

## Comment

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For this issue of the *Covenant Quarterly*, I am thankful that three members of the faculty at North Park University graciously accepted my invitation to write an essay drawing on some of their recent research. In the first piece, we are encouraged to reflect on the function of music in the church, from the perspective of both Scripture and tradition. In the next essay, we are invited to listen to the perspective of marginalized communities in our culture, as we all seek to faithfully advance the cause of Christ through the work of the church. And in the last article, we are introduced to some specific research related to the social and cultural development of young adults and its impact on how church leaders might develop practical means to effectively reach this demographic.

First, Jonathan Teram, who teaches undergraduate Bible and theology courses at North Park University, draws on his own undergraduate studies in musicology, as well as his graduate work in Old Testament and Hebrew Bible (with master's degrees from North Park Theological Seminary and the University of Oxford), to explore the significance of instrumental music in the ministries of the church. Teram creatively explores the interplay of vocal and instrumental music in key biblical texts and in certain watershed moments of Jewish and Christian history. While not downgrading the value of vocal music, Teram helps us reflect on the ability of *instrumental* music to somehow communicate the ineffable. This is thoughtful biblical and theological analysis that ought to spur our own reflections regarding the use of music in the ministries of the church, and ultimately, in the context of our call to faithfully participate in the *missio Dei*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Teram is developing some of the ideas from his book on the Writings (the third section

Second, Dennis Edwards, associate professor of New Testament at North Park Theological Seminary, is an African American pastor-scholar who has served in evangelical spaces most of his life. Here, he presents some brief reflections on his 2020 book, *Might from the Margins*.<sup>2</sup> Edwards helps us understand some of the rationale behind his work, and especially the desire to encourage marginalized communities. In his essay, he first explores why there seems to be a recent surge in interest on books related to racial justice. He then goes on to emphasize three key issues that led him to develop his book: (1) the fact that racial justice is clearly a *biblical* notion (i.e., it should not be viewed as merely a sociological concern), (2) the reality that in Scripture, marginalized people are often at the forefront of God’s “upside-down” reign, and (3) the notion that white people are not always the central characters. Edwards concludes his reflections by emphasizing the biblical imperatives of Christ-centered love and humility. Whatever our own location as readers might be, I believe it behooves all of us to pay attention to Edwards’s voice, even if what he says may be uncomfortable. In the end, Edwards reminds us that fellow Christ-followers in minoritized cultures in the USA may indeed be on the cultural “margins,” but yet have “power from God to change the way Christianity operates,” especially with a continued focus on Jesus, who gives these communities the power needed “to fight injustice until he returns.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Beth Seversen, who has served in pastoral roles in Covenant churches, led evangelism efforts with the Evangelical Covenant Church, and, most recently, served as professor of Christian ministries at North Park University, presents a detailed essay that highlights some key findings from her 2020 book, *Not Done Yet*.<sup>4</sup> Seversen explores why certain

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in the traditional Jewish tripartite canonical order of the Hebrew Bible, known in English as the Tanak or Tanakh). See Jonathan Teram, *Illuminating Counsel: How the Least Holy Books Explore Life’s Most Important Issues* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> See Dennis R. Edwards, *Might from the Margins: The Gospel’s Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2020). This book was reviewed in the first 2021 issue of the *Quarterly*. See Armida Belmonte Stephens, review of *Might from the Margins: The Gospel’s Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice*, by Dennis R. Edwards, *The Covenant Quarterly* 79 (2021): 54-56.

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 185, 189.

<sup>4</sup> See Beth Seversen, *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020). Seversen’s book was also reviewed earlier

churches are able to effectively reach young adults in North America. As she notes in her book, her study is based on “original qualitative research on churches reaching and incorporating young adults, both the formerly unchurched or churchless ... and the nones, those who self-identify on surveys as having no particular religious affiliation.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, Severson’s research examines the ministry practices of what she defines as “bright-spot churches” in the Evangelical Covenant Church. These are churches that, according to her specific methodology, “were unusually successful at connecting to, evangelizing, and incorporating emerging adults into the church.”<sup>6</sup> In her essay, Severson first helps us understand the major issues emerging adults face as they seek to form their own identities. This, in turn, enables us to better appreciate the five invitational practices (initiating, inviting, including, involving, investing) Severson encourages us to consider. These are ministry practices that help create a healthy pattern of encouraging and enabling emerging adults to experience a vibrant relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. This study offers church practitioners much to prayerfully consider in the specific mission of effectively reaching young adults in a diverse culture.

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this year in the *Quarterly*. See Michael O. Emerson, review of *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults*, by Beth Severson, *The Covenant Quarterly* 79 (2021): 56-58.