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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*.[1]

[1] 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.*[2] 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."[3]

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.*[4] 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).

[2] 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.

[3] Edwards, Might from the Margins, 185, 189.

[4] 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 in 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."[5] In fact, Seversen'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."[6] In her essay, Seversen 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) Seversen 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 Seversen, *The Covenant Quarterly 79* (2021): 56-58.

"There Are No Words": Instrumental Music and the *Missio Dei*

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This piece is wordless but it has been pure healing for me over the past couple of weeks." So said my dear friend, Rebekah, regarding a piece of music called "Pile of Dust" composed by the late Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson for the 2017 film *The Mercy.* She was referring to a vocal arrangement of the piece sung by the British *a cappella* octet, Voces8. Her comment stirred in me all kinds of thoughts regarding the power of music, the Bible, and the *missio Dei.* Music is mentioned frequently in the Bible and is used not only for worship but also for therapeutic purposes. Moreover, music, like the visual arts, has the ability to metaphorically build bridges between peoples, as the varieties of music in the world perfectly encapsulate the paradox of humanity—that all humans are equal and yet each human is unique.

This may seem axiomatic with regards to vocal music, but it is less so for instrumental music. Despite the hundreds of references to musical instruments in the Bible, particularly the Hebrew Bible, there has been a long history within Judaism and Christianity of prohibiting musical instruments in worship and religious life. In what follows, I will briefly survey the biblical text and the history of Jewish and Christian attitudes towards musical instruments. Then I will attempt to provide a theological third-way response.

Instrumental Music in the Hebrew Bible

Jubal "was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe" (Gen. 4:21). Thus, in typical fashion, the Old Testament begins at the beginning with

the origin of musical instruments. We then start to see musical instruments mentioned in connection with anything celebratory. The first such occurence of musical instruments is in Genesis 31:27 where Laban mentions "mirth and songs." The more famous references are in 1 Samuel 18:6 where the women sing about how David killed more Philistines than Saul, and in 2 Samuel 6:5 where the Israelites celebrate the ark of the covenant's journey to Jerusalem. We can also note Jephthah's daughter greeting him in Judges 11:34 and the celebration of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem in Nehemiah 12:27. These verses mention a variety of musical instruments: lyres, harps, castanets, cymbals, and tambourines. Tambourines are used in Israel's very first act of communal worship led by Miriam the prophetess (Exod. 15:20). The words "musical instruments" in 1 Samuel 18:6 represent the translation of one Hebrew word built on the same root as the word for "three" (*shalishim*), perhaps indicating that it is a three-stringed instrument of some kind. We see something similar in Psalm 92:3 [MT 92:4] in which the word "lute" *asor* is the translation of some unknown instrument based on the same root as the word for "ten" (*eser*). The more typical phrase for "musical instruments" is something that would be translated literally as "vessels of song," a phrase that post-exilic Old Testament books prefer.

Musical instruments in the Hebrew Bible accompany singing, dancing, and even prophesying (e.g., 1 Sam. 10:5; 1 Chron. 25:1). Sometimes, however, the instruments stand on their own. David's first role in Saul's employ is to play the lyre for him (1 Sam. 16:16–23). There is no mention of singing in that pericope. The Hebrew word *niggun* specifically refers to playing a stringed instrument. The text literally states that he played it "with his hand."

David is as much associated with musical instruments as he is with slaying Philistines. He sets up a Levitical choir and orchestra in the temple, as mentioned in 1 Chronicles 15:16 and 16:4-7 and expands upon it in 1 Chronicles 23 and 25, where we learn that 4,000 musicians were to offer praise to God with musical instruments which David himself made (1 Chron. 23:5). Lest anyone think this is a Davidic innovation, 2 Chronicles. 29:25 explicitly says that the entire thing was God's idea:

> And [Hezekiah] stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and of Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was from the LORD through his prophets.

So profound is Chronicles' mention of musical instruments that John Kleinig argues that the music in the temple manifests the glory of God. The text says the cloud of God's presence filled the temple "when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals, and other musical instruments" (2 Chron. 5:13–14). This would have been particularly significant for the post-exilic community because, as far as we can tell, the second temple was never filled with the cloud as was the first temple. Thus, we can infer that the psalmody in the second temple, with the instrumental music, symbolized God's presence dwelling among the people.[1]

And we have not yet mentioned the Psalms, nor do we have space to do justice to them. There is no word for "poem" in classical Hebrew. Poems are called *shirim*—"songs." Thus, the poems of the Hebrew Bible are really lyrics. This is the reason I refer to the psalms as "songs without music."[2] The psalms are lyrics whose music is lost to us. The musicality of the psalms, however, is ubiquitous. Not only are they songs that mention singing, but many of them also mention musical instruments directly. For example, in Psalm 33 we read:

> Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
> Make melody to him on the harp of ten strings!
> Sing to him a new song;
> play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts
> (Ps. 33:2–3 [MT 33: 3–4]).

Psalm 43:4 reads, "I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God." "Awake, my glory! Awake O harp and lyre!" exclaims Psalm 57:8 [MT 57:9]. Psalm 92 calls for declaring God's steadfast love "to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre" (Ps. 92:3 [MT 92:4]). There are many more such examples in the Psalter. The prevalence of musical instruments in the Psalms implies that they are as fundamental to worshipping God as is singing.

The superscriptions of the psalms also mention musical instruments. We see this as early as Psalm 4, where the superscription calls for the piece to be sung with "stringed instruments" (presumably various kinds of lyres and harps). Some further examples include the superscription of Psalm 5 calling for "flutes" and the superscription of Psalm 6 again calling

[1] John W. Kleinig, "Chronicles, and Church Music," *Logia* 21, no. 3 (2012): 54.

[2] This is title of the chapter on the psalms in my book: Jonathan Teram, *Illuminating Counsel: How the Least Holy Books of the Hebrew Bible Explore Life's Most Important Issues* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 41.

for "stringed instruments." The directions also contain what are perhaps the names of melodies, only some of which we can translate, such as the "Doe of the Dawn" in Psalm 22, as well as musical or liturgical words, the most famous of which is *selah,* which is scattered throughout. It is remarkable how musical the Hebrew Bible is!

Musical Instruments in the New Testament

While the New Testament contains snippets of hymns which are perhaps the oldest writings of the New Testament (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:16), there is far less poetry in the New Testament than its Hebrew counterpart. There are also fewer references to musical instruments. Most of the New Testament's references to musical instruments are not related to the worship of the church. Jesus tells a parable where he says the people of his generation are like children who do not follow the rules of the game: they do not dance at the sound of the flute and they do not mourn at the singing of the dirge (Matt. 11:16–17). The parable of the Prodigal Son mentions "music and dancing" as part of the celebration of the return of the father's younger son (Luke 15:25). In 1 Corinthians 13:1 and 14:7, Paul uses musical instruments as illustrations of various principles. He makes similar analogies with sports (1 Cor. 9:24–27). The Gospels and the Epistles state the parousia will be announced with the sound of the trumpet (Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16).

The only book of the New Testament to mention musical instruments as part of worship is Revelation. There we read not only about trumpets but also harps (Rev. 5:8; 14:2). One verse even refers to the "harps of God" (Rev. 15:2). However, all the references to harps in Revelation are to heavenly worship, not earthly worship. When it comes to the church, what we see again and again in the New Testament is singing with no mention of instruments. In Ephesians 5:19, Paul instructs the church to sing and "make melody to the Lord with your heart" (cf. Col. 3:16; James 5:13). Compare that to Psalm 33:2 which says to "make melody to him with the harp of ten strings." Of course, the Hebrew Bible does say, "I will sing and make melody with all my being [literally "all my glory"] (Ps. 108:1 [MT 2]). The point, though, is that the only instrument in Paul's instructions is the strings of one's heart.

Musical Instruments in Jewish and Christian Worship

The synagogue is perhaps the greatest religious innovation in the ancient world, for it was the first religious institution to be divorced

from animal sacrifices. The synagogue, therefore, was not patterned after the temple. The temple was the domain of the priests, whereas the synagogue was run by the laity. The temple was the center of sacrifices and prayer, whereas the synagogue was a house of learning. Since prayers were accompanied by musical instruments, and since prayer was not the primary function of the synagogue, it is reasonable to presume that the synagogue was devoid of instruments from the start.[3]

The destruction of the temple in 70 AD changed the situation dramatically. It is then that the synagogue inherited the role as the primary house of prayer among the Jewish people wherever they were scattered around the world. God, no longer symbolically tied to Jerusalem, was now viewed as present wherever ten Jewish men were in a synagogue. Prayer replaced sacrifice, and emphasis was placed on the study of Torah. Even though prayers were sung, and psalms eventually became a part of the synagogue liturgy, musical instruments were never used in the synagogue. The reasons for this are unclear. It has been argued that musical instruments were forbidden because the Jewish people are in perpetual mourning due to the destruction of the temple. For instance, Sotah 9:12 in the Mishnah states, "From the day the temple was destroyed, there is no day that does not include a curse." It is also argued that the rabbis associated musical instruments with pagan rituals or immoral banquets. And it is supposed that playing instruments is a violation of the Sabbath. These are all speculations, since there is no direct statement in the Talmud that explicitly prohibits instruments.[4]

The church fathers, on the other hand, were not shy about their disdain for musical instruments. Hyun-Ah Kim states that, for the church fathers, "music was not primarily a matter of aesthetics, but of ethics."[5] They associated musical instruments with pagan rituals and thus viewed musical instruments as being immoral, carnal, and unfitting for Christian worship. "If people occupy their time with pipes, psalteries, choirs, dances, Egyptian clapping of hands, and such disorderly frivolities, they become quite immodest," said Clement of Alexandria.

