their experience of the pandemic has been, and you will hear a unique story. Unique, because each of us experiences things differently—yet there are common themes. For some, the pandemic has been an experience of personal illness or the illness (or loss) of a family member. Some have lost jobs or needed to move their work online. Some have been isolated from friends and family, while others, particularly those with small children, have been scarcely able to find a moment of quiet. Many have endured financial pressures, and some have needed to relocate. Common to many peoples' experience of the pandemic is a sense of growing isolation as church services moved online, jobs moved online, and even birthday parties moved online. These online activities, while helping us to retain some sense of connection with our communities, may also have left us feeling "Zoomed out." We long for a greater sense of normalcy. Social isolation is antithetical to the kind of community for which we are created. We need ways to connect with others.

The Commission is a short book (60 pp) that provides an opportunity to hear from those who have experienced the losses and griefs of the pandemic and other contemporary events, along with their experience of the goodness of God. The book begins with a foreword by Julia Davis, an African American educator, who writes about the importance of peer learning (xi) and illuminates the effects of structural racism. The introduction includes a call to empathize with those who are suffering. Aída Besançon Spencer, Senior Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, brings a biblical perspective on the pandemic. She also exhorts us to pray, keep calm, stay in fellowship, and maintain gratitude toward God (3). The body of *The Commission* consists of vignettes written by those who have suffered from Covid-19, those who have lost loved ones to Covid-19, and those whose lives have been impacted by the effects of the pandemic. Throughout, there are many statements that resonate. One that stands out has to do with computer fatigue: "It was the year I hated virtual life the most, missing eye to eye and skin to skin contact" (29). The personal narratives are honest and heartfelt reflections primarily on the difficulties of the pandemic and the changes that it has hammered into our lives. The reader is encouraged to continue to seek and trust God by several pastors and ministers in the final section of the book.

The Commission provides an opportunity to gain perspective. Personally speaking, I found reading *The Commission* provided both a point of identification and a means of processing the deep impact that the pandemic has had on my own life. DeFazio's book comes at the right time. We can all be edified by reading the experiences of others and by contemplating the faithfulness of the God who is there.

Jennifer Creamer (Ph.D., North-West University) teaches biblical studies for the University of the Nations. She received master's degrees in Old and New Testament from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Hamilton campus) and has taught as an adjunct professor at Gordon-Conwell's Boston campus. Jennifer is author of *God as Creator in Acts 17:24*, Africanus Monograph Series (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

God as Creator in Acts 17:24

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The Areopagus speech of Acts provides a helpful study of how Paul both engaged and confronted the contemporary culture of his day to present the message of Christianity to his hearers in Athens. How does Paul, as a Jew, contextualize the message for his audience of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Athens on the topic of God as Creator in Acts 17:24? Paul touches on a subject of contentious debate between Stoics and Epicureans when he identifies God as Creator. Stoics believed in a creating deity, something akin to Plato's demiurge of the *Timaeus*. Epicureans ridiculed such an idea. By using the identification of God as Creator, Paul engages a common controversy between schools of philosophy.

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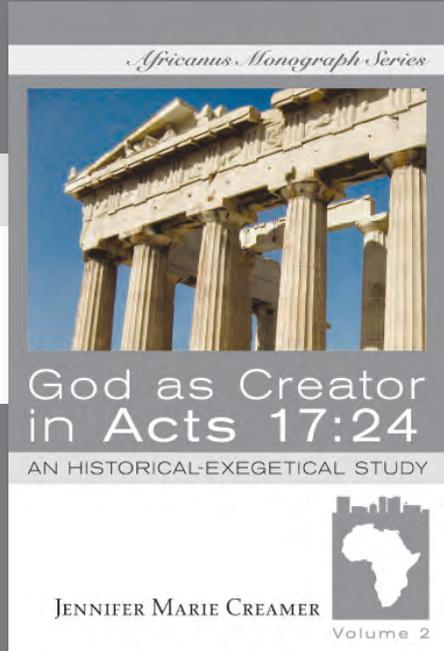
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"I highly recommend *God as Creator in Acts 17:24* to anyone who wants to know more about the first-century context of the Areopagus speech of Acts 17:24. How did Paul use concepts familiar to Greeks in order to introduce the unfamiliar content of the gospel? . . . This is a careful, detailed, exhaustive, and focused study of the primary sources on this timely topic: the cross-cultural communication of the gospel."