[3] See Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Servic*e (New York: Schocken, 1995), 61.

[4] See James W. McKinnon, "The Exclusion of Musical Instruments from the Synagogue," in *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association,* 106 (1979–1980): 77–87.

[5] Hyun-Ah Kim, "Erasmus on Sacred Music," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 8, no. 3 (Dec 2006): 292.

He argues elsewhere that "we no longer employ the ancient psaltery, trumpet, timbrel, and flute." He goes on to prohibit certain "chromatic harmonies" because "they lead persons to effeminacy and indecency." Clement knew full well that the psalms said things like "Praise him on the lyre," but it is not a problem since the lyre is "the mouth struck by the Spirit" and the "tongue is the psalter of the Lord." Likewise, Tertullian writes, "What trumpet of God is now heard—unless it is in the entertainments of the heretics?" Novatian, speaking of the "hoarse, warlike clanging of the trumpet" and the pipe, says, "Even if these were not dedicated to idols, they should not be approached and gazed upon by faithful Christians." And Cyprian states that "[Satan] tests the ears with harmonious music, so that by the hearing of sweet sounds, he may relax and weaken Christian vigor."[6]

Many in the West tend to overlook the practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Worship in the Orthodox Church has always been *a cappella.* It is the Roman Catholic Church which eventually added instruments into its worship, beginning with the organ. The Reformers were divided on the matter. Luther was in favor of musical instruments in worship, whereas Zwingli and Calvin were not. Luther argued silence in Scripture was permissive. Zwingli argued silence was prohibitive. Both Zwingli and Calvin believed that the Old Testament example of temple worship has no bearing on the life of the church.[7]

Then came the nineteenth century American movement known as the Restoration Movement, led by Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone. The idea behind the Restoration Movement is that Christian denominations could unite by stripping away tradition and, in doing so, restore primitive faith and practice as revealed in the Scriptures. This unity would then usher in the millennial reign. Thus, the Church of Christ, which arose from this movement, promotes *a cappella* singing in worship as a matter of doctrine. Taking a Zwinglian approach to the text, the New Testament's lack of command regarding playing an instrument in worship is interpreted as being prohibitive. God did not authorize the use of musical instruments and thus no one has the authority to add

[6] For the early church quotes in this paragraph, see "Music, Musical Instruments," in *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs,* ed. David W. Bercot (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 467–68.

[7] Jonathan M. Lyons, "From Silence to Golden: The Slow Integration of Instruments into Christian Worship," *Musical Offerings* 8 (2017): 17.

them to the worship assembly.[8] The two churches of the Restoration Movement—the Church of Christ and the Christian Church—officially split in 1906 over the issue of instrumental music.

Instrumental Music as Part of the Life of Godliness

There are many ways to respond to all of this. Against the church fathers, we can say that there is no such thing as "immoral" music. While people have viewed music through a moral lens right down to the modern era (think of the objections to rock-and-roll when it first came out), music is, in fact, amoral. It is only lyrics, which express ideas, that can fall into the binary categories of moral and immoral. Remember the mention of Jubal being the father of musical instruments. Jonathan Sacks argues that Genesis's mention of Jubal and his role is not endowed with any "special significance," i.e., it is neither good nor bad.[9] Jonathan Friedmann looks at it another way. He argues that the mention of the invention of musical instruments by Jubal sandwiched between the invention of tents and livestock by Jubal's brother, Jabal (Gen. 4:20), and the invention of "all instruments of iron and bronze"—i.e., tools—by their half-brother, Tubal-Cain (Gen. 4:22), implies that "herding, metal forging, and music making are the three fundamental professions upon which humanity depends."[10] Indeed, one can scarcely think of a society that is devoid of music. To paraphrase Friedrich Nietzsche, life would not be worth living without music. In that sense—the sense that music has the power to elevate life—we could say that music is a good thing. But God was not so impressed by the music of the harp that he accepted hypocritical and vain worship (Amos 5:23; 6:4–7). The lovely sound of the harp did not turn injustice into justice. And certainly, instrumental music has been used in immoral and pagan settings. In Daniel 3:5, for example, instrumental music is used to signal the time to worship the idol that Nebuchadnezzar erected. This does not mean instrumental music is moral or immoral. Like almost anything else, music that is used for evil must not be destroyed but liberated and redirected so that it is used for good.

[8] J. Charles H. Roberson, "The Meaning and Use of *Psallo* (Part I): A Study of Words Formed on the Root *Psa* and Other Matters Pertaining to the Problem: 'Did Early Christians Use Instrumental Music in the Worship of God?'" *Restoration Quarterly* 6 (1962): 19.

[9] Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken, 2007), 79.

[10] Jonathan L. Friedmann, *Synagogue Song: An Introduction to Concepts, Theories, and Customs* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 11.

Music is in the realm of aesthetics, not ethics. Aesthetically, some music is banal and poorly structured, to put it charitably. Such music may be offensive to the ears, but that does not make it immoral. If lyrics are attached to music, the lyrics may be immoral but the music itself (the melody, harmony, orchestration, rhythm, etc.) would not be.

Having said that, the fact that so many venerated Christian thinkers over the centuries have had problems with using instruments in worship ought to cause us to think twice before dismissing their arguments as archaic or legalistic. And even if their arguments are those things, and even if there is nothing intrinsically wrong with using instruments in worship, should we then presume that there can be no abuse of instruments in worship? Surely there is a line between worship and entertainment. When we see churches across the United States produce shallow biblical instruction but heart-pumping music performed by popular bands, should we not conclude that that line has been crossed?

I would like to move aside from these debates—aside, not past—and offer a role for instrumental music within the *missio Dei* (the mission of God) that does not involve accompanying singing. It is unfortunate that so many people view instrumental music as being the servant of vocal music; the piano seems to be the servant of servants. Sergei Rachmaninoff intentionally named his sonata for cello and piano "Sonata in G minor for Cello and Piano," rather than just "Cello Sonata," for the piano is an equal partner to the cello. The piece is a cello and piano duet, not a cello solo with piano accompaniment.

I would like to point out a striking feature of Psalm 150, the final psalm. The psalm is short enough to quote in full:

> Praise the Lord!
> Praise God in his sanctuary;
> praise him in his mighty firmament!
> Praise him for his mighty deeds;
> praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
> Praise him with trumpet sound;
> praise him with lute and harp!
> Praise him with tambourine and dance;
> praise him with strings and pipe!
> Praise him with clanging cymbals;
> praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
> Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
> Praise the Lord!

As James Limburg points out, this psalm tells the reader what to do (praise the Lord), where to do it (in the sanctuary and firmament), why to do it (for his mighty deeds), and how to do it (with instruments and dancing).[11] Furthermore, Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger point out that all the instrumental families are represented: brass (trumpet), strings (harp), percussion (tambourine and cymbals), and winds (pipe).[12]

Yet there are two more noteworthy aspects of this psalm. The first is that the psalm is eschatological. There may not be a developed eschatological scheme such as the series of events that became fundamental to Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. There is no talk here of the end of the world and the resurrection. However, the psalm's ambition is to see "everything that breathes" praising God. "Everything that breathes" might be understood as a double entendre, referring to the "breath" of musical instruments as well as the breath of every person. If we take Psalm 148 into consideration, we could interpret "everything that breathes" to include the non-human creation. "Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, shining stars!" (Ps 148:3). Either way, since "everything that breathes" did not praise God in the psalmist's day, nor in ours, we must presume that this vision will only be realized in the "age to come." Therefore, to interpret Psalm 150 as being merely a part of the "old covenant" is to misunderstand it.

The second point is that singing is not mentioned in Psalm 150. The last time singing is mentioned in the Psalter is in the penultimate psalm. Psalm 149 says, "Sing [*shiru*] to the Lord a new song," (v.1) and "Let the godly… sing for joy [*yeranenu*] on their beds" (v.5). These words are absent from Psalm 150, which mentions dancing but not singing. All the expressions of praise in Psalm 150 are nonverbal. According to Miriyam Glazer, Psalm 150 "brings the whole series to a jubilant climax by reaching beyond words, and even beyond prayer, to whole-body-praise."[13]

There is an irony here. The Psalter represents the height of classical Hebrew poetry, yet the last psalm in the Psalter seems to imply that even artistically arranged words cannot express certain feelings. We see this in Psalm 19. The first verse of poetry in that psalm reads, "The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork."

[11] James Limburg, *Psalms for Sojourners* (Minneapolis, Fortress: 2002), 93.

[12] Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms,* New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 635.

[13] Miriyam Glazer, *Psalms of the Jewish Liturgy: A Guide to Their Beauty, Power, and Meaning: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Aviv, 2009), loc. 1028-31, Kindle.

Then the text says, "Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge." The subject of this line should probably be understood to be the "firmament," not the "day" and the "night." In other words, the text should be understood to mean, "Day to day *the firmament* pours forth speech." The third line says, "There is no speech, there are no words; their voice is not heard." The ESV changes the natural meaning of the Hebrew by translating it, "There is no speech, nor are there words, *whose* voice is not heard"—as if to imply that *all* of the speech of the heavens and the firmament is indeed heard far and wide. According to the ESV, *everything is heard.* Better, though, is to realize the strange tension inherent in the Hebrew. The firmament pours forth *speech,* and yet "there is no *speech.*" (The two uses of "speech" are the same word in Hebrew). The heavens and the firmament are preaching a wordless, even silent, sermon. If "everything that breathes" in Psalm 150 is meant to refer to the non-human creation, we could interpret the instrumental music of the psalm as giving voice to the voiceless creation.

This is true for human emotions as well. Haim Nachman Bialik said that "God has other languages without words: melody, tears and laughter, all privileged inheritances of this 'speaking creature.' These begin where words end, to bring not closure, but new beginnings."[14] We can illustrate this point in any number of ways. In Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera,* after Christine pulls off Erik's mask, revealing the grotesque hideousness of his face, Erik retreats to his room and plays music from his opera on the organ—vocal music turned instrumental. Christine's description of the music is haunting:

> Presently I heard the sound of the organ; and then I began to understand Erik's contemptuous phrase when he spoke about Opera music. What I now heard was utterly different from what I had heard up to then. His Don Juan Triumphant (for I had not a doubt but that he had rushed to his masterpiece to forget the horror of the moment) seemed to me at first one long, awful, magnificent sob. But, little by little, it expressed every emotion, every suffering of which mankind is capable.[15]

If there is any piece of existing music that could be described as "one

[14] From "The Revealed and the Hidden in Language" as quoted in Benjamin Segal, *A New Psalm: Psalms as Literature* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2013), 693.

[15] Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera* (Ann Arbor, MI: Borders Classics, 2006), 108.

long, awful, magnificent sob," surely it is Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings,* which entered popular culture due to Oliver Stone's use of it in his film *Platoon*. Words cannot sufficiently describe the poignancy that *Adagio for Strings* expresses. The melodic line is expansive and develops so gradually, so measuredly, that it is not easily hummable. The piece is written in B-flat minor, but it stays as far from the tonic as possible, thereby extending the emotional tension. The piece was composed in 1936 and it is difficult to imagine Barber not being influenced by the Great Depression. After the atrocity of 9/11, Leonard Slatkin conducted *Adagio for Strings* at the Royal Albert Hall in England in memory of the victims. How fitting! One cannot help but think of Paul's words in Romans 8:26—there are sighs, or groanings, "too deep for words."

It is no wonder, then, that instrumental music is a God-given means of healing. First Samuel 16:14-23 may feature an unusual ailment, but it is nonetheless a healing pericope.[16] David's lyre-playing for King Saul is a biblical example of music therapy.[17] Music heals because its beauty triggers the release of emotions. Erich Fromm, writing about the power of lament in the Psalms, states: "The cure of despair is not achieved by encouraging thoughts, not even by feeling part of the despair; it is achieved by the seeming paradox that despair *can be overcome only if it has been fully experienced."*[18] For this reason, following David's example, there is a push for pastors to incorporate music therapy in their pastoral ministry.[19]

This is not to say instrumental music is only useful if it is expressing lamentations. Consider the ecstatic Hassidic *niggun* ("melody" in Hebrew). This is a form of wordless singing—a Jewish vocalise. While it can express lamentation, it is commonly used to express joy.[20] The idea is that just as some grief is indescribable, so too all human tongues lack the vocabulary to express the peace that transcends understanding.[21]

[16] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 125.

[17] See John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 51.

[18] Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 208 (italics original).

[19] Donald C. Houts, "The Structured Use of Music in Pastoral Psychotherapy." *Journal of Pastoral Care* 35, no. 3 (September 1981): 197.

[20] Keith Harris-Kahn and Marcus Moberg, "Religious Popular Music: Between the Instrumental, Transcendent, and Transgressive," *Temenos* 48 (2012): 101.

[21] Simon Jacobson, *Toward a Meaningful Life, New Edition: The Wisdom of the Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), loc. 225, Kindle.

Instrumental music can also be emotionally ambiguous and complex. Take, for example, Johannes Brahms's Intermezzo in A major from his *Six Pieces for Piano,* Op. 118. This piece was dedicated to Clara Schumann, the brilliant woman with whom Brahms was hopelessly in love, while her husband (Brahms's friend and mentor, Robert) lay sick in hospital. They are probably classical music's most famous love triangle, though there is no evidence that Brahms and Clara ever had a physical relationship. After Robert tragically died in 1856, Brahms did not propose to Clara. Both remained unmarried until death, though they never stopped writing to each other. Brahms's last letter to her was on May 8, 1896, in which he thanked her for wishing him a happy birthday. She died twelve days later. Brahms followed suit in eleven months' time.[22]

This piece then—all of Op. 118 but especially the Intermezzo in A major—is the sound of unattainable love. The minor seventh interval, so prominent throughout, gives off the feeling of profound longing. It yearns for the octave but cannot seem to reach it. When it finally does, it lasts but a moment before the music reverts to the emotional complexity that marked the beginning. Thus, the piece is neither happy nor sad; rather, it is an elegant mixture of the joys and sorrows of knowing and adoring a beautiful soul with what C.S. Lewis called "appreciative love."[23] If words were added to the music, they would short-circuit the composer's intention, for words would cause the music to choose emotional sides, and the music would lose its sublime ambiguity. As wonderful as vocal music is, instrumental music can do things vocal music cannot.

While Brahms's relationship with Clara might seem a rather odd example of godly music, it suits the mood of the psalms well. The same Psalter that says, "Let everything that breathes praise the LORD," also states, "Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (Ps. 10:1). In fact, the same psalm that says, "I will sing to the LORD for he has dealt bountifully with me" (Ps. 13:6), also says, "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?" (Ps. 13:1). These sentiments may be contradictory, but they are real. The psalms demand authenticity above all. One can scarcely think of a biblical book that has a better understanding of the human condition. Ironically, the abstractness of instrumental music brings out the complexities of the human psyche in a way that might be more difficult for vocal music to

[22] See further, Berthold Litzmann, ed., *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, 1853-1896,* vol. 2 (New York: Vienna House, 1973), 298.

[23] C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960), 16.

achieve. Instrumental music can have more complex melodies than is possible in vocal music. Take Alexander Scriabin's *Two Impromptus,* Op. 10, for example. This piano piece would be unsingable as a vocal piece, yet it is bursting with melody and saturated with rich harmonies. Boris Pasternak said of it, "The melodies, mingling with the tears, run straight along your nerves to your heart, and you weep not because you feel sad, but because the way to your heart has been found so unerringly and so shrewdly."[24] One cannot help but think of the declaration in Psalm 139:2, "O LORD, you have searched me and known me!"

One viewer, after watching a YouTube video of Itzhak Perlman playing the Beethoven violin concerto, noted the irony of it, commenting, "How can anyone feel sorry for him/herself after listening to this music played by a man who can't walk and composed by a man who couldn't hear?"[25] Sacks, in noting not only Beethoven's struggles with deafness (he was near suicide at one point because of it) but also the struggles of other classical musicians, said, "Happiness, these lives seem to say, is not the absence of suffering but the ability to take its fractured discords and turn them into music that rescues from the darkest regions of the soul a haunting yet humanizing beauty—surely the supreme achievement down here on earth."[26] Indeed, if it is the case that the greatest work of God is raising life out of death, then surely the greatest work of any human is to take one's curses and turn them into blessings for others. Music turns pain into beauty.

I do not mean to imply that classical music is the only worthy music. To the contrary, it is a wondrous reality that each culture has its own style of music. As my friend Damion put it, "Any genre of music can convey great power." There was a controversy regarding the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which allows instrumental music in worship, but prohibited its use among churches in Zimbabwe. The result was a stifling of the culture of the Zimbabwean Christians.[27] At worst, this is rank hypocrisy and an abuse of power. At the very least, it is a denial of

[24] Boris Pasternak, *I Remember: Sketch for an Autobiography,* trans. David Magarshack (New York: Pantheon, 1959), 43–44.

[25] Jerry Kopel, comment on YouTube video, Nov. 2020, https://youtu.be/cokCg-WPRZPg.

[26] Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World,* 222–23.

[27] Tompson Makamahadze and Fortune Sibanda, "'Melodies to God': The Place of Music, Instruments and Dance in the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe," *Exchange* 37 (2008): 306.

the right of the Zimbabweans to devote their cultural, instrumental musical expressions to the worship of God. Might making music be a means of peacemaking between people—increasing emphathy and decreasing our inclination to violence?

Conclusion

Traditions that utilize instruments in worship ought not to look down upon traditions that do not, and vice versa. Let the practitioners of each tradition be fully convinced in their own minds. My point is not so much about whether it is right or wrong to use instruments in worship, but about the power of music more broadly. The fact that vocal music is so much more prevalent in our culture than instrumental music indicates there is an entire aspect of music that many people are not experiencing. Musical instruments are made for so much more than mere accompaniment.