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—FRANCOIS P. VILJOEN, North-West University, RSA



978-1-5326-1536-8 / \$25 / 186 PP. / PAPER

Jennifer Marie Creamer is adjunct professor of New Testament at the Boston campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She has also taught biblical studies with the University of the Nations at various international campuses.

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**Review of *The Quran with Christian Commentary: A Guide to Understanding the Scripture of Islam* by Gordon D. Nickel
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020)**

PAUL T. MARTINDALE

The premise of this volume is that Christians will benefit from a scholarly translation of the Quran in English with explanations and commentary from a Christian point of view. The text of the Quran is reprinted from the excellent English translation by Arthur Dodge. The translation is both readable and accurate. I compared a number of passages to the English translations of A. Yusuf Ali, A. J. Arberry, Majid Fakhry, and John Rodwell. The Dodge translation is clear, modern, and accurate to the original Quranic Arabic text. The only disadvantage I find is that the Dodge translation uses the word “God” when translating the Arabic word “Allah” rather than using the word “Allah.” Since the Christian concept of God is not a one-to-one equivalent of the Muslim concept of Allah, many translators retain the word “Allah” to distinguish it from the Christian doctrine of God. On the other hand, the word “Allah” in Arabic literally means “The God” so this use is literal and accurate. Nickel addresses this issue in his introduction section (pp. 19 and 20).

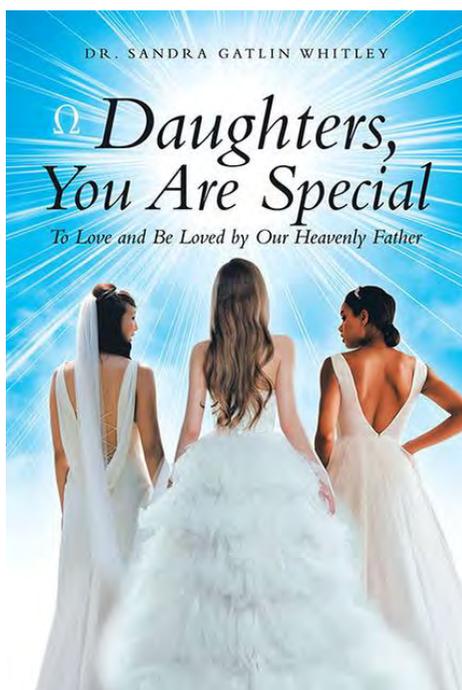
Gordon Nickel brings a wealth of experience living among Muslims to this work. He is an outstanding scholar of Islam and is the Director of the Centre for Islamic Studies at the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) in Bangalore, India. He and his top-ranking Islamic Studies Scholars describe the classical Islamic interpretations of the Quran’s text in a way that clarifies and gives the reader greater understanding.

There are many inserts in the book with brief articles giving background historical commentary for readers, helping them to understand the context behind various events being described in that passage of the Quran’s text. There are verse by verse explanatory notes at the bottom of each page describing Islamic concepts such as prophethood, deliverance, and divine punishment, which enable readers to understand the significance of what is being described from the Muslim’s point of view. Definitions of Arabic words are found throughout the book, enabling readers to understand the text more clearly. All of these helpful explanations and commentary are done with the goal of helping the Christian to understand the Quran from the Muslim’s point of view. In some ways, the title “with Christian Commentary” is a misnomer. At no point could I detect Nickel attempting to misrepresent the text or unfairly refuting the text from a Christian point of view. The commentary is historically and theologically impartial. Nickel does respond to many of the passages giving a Christian point of view and in that sense there is Christian commentary. It is obvious that Nickel’s goal is to help Christians understand what the text is saying from its own historical and theological point of view. Therefore, I find this work to be fair, impartial, and scholarly.