It is true that words are important, that lyrics enrich music, and that the combination of music and lyrics is potent. I, for one, would not want to live in a world without vocal music. I also understand that, without words, many people would not consider instrumental music to be "sacred." However, since there is no such thing as a sacred-secular divide in the Bible, we ought not to think of instrumental music as being purely secular. Whatever is to be done is to be done for the glory of God and the good of one's neighbor. The beauty and power of instrumental music should not be underestimated or ignored, for instrumental music can point one to God, bring healing to hurting souls, and form bonds between cultures. Surely those accomplishments are part and parcel of the *missio Dei.*

Reflections on *Might from the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice*

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Books about justice are proliferating, with many devoted to the topic of racial justice. I wrote *Might from the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice* before a Minneapolis police officer murdered George Floyd in 2020. Some who read my book said it arrived at an opportune time in our nation's reckoning with its embedded racism.[1] What follows in this essay is a discussion of my rationale for writing *Might from the Margins,* which includes brief treatments of some of the book's themes. I conclude with a detailed reflection on my final chapter, "The Power of Love."

Why Some People Explore Books on Racial Justice

Perhaps because so many people carry cameras with them all the time, we have been able to witness scenes of racial injustice, including episodes of police brutality and public lynching. Consequently, increasing numbers of white people—many of them Christians—have demonstrated renewed interest in race matters, with many requesting titles of books for information concerning racism. Countless social media platforms have displayed titles or pictures of books that people should read if they want to understand racial dynamics in America, particularly with regard to evangelicalism's complicated history. It is impossible to know everything that motivates interest in any topic, but some people have communicated

[1] See Dennis R. Edwards, *Might from the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2020).

that their examination of racial issues stems from some version of the following three perspectives.

The first reason people request books on racial justice is that they desire to be equipped to help combat evil. Many people—including some of my friends and former parishioners—have committed to exploring issues related to racism, white supremacy, and anti-racist strategies with hopes of helping to eradicate racism. Many of these people are Christians motivated by their faith in Jesus, which leads to passionate concern for their fellow human beings. This passion turn provokes curiosity about how to engage in the work of justice. Whenever I have the opportunity (or is it the challenge?) to address issues related to race, the most frequent question I get from white Christians is some version of, "What should I do?" Since knowledge is power, these inquirers seek to arm themselves with information in their fight for racial justice.

A second reason some people explore literature related to racial justice is to refute the concerns of the overwhelming majority of minoritized and marginalized people. Members within this second group tend to rank the sources of their information according to how proximate the author is to whiteness. Whiteness is not so much about skin tone as it is about power. "Whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white."[2] Anyone can be consumed by whiteness—even non-white people. No group of people is monolithic, and for many alienated people the pressure to assimilate and conform to the thinking and practices of the dominant culture is relentless and unbearable. Therefore, outliers among marginalized groups emerge, parroting white people who resist the reality of racism. For example, conservative activist and author Candace Owens provides a perspective different from the majority of African Americans, as does pastor Voddie T. Baucham, Jr., whose book *Fault Lines* simultaneously draws praise from racism deniers and vitriol from serious scholars of race.[3] Many white evangelicals have flocked to Owens and Baucham, as well as to a few others, and appear justified in dismissing the concerns of the vast majority of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

A third reason some people are drawn to literature related to justice is

[2] Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, rev. ed. (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society, 2002), 17.

[3] See Voddie T. Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, DC: Salem, 2021).

to gain information—like that first group of people—but not necessarily to be involved in anti-racist activities. These inquirers are tentative, unsure if racism is as serious a problem as some contend. Members within this third group are cautious of any author or speaker who seems too pro-Black, or too angry. I have sometimes been dismissed for coming off as angry even though most who know me consider me to be even-keeled. Many ethnic minorities expertly *code switch*, so many of our white friends have little clue how angry we might be.

I address anger in *Might from the Margins* because anger is not the sin when it comes to injustice; rather, the sin is failing to be angry over injustice, and exercising the privilege of ignoring the problems of people in pain. Israel's eighth century BCE prophets had addressed those who "are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1) when injustice abounds.

My Rationale for Writing *Might from the Margins*

My years of church involvement, pastoral experience, and academic work in biblical studies, especially given my proximity to American evangelicalism, all contributed to my motivation to write *Might from the Margins*, but I highlight these three factors:

1. The need to provide a biblical treatment of racial injustice.
2. My prior work in 1 Peter revealed how marginalized, diaspora people demonstrate the character of Christ, often to a greater degree than people of higher status.
3. My desire to encourage minoritized and marginalized people.

Racial justice is a biblical notion, not just a sociological one. Most of my family attended a charismatic, storefront church in Queens, New York, that was a major part of my development. I'll not take the space to discuss the Jesus-only, non-Trinitarian doctrinal stance of the church or some of its other idiosyncrasies. Suffice to say that it was not a stereotypical evangelical church and not even a church within a prominent African American denomination, such as African Methodist Episcopal, Progressive Baptist, or Church of God in Christ. The non-mainstream nature of my church background led me on a quest to find an ecclesial home. Before I found that home in the Evangelical Covenant Church, I spent about twenty years around and within the Mennonite Church (USA), and before that, the Evangelical Free Church of America. In the settings that viewed themselves as conservative, racism was understood to be sin,

but only to the extent that it meant personal prejudice or bigotry. Making judgments based on appearances is clearly wrong (e.g., James 2:1-5) and easily denounced, at least in contemporary times. Therefore, according to those conservative Christians, the cure for racism is to get people "saved" so they would presumably learn to love. Love, however, was not something that these Christians could connect to unjust structures or institutions. Love was simply interpersonal, thus, some white people have queried, "If my family didn't own slaves, why should slavery's enduring legacy be an issue for me to address?" These same people might claim to love people of a different racial or ethnic background but pay little attention to the forces that prevent those minoritized people from buying a house, securing a loan, driving safely, attending the best schools, or getting good health care. For some who claim allegiance to Jesus Christ, love does not connect to justice. In fact, it is the people in the dominate culture who tend to define what constitutes love and therefore position themselves to never be accused of failing to love. One example is a white couple who visited one of the churches I served. The couple had been missionaries in an African country for many years, but the wife proceeded to tell me a racially offensive joke. I am sure she would describe herself as loving Black people, but she did not seem to see the bigger picture. Despite the good deeds she may have helped perform in Africa, her perception of dark-skinned people was sinful. People with worldly power get to define the terms and set the boundaries which serve to secure their privileged place in the world. Injured parties have little voice in what constitutes love or justice. But as I write in the book, victims of injustice are in the best position to define it, and likewise know what it means to feel loved.[4]

Racism is about power, not just bigotry. As experts have noted, religion, science, history, and other disciplines conspired to dehumanize and devalue non-white Europeans. To address racism, we need to look not only at obvious examples of hatred, such as perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan and other hate groups, but also at policies, institutions, and societal systems that perpetuate injustice. As the biblical story of Israel's enslavement in Egypt illustrates, exploitative power, not emotions, is responsible for injustice. Even so, to some Christians, tackling society's power problem is a secular task, or something not addressed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. While sociologists might shed light on injustices such as racism, they do not address spiritual matters—according to some Christians.

[4] Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 59-73.

Therefore, I attempt to show throughout *Might from the Margins* that the topic of power is indeed a biblical issue, and sociologists are not the only ones concerned about power, privilege, sex, race, ethnicity, physical and mental abilities, and a host of other topics. One biblical passage that helps to frame my book's argument is 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

> Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. (NRSV)

This passage makes clear that the Corinthian Christians included people on the margins (and that is reiterated in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22). God always delights in using people who are likely to be overlooked, such as David the shepherd, or a curious Samaritan woman, or another Samaritan on the ancient Jericho Road. God's prerogative for the marginalized is a theme that runs throughout Scripture.

Marginalized people are our exemplars. I have been spending time studying the book of 1 Peter, having written a commentary on that letter in the Story of God Bible Commentary series.[5] Also, in *Gospel Haymanot,* I argue that 1 Peter honors both enslaved people (1 Pet. 2:18-25) who were not Roman citizens, and women (1 Pet. 3:1-6) who were marginalized even if they were citizens. Peter not only instructs both enslaved people and women—he also commends them for being like Jesus.[6] Those who have suffered societal injustices—not just bad vibes from people but actual oppression—are raised as exemplars because they hold tenaciously to their faith in Jesus and show themselves to be like the Lord. Consequently, the upside-down nature of God's reign requires that we look to the least to understand greatness and to discover what God desires. We are to be like children, according to Jesus (e.g., Mark 9:36-37; 10:15).

[5] Dennis R. Edwards, *1 Peter*, Story of God Bible Commentary 17 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

[6] See Dennis R. Edwards, "Worthy of the Gospel: Aliens, Slaves, and Women as Our Teachers," in *Gospel Haymanot: A Constructive Theology and Critical Reflection on African and Diasporic Christianity,* ed. Vince L. Bantu (Chicago: Urban Ministries, 2020), 84-107.

Children, dependent and inconvenient, were and are still overlooked and minimized by many adults. But the little ones are our teachers.