Many of my students have found the reading of the Quran to be tedious and confusing. This has to do with the way that the Quran was compiled, the vagueness of many translations into English, and the student being unfamiliar with Islamic theological concepts. The articles and notes on each page engage with the traditions of classical Islamic commentary and provide Christian responses to these classical interpretations. This helps the reader to gain a great deal of insight into the cultural, historical, and theological context of the Quranic passages even during their first reading of the Quran’s text. The clarity and readability of this translation with its helpful explanations and commentary make this book very useful for any Christian wishing to read and understand Islam’s Holy Book. I think it should be the standard Quran used in university and seminary classrooms.

Dr. Paul Martindale is Ranked Adjunct Professor of Islamic Studies and Cross-Cultural Ministry (retired) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He served as the lead instructor and director of the Summer Institute on Islam program for Arab World Ministries and Pioneers. His ministry to Muslims on three continents spanned 36 years. He has written dozens of articles and the book *Reaching Muslims in America with the Gospel: Understanding how the Church can Reach Muslims Effectively* (Lambert Academic Press).

Daughters, You Are Special: To Love and Be Loved by Our Heavenly Father



A Discovery of Real Love!

“God is calling His girls, His daughters to come to Him. Girls and women are invited to embark on a beautiful journey to discover who they are, who they belong to, who loves them and ultimately, how to enjoy healthy relationships with God and others. God is available, and He is waiting for us to invite Him in or cry out to Him. God, the Father wants to spend time with His girls giving the Truth about who they are in His eyes according to the Scriptures. This is a scriptural guidebook for girls and young women to discover they were born in this world as God’s masterpiece with true identity and value in Christ Jesus. For each one either entering a passage of life to womanhood or have been hurt, wounded, rejected, abandoned, neglected and/or abused in relationships will be drawn to

knowing, believing and feeling special according to God’s masterpiece plan. Girls and women are reminded that they are adorable, loveable, capable, strong, courageous, bold and beautiful in His eyes. Girls will understand how to live confidently by not comparing, competing or conforming to others standards.

Dr. Sandra Gatlin Whitley provides an understanding that will motivate girls and women to build healthy relationships with God, with themselves and with others. While learning how to apply their identity, worth, and values as God’s image-bearers, girls and teens will also gather an understanding as to who they are according to God’s purpose for them.

This book also includes an epilogue that provides actionable strategies for parents, teachers, mentors and all those who influence the lives of young women.

**Learn more about the book and author on her website:
www.drsgatlinwhitley.com.**

**Review of *Specialist Fourth Class John Joseph DeFazio: Advocating for the Disabled American Veteran* by John Joseph DeFazio, edited by Jeanne C. DeFazio, Resource Publications
(Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020)**

SANDRA GATLIN WHITLEY

John Joseph DeFazio wrote this inspirational book (27 pp.) to inform, support, and express care for all disabled veterans (2). He empathizes, connects, and advocates for his comrades who received service-related injuries while protecting our American freedoms. He advocates for these disabled American veterans by sharing his personal experiences and struggles, while guiding them through the disability claims process despite its history of ineffectiveness (ix-x). With various resources available, DeFazio affectionately and specifically makes known to his comrades without legs in wheelchairs begging on the side of the freeway, those lying in the street self-medicating with alcohol, and those repeatedly incarcerated for using drugs not to give up, but file for their benefits and volunteer with their local community veteran organizations (xx). His aim is to encourage all to “triumph over the disability and horrific loss of mobility that I experience everyday” (2).

John Joseph DeFazio begins and ends his book on the foundation of Scripture in Revelation 12:7-12 explaining “that disabled veterans did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (1:11). DeFazio’s faith in God, childhood baptism, and Catholic teachings were instrumental in his steadfast ability to stay grounded in the belief he was created to seek, know, and love God with all his strength and endure whatever circumstances he faced. He resisted despair, alcohol, and drug abuse and professes he is a better person as a result of it (10-11).

The author’s primary sources are his own personal experiences and struggles in dealing with the veteran’s administration disabilities process. He also relied on other veterans and family members of the Vietnam war era exposed to Agent Orange, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census Bureau, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Veteran Affairs, Wounded Warrior Project, and other sources. DeFazio also includes personal preferences such as Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and various local community agencies.

In addition, the author relied on the expertise and experiences of other veterans for his book. Julia Davis’ three brothers served in the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force, one of whom struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of exposure to Agent Orange. Of the 217,000 veterans who served in the American revolution, only 3,000 ever received benefits. In World War One (WW1), 85 percent of disability claims were denied, whereas 31 percent of claims today are denied, proving the disabilities system is still not perfect. Also, in the disabilities system, the inequities among African or Hispanic American homeless veterans is 45 percent (ix-xi). Bruce I. McDaniel, a four-year army veteran is fully aware and familiar with the impact of the Vietnam war on veterans leaving them homeless. He researched and wrote a book about the effects of the Vietnam war and the veterans returning home (13-21). Martha Reyes’s uncle and cousin served in Vietnam and were exposed to Agent Orange in combat. Although neither died on the battlefield, each died from a long battle with cancer brought on by the exposure to chemical warfare. With the alarming rates of veteran homelessness in California, despite the annual allocation of funds, many veterans are unable to follow up on their disability claims process (xiii-xvii).

How did the author gather data? Through DeFazio’s filing and navigating the disabilities claims process in the veteran’s administration, he discovered irregularities in the system. Ultimately, he gathered data from other veterans and mentors, researched websites, contacted his county’s

Military Veterans Service Officer, DAV, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and volunteered at local military organizations and community agencies.

The number one credential of the author, Specialist Fourth Class John Joseph DeFazio, in writing this heartfelt book is his selfless military Army service to the United States of America and his returning home a disabled veteran. He is one of our country's heroes who served with loyalty, pride, and patriotism. By telling his own story of service-related injuries to military veterans, he gives credibility to the reality of the struggles of the mental, physical, moral, and emotional wellbeing faced by disabled veterans. His undying faith in God has and is equipping him to accomplish his goals effectively.

John Joseph DeFazio is a proud American soldier expressing his testimony of triumph over horrific loss of mobility. In this heart-wrenching testimony, he declares that "disabled soldiers did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (11). He remains selfless by not giving up on his comrades and by following the great commandments, to love God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love others as himself (Mark 12:30-31). I am totally in agreement with the author as he highlights Mother Teresa's quotation, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other" (xx). This book is very timely, resourceful, and beneficial in bringing awareness to a crucial American problem among our disabled veterans. Not only did the author "not shrink back from death" (Rev 12:11), but he gives disabled veterans hope in spite of this country's neglect of their sacrificial service. The author's transparency is conveyed with sincerity and compassion for his fellow disabled comrades. By sharing his personal experiences about the disability rating process, the author reaches back to help disabled veterans and brings awareness to everyone else. He provides specific guidelines for processing disability claims, encourages his comrades to volunteer with local veterans' organizations, stay informed, stay active, and stay involved within their various communities (11).

Thank you so much, Specialist Fourth Class for your honorable service to our grateful nation. I am grateful for having taken the time to read this very informative and insightful book about discrepancies in our veterans' affairs system. May the Lord Christ bless all your goals and may His justice prevail for all our veterans.

Sandra Gatlin Whitley, an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, serves as the current Pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church in New Bedford, MA. She served in the United States Air Force for twenty-two years, earning the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. She has an M.A. in Management from Webster University, and an M. Div., an M.A. in Counseling, and a Doctor of Ministry from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She has published several articles, including one in *Global Voices on Biblical Equality: Women and Men Serving Together in the Church*. She is the author of *Daughters, You Are Special: To Love and Be Loved by Our Heavenly Father*. She and her husband, Kenneth, a retired Air Force Colonel, now serve in ministry together.