The letter called 1 Peter not only addresses enslaved people and women, but also marks the entire community as alien, stranger, diasporic (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11). Such a status reveals vulnerability. Willie J. Jennings, in his Acts commentary, poignantly describes what diasporic status involves:

> Diaspora means scattering and fragmentation, exile and loss. It means being displaced and in search of a place that could be made home. … Danger and threat surround diaspora life. Diaspora life is crowded with self-questioning and questions for God concerning the anger, hatred, and violence visited upon a people. We must never confuse voluntary migration with diaspora, because diaspora is a geographic and social world not chosen and a psychic state inescapable. The peoples who inhabit diaspora live with animus and violence filling the air they breathe. They live always on the verge of being classified enemy, always in evaluation of their productivity to the empire, always having an acceptance on loan, ready to be taken away at the first sign of sedition. They live with fear as an ever-present partner in their lives, the fear of being turned into a them, a dangerous other, those people among us.[7]

It is from that peripheral, outsider status that the Christian community develops a sense of solidarity, learns how to negotiate secular authorities, and discovers that their witness for Christ can be powerful and effective (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:15). In the book I reflected on my own diasporic status, as well as that of other African Americans. I recall how *Christianity Today* and other evangelical publications contained advertisements for readers to discover their family crest—an exercise for people of European descent, which has long been evangelicalism's target audience. It was as if those publications didn't want business from people of color or didn't think we mattered. Yet the faith and fortitude of some of my forebears and that of many other African Americans puts to shame oppressive, self-centered, greedy, and otherwise narrow expressions of Christianity. The civil rights movement is but one example of how godly people on the margins prayerfully confronted injustice and pushed forward legislation that provided voting rights and would even enable me to attend

[7] Willie J. Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 6, emphasis original.

better schools, as New York City made its own efforts to increase the level of integration.

Another writer that I rely upon in *Might from the Margins* is the poet, mystic, and theologian Howard Thurman, whose *Jesus and the Disinherited* is a classic.[8] Sadly, I did not come across it until after seminary. Thurman raises questions about whether Christianity provides any benefit for people "whose backs are against the wall," especially when propagators of injustice profess to be Christian. Thurman proceeds to answer his questions and, in the process, helps Black and other marginalized people to understand the life of Jesus and depend upon the Lord and his example, rather than turn toward the dominant culture for solutions. *Might from the Margins* attempts to celebrate the unsung heroes who loved and served Jesus in the face of the vitriol, discrimination, and outright hatred—often doled out by people claiming to be Christian. Indeed, white America often venerates many slaveowners as heroes of the faith, but God would have us look elsewhere and find our examples of Christlikeness among the enslaved.

White people are not always the central characters. In the book, I recount my experience of watching the blockbuster movie Black Panther for the first time.[9] One scene that I focus on is where CIA Agent Ross begins to speak to M'Baku of the Jabari Tribe while several residents of Wakanda, including royalty, are right next to him.[10] The audacity of Agent Ross becomes immediately clear when M'Baku, followed by the rest of the Jabari Tribe, begin to bark, drowning out the agent so that he must shut his mouth. I was ready to stand and cheer in the theater as my mind went to the many ways white people presume themselves to be the center of the universe, even when they make up the minority. One need only consider South Africa's history and the legacy of apartheid. Contemporary Christians, by and large, denounce the apartheid regime, but many evangelicals championed it and vilified efforts to undermine or otherwise thwart the regime. A *New York Times* article of August 21, 1985, by Robert Pear, explains how the Reverend Jerry Falwell Sr. had been calling Bishop Desmond Tutu a phony and that American Chris-

[8] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon, 1996). Thurman initially published the book in 1949, so there are various editions available after more than 70 years.

[9] Edwards, *Might from the Margins*, 21

[10] *Black Panther*, directed by Ryan Coogler, (United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2018).

tians should buy South African gold coins (krugerrands).[11] The article reflected what I had been hearing in college when staff workers in the prominent Campus Crusade for Christ ministry on my campus told me that apartheid should not be dismantled because the country would turn Marxist. White people have long acted as if they know what is best for everyone else, even when they are not affected directly by the situation. White Christians are accustomed to being the center of attention in the USA, so most of our literature is written for them, even books about racial injustice. Being at the center means elevating white people's interests and concerns so that they remain the main characters, while we people of color are supporting players, treated as if our job is to improve white people's perspectives.

Consider how when many white evangelical churches desire to become racially diverse, they look to hire non-white associate staff people. Somehow, those staff people are to help the church without changing anything about the institution. In their supporting roles, non-white staff might contribute to a picture of diversity, but the power of authentic diversity is absent. In *Might from the Margins*, I convey some stories from my own years of pastoral ministry, including a time when I was an associate pastor of a predominately white church. Many of the attendees were progressive enough to receive my leadership, at least in principle, but some influential people in the church found it too difficult to have an African American pastor who was not interested in being *bleached* (which is how an African American friend referred to assimilating into whiteness). It became clear that my task was to help us *look* better without pushing us to *become* better regarding racial diversity and inclusion. Even when white people are chastised or offered advice for correcting their views or behaviors, they are still at center-stage because the message is geared to them. Books written by people of color often have white people as the target audience. The same happens with movies.

In 2019 there was some hubbub over the movie *Green Book*, which told the story of an Italian American driver for an African American entertainer traveling throughout the segregated south in the 1960s. *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was an actual publication listing places safe for African Americans to eat and sleep while traveling. One complaint directed toward the movie is that it is the story of a white person's redemp-

[11] Robert Pear, "Falwell Denounces Tutu as a 'Phony'," *New York Times*, August 21, 1985.

tion through the agency of a Black person who is the one facing injustice. Director Spike Lee lamented the "magical Negro" trope in movies, where the white hero benefits from a Black person with special skills or mystical abilities, as in *The Legend of Bagger Vance* or *The Green Mile*. It is rare to find books or movies that describe and celebrate African American ingenuity and intellect without white people as the beneficiaries. The movie *Black Panther* is not without its flaws but does counter the tendency to center white people. I respect that some Black people want white people to be their main audience, as in the book and HBO program *Dear White People*. Certainly, since white people wield societal power, it makes sense that one path toward positive change is to win over the most powerful people in a society. That is indeed *one* path.

My path toward change, however, at least in *Might from the Margins,* includes building solidarity among marginalized people. Some white people might feel threatened at the notion of various minority groups joining together, but such solidarity reveals the strength that alienated people do not always realize is present. Members of minoritized groups can be made to feel that they are insignificant, but when we connect with others in a similar situation, we discover renewed hope for change. Such was the case when the Asian American Christian Collaborative was formed.[12] I was moved to tears seeing Asian Americans from different ethnic groups carrying "Black Lives Matter" posters and demonstrating against police brutality. In turn, many of us denounced the anti-Asian violence that swelled in the wake of former President Trump's characterization of the Covid-19 virus as the "China virus." Supplying white people with information, anecdotes, and persuasive testimony meets a concern, as I noted in the introduction above, but with *Might from the Margins* I hope to help motivate alienated people to grow in our solidarity, working for justice alongside each other, like the phalanx suggested by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians.

In Philippians 1:27, Paul writes, "Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel." *Might from the Margins* elaborates on a few details about Philippi, a colony of Rome and "leading city" according to Acts 16:12. Considering Philippi's history and their understanding of Rome's military might, Paul's language

[12] See https://www.asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com.

of "standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side" conjures images of the phalanx where soldiers created a virtually impenetrable shield-wall to advance against their enemies. Paul uses the image of a phalanx, not only to note that the Philippians faced opposition but to encourage their solidarity. His admonition to strive side-by-side in one spirit continues into Philippians 2:1-5, where he passionately pleads for unity:

> If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (NRSV)

Certainly, we strive for all Christians to be united, and *Might from the Margins* affirms that, but it is often necessary for minoritized people to practice unity apart from white people's supervision. It is important to understand that alienated people sometimes need to recognize—or remember—that the power we have from God does not depend upon what the dominant culture does to or for us. Some of us have been conditioned to think we need white people's permission or approval to exercise our spiritual gifts, raise our voices, or otherwise express our expertise—even in theological circles. Striving for unity in Christ is one goal God placed on my heart many years ago. I was bussed outside my neighborhood for school, often the only or one of few Black people in various contexts, and wondered why churches were frequently racially segregated; mirroring, rather than challenging, secular society. Those experiences contributed to shaping my theological perspectives regarding unity. On the way to becoming one united people, those who have been alienated by the dominant culture need to come together so as not to glean all our understanding of other minorities from white people. We need to support each other.

Sometimes, when white organizations hire people of color, they are not aware of how difficult it might be for that newly hired person to navigate within the organization. We might be the only person from our racial or ethnic group and potentially face pressures including a feeling of responsibility for representing the entirety of our group. Solidarity among people of color leads to collaboration and not fragmentation. Of course, unity is not a strategy, it is an outgrowth of love.

Love Is Always the Answer

Whenever people of color address issues of race—especially in Christian contexts—the anxiety level rises for white people and a degree of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) sets in for people of color. As for the anxiety, it is clear that not many white people want to be accused of being racists. For example, you might have seen a video from the PBS show Frontline that went viral. They did a story called "Poverty, Politics, and Profit" and the viral clip from that story was a white woman's response to an interviewer's questions.[13] The woman, who lived in a comfortable community in Texas, was pointing out the reasons she opposes affordable housing in her neighborhood. She touted every stereotype about poor and otherwise marginalized people, all the while making disclaimers such as, "I know this sounds terrible, but…" and also, "I'm not a racist, but…" She was even asked if the poor kids of a single mother deserved the same educational opportunities as her kids and she said "no," because since she doesn't expect to have the luxurious lifestyle of a billionaire, impoverished people shouldn't expect to have her lifestyle. What came through in that short clip is how easy it is to participate in racism without even seeing it or wanting to acknowledge the power of it. That woman demonstrated the privilege of being able to distance herself from the problem of homelessness, caricature families in desperate need, and absolve herself of any culpability.