Review of *A Boundless God: The Spirit according to the Old Testament*
by Jack Levison
(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2020)

JHYUNG KIM

Jack Levison, W. J. A. Power Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and Biblical Hebrew at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University published another remarkable book on the topic of the “spirit.” Levison is an internationally recognized scholar, who wrote a number of significant books on the subject of the Spirit, including *Filled with the Spirit* (Eerdmans, 2009); *Fresh Air: The Holy Spirit for an Inspired Life* (Paraclete, 2012); *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Eerdmans, 2013); and *40 Days with the Holy Spirit* (Paraclete, 2015). Levison’s most recent volume, *A Boundless God: The Spirit according to the Old Testament*, explores the testimonies of the Old Testament upon the nature and function of the Hebrew term, *rûah*. To this end, Levison concentrates on what he identifies as an “iconic” (4) lexeme, *rûah*, a term that appears almost four hundred times across the Old Testament. As usually is the case, Levison beautifully integrates his academic proficiency with his high view of the Scripture in developing his argument, drawing his readers not to any speculative reasonings or debates, but rather to the ways in which the Word of God testifies about the Spirit. In this regard, anyone who wishes to listen to the voice of the Old Testament concerning the nature and the role of the Spirit would greatly appreciate the present volume.

In the opening chapter, Levison starts his discussion by showing his concern about the potential pitfall that his readers may fall under—pursuit of a definite definition of *rûah*. Levison makes it straightforward that such an attempt would not reap any benefit as *rûah* in the Old Testament conveys a broad and even “mysterious” (19) meaning that combines individual entities of wind, breath, spirit, and the Spirit (18). With this perspective, based on his careful study of the Old Testament passages, Levison goes on the extra mile to display how the Israelites conceived the “spirit” as a “dazzling fusion of wind, breath, and spirit” (29). Of particular importance is Ezekiel 37:1 where *rûah*, is viewed as to “breathe new life into a defeated and dislocated community” (32). In chapter two, Levison traces from Judges to 1–2 Chronicles to investigate to whom and in what circumstance the *rûah* “came upon.” The careful analysis of each figure upon whom the “spirit” came allowed Levison to conclude that when the *rûah* “comes upon,” what transpires is a sort of public benediction or victory over Israel’s oppressors (174). The above passages underscore the role of *rûah* as the one who inspires emancipation, assistance, and liberation (71).

Chapter four deals with an interesting phenomenon of the *rûah* “passing down” from one to another. Levison, from his analysis of the Scripture, finds that the pattern that the *rûah* siphons off is “from old to young” (88). Here, *rûah* refers to what kept both mentor and his protégè “young, vibrant, and fresh” (88). Chapter five examines the “outpouring” of the “spirit.” The pouring out of the *rûah*, according to Levison, is a “sheer blessing” (92) that carries out one’s transformation in every aspect: refreshing nature, turning people of God into a green pasture in a vast desert, bringing Israel home, transforming slaves into prophets, and evoking godly remorse in times of violence (92).

In chapter six, by tracing the figures who were “filled” with the “spirit,” Levison concludes that people who received the *rûah* do something remarkable (106), with inspired knowledge (108), heart toward justice (111), unsurpassed generosity (112), wisdom (114), sheer brilliance (119), and skills capable for a given task (121). In the seventh chapter, Levison delves into the “cleansing” of the *rûah*. While he plainly admits that the systematic correlation between the “spirit” and purification is not observed in the Old Testament, based on his insights gained from Qumran literature, Levison addresses how Psalm 51 and Ezekiel consider the *rûah* as the source of wisdom and virtue that cleanses those who are exhausted from sin and thus yearn for a new heart and spirit (138). The final

chapter concentrates on the *rûah* who stands and guides Israelites in their journey. The standing and guiding role attributed to the “spirit” in this chapter is distinctive from its previous chapters as it specifically underscores the personhood of the *rûah*. The “spirit,” according to Levison, is a person who “like the angel, pillars, and presence of God,” stood within Israel and guided them to the promised land (155).

I strongly recommend the present volume to those who are interested in this subject for its several strong points. First of all, the volume is well-organized and persuasively structured with rich evidence drawn almost exclusively from the Old Testament. Levison does a great job in defending his thesis that the term *rûah*, which conventionally has been translated into one or the other among “breath,” “wind,” “spirit,” and “the Spirit,” in fact, conveys a much broader and rich meaning that incorporates all these entities without any kind of classification. Levison is diligent in providing a biblical foundation in articulating his argument, making it persuasive and solid, difficult to reject. Second, this work is groundbreaking in the sense that it rejects not only the conventional definition of the “spirit” but also the conventional way of defining the “spirit.” By inviting his readers into the perspective of ancient Israelites, Levison challenges the ground upon which modern interpreters stand. Third, in the beginning section of each chapter, Levison lists biblical passages that are relevant to the discussion of the chapter. This allows the readers to listen to the Scripture’s own voice concerning the *rûah* on their own before engaging with the claim of the author. It furthermore allows the readers not only to appreciate what the author proposes but also critically evaluate his argument. Fourth, Levison seems to be aware of the danger of imposing Christian tradition upon his search for the “spirit.” By focusing solely upon the scriptural evidence, Levison opens the gate for conversations between different Christian circles and traditions. Last, but not least, while the book is not specifically intended to function as a groundwork for the study of the New Testament pneumatology, still it does provide a firm background upon which *pneuma* in the New Testament must be examined.

The present volume offers a significant contribution to the field of the Old Testament pneumatology and beyond by providing a comprehensive description regarding the biblical concept of the “spirit.” Considering Levison’s eloquent writing skills and his high view of the Scripture, *A Boundless God* well deserves to be a valuable guide for small groups in the church as well as church leaders, seminarians, professors, and anyone who is interested in studying the Old Testament account of the s/Spirit.

Jihyung Kim is a Ph.D. student at McMaster Divinity College. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in library and information science from Sunkyunkwan University, an M.Div. from Chongshin Theological Seminary, and an M.A. in biblical language from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His dissertation concerns Hebrews’ use of the Old Testament.

Review of *Big in Heaven* by Stephen Siniari (Chesterton: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2020)

CHARLIE LEHMAN

*Big in Heaven*¹ takes the reader into the lives of characters like those we saw in *The Deer Hunter*, those who worship in the Church of the ethnic Eastern Orthodox Christians of blue-collar Pennsylvania, which identifies itself with the Church founded by the Lord Jesus through the Apostles, the Church that preserved the identity of the Lord Jesus in its Ecumenical Councils, the Church of the right Faith for the wrong people and the Church of Tom Hanks, Hanan Ashrawi, and Vladimir Putin. Read this collection of short stories, and meet the members of one fictional congregation. You will understand why the priests and faithful of the Orthodox Church chant Lord have mercy² so many times. Thankfully, more Americans now chant it in English. Over thirty years ago, the head of one Orthodox jurisdiction in our country called its Faith *the best-kept secret in America*.³

Like fiction writers from Amy Tan to Ernest Hemingway, Father Stephen Siniari writes from experience, from his origin in the Badlands neighborhood of Philadelphia to serving Orthodox Churches in three American jurisdictions as these branches are called. And Fr. Stephen spent decades with Covenant House, serving trafficked children in twenty-two of the most dangerous American cities, getting beaten up, shot at, and knifed.

Fr. Stephen writes as a priest, but as a priest who rates the members, *especially the women*, much higher than he does the clergy. The underlying thesis supports:

1) *relationships over rubric*, 2) *ontology over theology* and 3) *love over logic*,

Fr. Stephen: *Ongoing struggle means you're doin' OK*.⁴

Asked why he'd written this collection, Fr. Stephen cited his heart attack. He was *on the other side*⁵ for twenty minutes.