As for PTSD, often marginalized people, the ones best able to discern injustice and speak prophetically to it, are asked to address the same problems that have persisted for generations, yet not allow that work to take a toll on us. Over the decades I have spoken in churches, at camps, within clergy meetings, and in classrooms, but I have also had some people minimize me and dismiss my discussion of racism. Recalling those gatherings sometimes triggers physical reactions, including a desire to withdraw, close my mouth, and disappear. But regardless of the discomfort we all face in sorting through issues of racial injustice, we must always recognize and rely upon the power of love. Love, however, is not about holding hands and singing Kumbaya! The songs and sitcoms of my childhood in the 1970s reduced love to sappy sentimentality, but love is more powerful than that. Love must always be

[13] *PBS Frontline,* "Poverty, Politics, and Profit," written and produced by Rick Young, featuring correspondent Laura Sullivan interview of Nicole Humphrey, posted October 13, 2020, https://youtu.be/8iei3HtdBbQ.

what Jesus-followers pursue. We are to love God and love our neighbors, as well as love fellow members of God's household. Love encompasses dignity and justice.

Chanequa Walker-Barnes, in her book *I Bring the Voices of My People,* acknowledges, "When people of color internalize the view that whiteness is superior to all other races (including their own), we call this internalized oppression."[14] Sadly, Christianity contributed to racial self-hatred. One example is how the so-called Curse of Ham (Gen. 9:20-27) persisted throughout the centuries to justify the enslavement of Africans in the New World. The contemporary slogan and hashtag "Black lives matter" is fuel for our self-love. It is an anti-brutality slogan that reminds us of our inherent worth as human beings. In my era, we needed to hear and echo James Brown: "Say it loud—I'm black and I'm proud!" We needed to say "Black is beautiful" to ourselves and to each other. Another reason I wrote *Might from the Margins* is so that African American people would not need to reject Christianity because of the way it has been used against us. And if we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, we need to love ourselves. Love not only affirms the dignity of marginalized people, it is also honest.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, the apostle Paul writes, "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." When Paul says that love rejoices in the truth, he is saying that love should be honest. Truth encompasses our understanding of Jesus Christ and accuracy regarding any situation under scrutiny. Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses meals, marriage, the resurrection, spiritual gifts, and so much more, and claims that love doesn't merely tolerate the truth, it rejoices in it.

Miroslav Volf writes of the moral obligation to remember truthfully in the quest for justice and movement toward unity: "So the obligation to truthfulness in remembering is at its root an obligation to do justice, even in such a seemingly simple act as the 'naming' of what one person has done to another."[15] Naming seems simple, but it is hard for many,

[14] Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation*, Prophetic Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 71

[15] Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 54.

especially when it puts a spotlight on negative parts of the nation's history. But love requires honesty that can lead to dismantling injustice and creating equitable systems.

Conclusion

Might from the Margins was nearly a memoir of sorts, because I share many of my own experiences. But I share aspects of my life openly while also examining the Scriptures. In so doing, I hope to challenge, stimulate, encourage, motivate—and perhaps even comfort—anyone who has been minoritized, minimized, alienated, discriminated against, and otherwise victimized by injustice. We have might, not because we take up worldly weapons but because God fights for us. As Mary, the mother of Jesus put it:

> He has shown strength with his arm;
> he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
> and lifted up the lowly;
> He has filled the hungry with good things,
> and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:51-53, NRSV)

I'm often asked what my hopes might be for Christians within the dominate culture. While that topic was not the focus of *Might from the Margins*, my first answer is always *humility*. Humility does not start with denials, excuses, or blame-shifting but assumes a listening posture in order to discern truth, which makes us free. I am happily part of the Evangelical Covenant Church because many white denominational leaders humbly listen to the concerns of minoritized sisters and brothers. When we listen, we learn, and as we learn, we grow. People who are growing together in faith, hope, and love can be part of Christ's transformative work in this world.

Covenant Churches Reaching Unchurched Young Adults: Effective Practices

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Many cultural observers believe our culture is "post-Christian," in which churches are losing more young adults than they are gaining. Yet a noticeable phenomenon has occurred among some congregations in the Evangelical Covenant Church: young adults appreciate church, connect to faith communities, come to faith in Christ, and become incorporated into the life of their new churches. They then invite their friends to experience their churches. In this article I describe this phenomenon among nineteen Covenant congregations who are effectively ministering to young adults. A similar pattern emerged in examining and analyzing how effective Covenant churches have engaged younger millennials and Generation Z members, despite differences in church size, ethnic composition, and geographic and social locations. Data for the study was gathered through interviews with Covenant church pastors and leaders, as well as emerging adults who came to faith in Jesus Christ and became active in the life of their churches—the latter often in reverse order. This article has two major sections: "Understanding Current Challenges of Young Adulthood" and "Covenant Churches Effectively Reaching Out to Young Adult Dones and Nones." My goal is to show how Covenant churches have effectively engaged, retained, and reached young adults by (1) providing access to a mentoring Christian community, and (2) leveraging participation in Christian practices that catalyze young adulthood's developmental work of exploring, experimenting, and achieving well-developed cohesive personal and social identity commitments.

Understanding Current Challenges of Young Adulthood

Cultural trends and social forces impact young adults in ways both similar to and different from previous generational cohorts. Understanding what is currently happening in the world of young adulthood will help us better grasp why this generation often displays delayed spiritual and religious commitments, or lack of commitment.

Where have all the young adults gone? That is a fair question to ask when surveying congregations in the North American context.[1] Often, pastors and parents alike lament the scarcity of young adults in their churches. Remembering the vibrant ministries that attracted their own generation of friends to church, these older generations may be wondering whether all the Christian young adults are gathering at some hip new church plant or flocking to the local megachurch. The younger generations must be going to church somewhere, right?

Actually, many young adults are simply not attending church.[2] COVID intensified that phenomenon influencing current church attendance patterns. In fact, roughly only a quarter of 18- to 29-year-olds attend church.[3] Their absence can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the number of young adults identifying as Christian dropped almost 10 percent over the past decade. The percentage of Americans who state that they have no religious affiliation, often described as "nones," reached 35 percent among

[1] This question is reminiscent of the circular song "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" by Pete Seeger. Peter, Paul, and Mary, The Kingston Trio, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and many others sang this song as political protest and lament over the consequences of war—especially the Vietnam War. The flowers are picked by the young girls, the young girls marry their young men, the young men become soldiers, the soldiers are gone to the graveyards, and the graveyards are covered in flowers, used here to express a communal lament over churches' loss of their young adults.

[2] From a survey administered May 30, 2014, The Pew Research Center reported 27 percent of 18–29-year-olds attend religious service at least once a week (60 percent of the same age group seldom or never attend church), compared to 33 percent of 30–49-year-olds, 38 percent of 50–64-year-olds, and 48 percent of those surveyed who were 65 and older. See "Religious Landscape Study: 18–29-Year-Olds," https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/age-distribution/18-29, accessed June 23, 2021.

[3] The Pew Research Center reported that the percentage of college graduates who identify as Christian declined from 73 to 64 percent between 2007 and 2015. Among those without a college education, it declined from 81 to 73 percent. See "America's Changing Religious Landscape," May 12, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape, accessed October 6, 2021.

young adults aged 18–29 in 2015.[4] A 2019 Pew Research study showed that millennials aged 23–38 were almost as likely to be religiously unaffiliated as they were to identify as Christian.[5] Similarly, the Public Religion Research Institute found in 2018 that 38 percent of young adults aged 18–29 were religiously unaffiliated and that the percentage dropped to 36 percent in 2020.[6] Combined, these studies show that well over a third of young adults in the US are now comfortable reporting that they are religiously unaffiliated.

Further, young adults drop out of church after high school at alarming rates. Researchers have found that around 50–60 percent of young adults in the USA will drop out of church for a year or more after graduating from high school—some never to return.[7] Similarly, Canadian congregational research from the 2018 Renegotiating Faith survey reveals that about half of teens who grew up in the church persist in their religious service attendance into young adulthood, while 46 percent drop off and only 6 percent display an increase in church attendance.[8] The study defined "church" as the whole Canadian church and engaged Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and evangelical young adults.

Will young adult dropouts return to church and when? That verdict is still out. Are we encountering the temporary discontinuance of

[4] According to the Pew Research Center, the religiously unaffiliated or "nones" include people who answer "atheist," "agnostic," or "nothing in particular" when asked to state their religious preferences. See "'Nones' on the Rise," October 2, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise, accessed October 6, 2021. This number may partly be increasing due to people feeling more comfortable admitting they are not religiously affiliated in the current cultural ethos.

[5] Daniel Cox and Amelia Thompson-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving the Church and Not Coming Back," https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religion-and-not-coming-back, accessed September 27, 2021.

[6] See "The American Religious Landscape in 2020," https://www.prri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/07/07/2021, accessed September 27, 2021.

[7] David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins found that 59 percent of young adults who grew up in church reported that they had dropped out of church. See their *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church—and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 23. Similarly, researchers Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin report a more conservative figure of 40–50 percent church dropout rate among Christian high school graduates from their analysis of the results of seven research studies. See their *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 318-319.

[8] See Rick Hiemstra, Lorraine Dueck, and Matthew Blackaby, *Renegotiating Faith: The Delay in Young Adult Identity Formation and What It Means for the Church in Canada.* (Toronto, Ontario: Faith Today, 2018), 13.

church attendance among young adults that may have been observed in earlier Christian generations, or is there a new phenomenon occurring in young adult church retention? With previous generations, sociologists could predict that at least half of young adults would continue to follow the religious patterns established prior to, or during, their early teenage years.[9] In fact, those who dropped out of church were likely to return once they established stable careers, became financially independent, married, and started having children. Some, therefore, argue that there is no cause for alarm: young adults are merely switching denominations or busy managing their lives on their own, immaturely choosing not to attend church at this early stage. In the latter case, scholars note that young adults typically return to church when they grow into "mature adulthood," which is generally defined as the stage when adults can manage their own lives, by meeting some or all of the typical milestones mentioned above.[10]

By "switching," sociologists mean that young adults are transferring their religious affiliation from one denomination to another, not simply dropping out altogether due to secularization. In this view, then, some denominations are growing, while others are declining in number. Here, the growth of certain denominations is merely the result of transfer growth.[11]

Why can't they get their act together? We did! Frankly, current young adults establish their identity commitments much later than older generations. By "identity," psychologists mean the search for self and how the self relates to the broader social context. Identity exploration, a major characteristic of young adulthood, seeks to answer such questions as, Who am I? What am I going to do with my life? What are my goals, values, beliefs, people, and roles?

Developmentalists believed previous generations of young people wrestled with these questions in their teens. In the late 1960s, the acute "identity stage" within lifespan development was thought to occur in high school.[12] Identity formation was considered a lifelong process, though

[9] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 243, 247–248.

[10] Rodney Stark, *What Americans Really Believe: New Findings from the Baylor Surveys of Religion* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 11.

[11] Stark, *What Americans Really Believe,* 11.

[12] Erik Erikson was foundational to identity theory and proposed an eight-stage developmental theory in which self-identity was stage specific and a major task of adolescence. However, Erikson considered identity formation to be an ongoing part of the life cycle.

significant identity questions consumed young people in particular: Who am I? What vocation will I pursue? Who will be my life partner? What communities will I belong to? The "identity stage" was thought to be completed within or shortly after high school.

Today, identity commitments—job, marriage, home, groups—are delayed by five, ten, or fifteen years compared to previous generations. Acute identity exploration is now considered to be part of a new developmental life stage called, "emerging adulthood," a term coined in the mid-1990s by psychologist Jeffrey Arnett and colleagues. Emerging adulthood refers to the distinct developmental phase between adolescence and mature adulthood, age eighteen to twenty-nine or so.[13] Identity exploration, the process of seeking to answer the same or similar questions as in earlier generations, is now thought to be most intensely engaged after the high school years, during late teens and twenties, even into the early thirties.

Arnett identified five common descriptors for the life stage of emerging adulthood: transition, instability, self-focus, identity exploration, and hope.[14] During this developmental period, it is not uncommon for young people to be resilient and optimistic about their futures. They aspire to constructively make the world a better place, to make something of themselves, to be a good person, to be mentored, to become leaders, and to have a good life. Thus, much of their time is spent focusing on themselves as they try to figure out how to become independent and where they "fit" in the world.[15] Through this identity formation, young adults often find meaningful life vocations and communities through experimentation, especially in the world of work.

[13] The concept of "emerging adulthood" is attributed to psychologist Jeffrey Arnett. See Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Susan Taber, "Adolescents Terminable and Interminable: When Does Adolescence End?" *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 23 (1994): 517-37, and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties," *American Psychologist* 55 (2000): 469-80. For the more developed theory see Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Early Twenties,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Not everyone agrees that emerging adulthood is a "new" developmental phase. On this, see for example James E. Cote, "The Dangerous Myth of Emerging Adulthood: An Evidence-Based Critique of a Flawed Developmental Theory," *Applied Developmental Science* 18 (2014): 177-88.

[14] Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood," 9.

[15] See further Sandra Dalloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 85, 174, 229, 233-234, 236.

Furthermore, much of the lengthy extension of young adulthood is driven by global and local economic factors and the concomitant challenge of young adults seeking to support themselves financially. Freezes on hiring, baby-boomers delaying retirement, the need for more education and specialized training, the rise in artificial intelligence, lack of long-term job security, and the global pandemic—all these issues impact young adults' ability to stand on their own. We also find social and cultural factors that contribute to lengthened emerging adulthood, such as the GI Bill enabling more people to attend college, the availability of widespread birth control, recreational sex, and the reality of needed extended parental financial support.[16]

In addition, young adults marry today at lower rates and later than those of past generations, due to the economic and social factors noted above. According to the US Census Bureau, for example, in 2020 the average age of one's first marriage was 28 for women (up from 24 in 1990, 22 in 1980, and 20 in the 1950s) and 30 for men.[17] As recently as a few decades ago, young adults who dropped out of church after high school and returned after marriage did so for only a handful of years. Today, however, many young adults have been out of church for more than a decade, forming patterns, habits, and friendships outside the Church. The pressing question is, are they likely to return to church when they can financially support themselves or marry, when they have dropped out of church for almost as long as they can remember attending church?

Certainly, there are other reasons that keep young adults from attending church. Christian Smith's research points to the delay in religious identity commitments until more pressing identity commitments are in hand, such as education completion, job security, financial independence, and home ownership. It seems that religious identity for some young people is not formed until many other identity commitments are first

[16] Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition,* 5.

[17] See "Median Age at First Marriage: 1890 to Present," https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/time-series/demo/families-and-households/ms-2.pdf, accessed October 6, 2021. This is based on the 2020 US Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1890-1940, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1947-2020. (Starting in 2019, estimates for marriages now include same sex married couples.) Additionally, according to "The Knot 2020 Real Weddings Survey," updated February 2, 2021, based on 7600 couples surveyed, the average age of marriage in the USA was 31 for female participants and 33 for male respondents. See https://www.theknot.com/content/average-age-of-marriage#the-2020-average-age-of, accessed August 5, 2021.

made. Religious identity questions and decisions, such as "what I believe, how important my faith is to me, how often I pray, whether or not I will worship and where," are set aside for a bit, or metaphorically secured within a security box, while other identities are being sorted.[18] As such, a domino effect is often in play, and religious identity represents one of the last dominoes to fall into place for young adults.

Why else don't young adults attend church? Robert Wuthnow, sociology of religion professor emeritus at Princeton University, has pointed out another problem: too often, American churches have little to offer young adults.[19] They provide programming and services for babies through high-schoolers, married couples, families, and seniors, but little is regularly made available for those between high school and later marriage and parenthood. Churches sometimes build a scaffolding to support members and attendees that is suddenly removed when people reach young adulthood. In this way, a gap often exists in both societal and religious structures for young adults, leaving them with little support. However inadvertently, this leads to churches sending a clear message to young adults: "You won't find any support here."

In fact, Robert Putnam suggests that the offending of young adults' moral compasses stands as a reason for their absence from church. Pointing to Pew Research, Putnam notes, "The new nones reported that 'they became unaffiliated, at least in part, because they think of religious people as hypocritical, judgmental or insincere.'" [20] Young adults who drop out of (or who never attended) church witness Christian institutions acting in ways that offend their moral sensibilities and conclude that they are not very Christian.[21] At least some unaffiliated emerging adults dismiss Christianity and the Church on the basis of immorality, because they believe the Church has broken moral codes by their homophobic, hypo-

[18] See Tim Clydesdale, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2007), 4, 15, 39, 205-206. In this context, Clydesdale first used the metaphor of a lockbox, into which young adults in their first year out of high school transfer important identity decisions like their religious identity to a later adult stage, while they sort out managing their own lives at the earlier stage.

[19] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 70.

[20] Robert D. Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2010), 3, 131, 133, 548.

[21] Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 28.

critical, judgmental, and politically conservative stances.[22] Such church dropouts accuse Christianity and the Church of being sheltered, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive and triumphalist.[23]

As such, young adults may experience a jarring disconnect when local churches remain silent on issues that are of regular concern to them. For instance, churches may choose not to address economic and educational racial disparities, racial profiling, police shootings, and racial unrighteousness—issues that young adults often observe demonstrating white privilege and white supremacy. Silence on such matters communicates that a church does not care about the justice issues that impassion emerging adults. It is no wonder many young adults simply stop coming when issues near to them are not being engaged. Young adults do not need themselves to be engaged in your church's social justice ministries, but churches that attract them are churches engaged in caring for the poor and disenfranchised, and prohibiting social discrimination.