Big in Heaven is an unflinching look at the lives of an Eastern Orthodox priest, his flock, and those around them. Because it is fiction, Fr. Stephen was relieved of the burden to sugarcoat it. Biblical? Yes. But, don't forget King David and the Apostles Judas and Saul/Paul. This priest and flock are, as we Orthodox say, *getting saved*. We are on the road, and life is sometimes hard. Some of us, clergy and the lay faithful, are more broken than others. We have good days and bad days, good years and bad years. This flock needs the compassion it receives from the Lord Jesus and from each other.

Truth is not this book's only quality. *Big in Heaven* is a collection of unbeatable short fiction. This reviewer, a lesser Orthodox fiction writer, found no weaknesses in it. *And* this man, Father Stephen Siniari, has served more needy people for more years and suffered more and gotten paid less doing it than the reviewer.

Because this is a collection of short stories, the reader will be blessed with over twenty beginnings and endings. It is appropriate for a modern fiction class.

1 <https://store.ancientfaith.com/big-in-heaven/>.

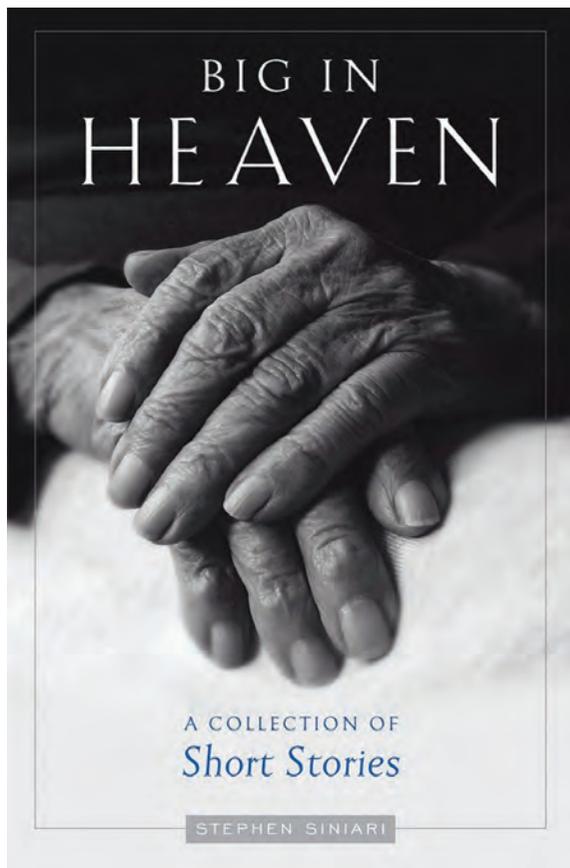
2 Orthodox Church common petition. The Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church, 7th Edition, 1984.

3 Metropolitan PHILIP Saliba, (deceased).

4 Cynthia Damaskos, "Holistic Christian Life - Worshiping God - Mind, Body, Soul - Podcast," <https://holisticchristianlife.libsyn.com/website/big-in-heaven-with-father-stephen-siniari-086>.

5 Ibid.

Charlie Lehman is an Eastern Orthodox Christian and a retired criminal defense paralegal. He acted with the Berkeley Street Theatre from 1972 to 1976. He earned a BA in theatre from Queens College, a paralegal certificate from UCLA extension, and a private investigation certificate from Cal State Fullerton. Lehman is the author of the novelette *Serve the People* (2020, Wipf and Stock).



SOMETIMES poignant, sometimes funny, sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes convicting, these stories of life in an inner-city immigrant Orthodox parish are guaranteed to shake your assumptions and make you see your life and faith in a new way. They are not for the faint of heart—but they are very much for all who want to embrace the truth more fully. *(Fiction for adults.)*

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“[These] stories begin to paint a new kind of Icon, that of a truly American Orthodox Christian, of regular people simply trying to be or tragically rejecting being regular human beings, the kind of people perhaps never even imagined by most American readers. . . . The stories break the mold of what a religious or non-religious story ought to be. They are not moralistic, nor are they irreverent in their honest portrayal of the realities of life in the Church. Rather they are just good, honest stories, and in being this they are sacramental, conveying and holding together elements of life that are seemingly disparate.”
(from the Foreword)



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