In my book *Not Done Yet*, I provide much more analysis on why young adults drop out of church, delay returning, and for some, never start attending in the first place.[24] So far, we have focused on the economic and social influences that delay marriage and family formation, and thus delay religious identity commitments. We also acknowledged the lack of support churches provide emerging adults aged 18–29 and their stage of development. Last, we recognized that young adults have moral compasses, particularly when it comes to how the Church thinks and acts, and they find hypocrisy an insurmountable barrier. In my book, I further explore the following related questions in greater detail: is church welcoming and compelling?[25] Does church support and meet the felt needs of emerging adults?[26] Does church speak to the injustices and issues they struggle with daily?[27] Is church good in the sense that it is moral and virtuous?[28] How churches perform on these questions really matters to young adults and influences their church attendance and adherence.

[22] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity—and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 41, 67, 91, 121, 153, 181.

[23] See further David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church … and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 90-93.

[24] Note Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 13-15, 18, 20-21, 28.

[25] Ibid., 49-62, 77-91.

[26] Ibid., 79, 86-88, 95-97, 107-119, 158-160.

[27] Ibid., 79, 86-88, 95-97, 107-119, 158-160.

[28] Ibid., 140-147, 192-196.

Covenant Churches Effectively Reaching Out to Young Adult "Dones" and "Nones"

Now that we have explored what seems to repel young adults from church engagement, we shift to what churches can proactively do for young adults who are stalled in their identity formation journeys and, ultimately, in their faith journeys. My qualitative research focused on congregations in the Evangelical Covenant Church that are effectively reaching and keeping young adult church dropouts and the formerly unaffiliated. By observing these Covenant churches, we can learn what makes a meaningful difference in the lives of young adults and what attracts church dropouts and nones. I focus on how these churches are effective at engaging identity exploration as one of the primary tasks of the developmental life stage of emerging adults.

Patterns among churches reaching young adult dones and nones. In a culture of young adult absenteeism, it is important to notice when churches are effectively reaching and keeping young adults. What are they doing differently and why? Is what they are doing or not doing reproducible? Does it pass the biblical and theological litmus test? My research among Covenant churches flourishing in reaching young adults revealed that these churches share a pathway, not a program. It is important to realize that a "one-size fits all" approach does not work for reaching young adults in a polarized culture, where some young people grew up saturated by church and are "done" with it while, simultaneously, a growing number of their peers have no personal experience with organized religion.

Nonetheless, churches effectively reaching, incorporating, and ministering to young adults do exhibit similarities in approach. The pattern includes emphases on building relationships with people far from God, engaging in spiritual conversations, and extending invitations to Christian community, specifically to service. Churches successful in this way enable meaningful, substantive service, emphasizing contribution before commitment. These churches seem to follow a similar path, as they connect to unchurched people and integrate them into the life of the church. Shea's story illustrates this pattern.

Shea's path to faith in Christ. Shea, an unchurched twenty-year-old, was interviewed eight months after she attended church for the first time. Shea's life had changed dramatically during that eight-month period. Her story began with feeling lost, broken, hurting, and dealing with the consequences of bad decisions. Shea's best friend invited her to come with her to church on a Sunday, believing it would help Shea.

Eight months later, Shea was a leadership intern at her church. What happened during those eight months?

The title of the sermon on Shea's first Sunday at church appealed to her. Shea was not sure what was happening, but she cried on the way home. She described her experience as "waking up a little more each day." When she went back to church a few weeks later, she heard about small groups—she was interested but did not pursue it. However, the church began to call and email her, and a young woman who worked at church met with Shea and introduced her to a small group where she found a community of young women who cared about her and were honest about their struggles. Within a month, Shea's small group leader invited her to begin serving at church. Shea was baptized three months after she began attending church. She describes her journey toward faith in Christ like this:

> My first time I went to LifeGroup, I was like, this is what I've been looking for. They didn't even know me, yet they loved me and cared about me and were interested in what was going on in my life, and what God was doing in my life. That drew me in. Then I started serving at Life Kids. The girl who leads my LifeGroup invited me to coffee. She was very intentional. "I want to get to know you and learn what's going on in your life." I said I was very passionate about kids. I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up. She asked, "Have you thought about serving on our Life Kids Team?"
>
> I met the Life Kids team coordinator, and she did my orientation. She called me after my background check and asked if I wanted to get plugged in that weekend. I fell in love with it immediately. I fell in love with serving. I fell in love with the people who were serving. Then, at about three months, the Life Kids coordinator baptized me.[29]

Shea's story illustrates the pattern shared by churches that are constructively impacting the identity and faith journeys of young adults. Shea was surrounded by a loving and caring Christian community. She was intention-

[29] Shea is a pseudonym, as her original name is changed to protect her identity. Note Seversen, "Churches Reaching Emerging Adult 'Nones' and 'Dones' in Secularizing North America," in W. Jay Moon and Craig Ott, eds., *Against the Tide: Mission Amidst the Global Currents of Secularization,* Evangelical Missiological Society Series 27 (Littleton, CO: William Carey, 2019): 75-94. See also Severson, *Not Done Yet,* 39-40, 88-89, 116-117.

ally tapped by a church leader and directed into serving in a meaningful way, in conjunction with the church. Both an affirming community and a place to contribute resonate with young adults' identity exploration. Shea's church gave her the opportunity to experiment, to try out firsthand a Christian "group" to belong to, and a place to purposefully contribute. With the help of a vibrant church, Shea found her "vocation" and her way to fit or to be in the world—a good match for her identity search.

The church roundabout for young adults on their way to faith in Christ. Churches that excel at reaching and keeping emerging adults may be quite diverse in size, location, ethnicity, programming, emphasis, and other characteristics, but they tend to follow distinct patterns in their engagement with people outside of the Christian faith. These churches take unchurched "dones" and "nones" along a road that moves through certain discernable and measurable points, though this does not necessarily occur in a linear fashion. To extend the traffic metaphor, it may be helpful to think of these churches as intentionally building and operating "missional roundabouts" or "traffic circles."

Traffic roundabouts help drivers change direction by offering several different on-ramps at which cars can enter the circle. Similarly, evangelistically successful churches provide multiple entry points or "on-ramps" to church and to faith in Christ for young adults, thus helping them navigate a change in direction. Young adults' journeys to faith tend to follow similar access ramps: pre-Christians and post-Christians approach the roundabout from different directions, but along the way they pass some, or all, of the same terminals. As the figure below illustrates, we can envision the evangelism pathway established by these churches as a roundabout with five on-ramps.

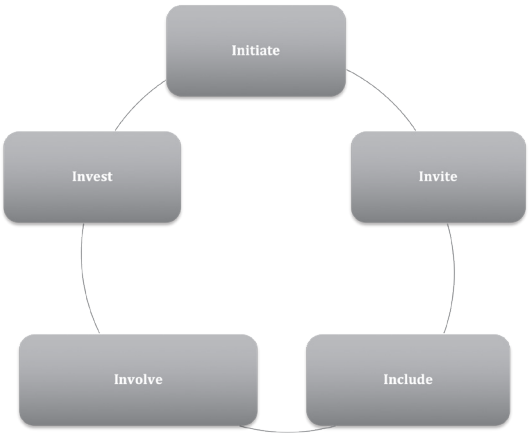

Figure 1: Churches reaching and retaining young adults: the pre-Christian and post-Christian pathway as a missional roundabout

As noted above, Shea's story is illustrative of the pattern shared by churches that positively impact the identity and faith journeys of young adults. See if you recognize the various on-ramps along the way that Shea traveled on her spiritual road trip. Which one served as her initial on-ramp to following Jesus?

First on-ramp: initiate. My research reveals how churches effective at reaching the next generation approached the broader social context with a posture of proximity and presence, in contrast to a posture of withdrawal and isolation. Attendees at these churches spent time with unchurched people in the places where they live and work, recreate and study. In addition to their nearness, they took the time to be present in the lives of unchurched people around them, thus cultivating community with friends who did not know Jesus.

Young adults interviewed for this study described having close relationships with Christian friends before they made faith commitments. Relationships involved investment of time together in shared activities. For Megan, that looked like evenings spent playing board games with Christian friends. Michael and Luke, who work together, had long talks about business, life, travel, and family. Kaitlin connected regularly with a friend for coffee or a drink at a local pub. Adam and Will saw each other every day at cross-country practice.[30] Nathan got to know a group of Christian friends through camping and ultimate Frisbee.[31] The theme of initiating relationships with people far from God runs through all these stories. In each case, Christians initiated relationships with unchurched young adults and nurtured those relationships with invitations to spend time together. Church members initiated relationship building by renewing old friendships, deepening current friendships, and beginning new friendships. They also introduced their unchurched friends to other Christian friends. Creating these relational networks is an important on-ramp on the missional roundabout.

For example, Alex Rahill, former lead pastor of LifeChurch Canton, prompted his congregation to reach out to non-Christians in various spheres of their lives. He noted,

> We intentionally do certain practices that make evangelism a normal and natural part of the life of the church. . . . [We say]

[30] Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 34.
[31] Ibid., 27.

> God has strategically put us in the midst of a bunch of people who need him. God may be laying someone on your heart, a friend, or a relative. We do FRANC lists—friend, relative, acquaintance, neighbor, and co-worker—all the time.[32]

In this manner, churches effectively reaching young adults actively encourage attendees to build, maintain, and deepen relationships with non-Christians.

Furthermore, emerging adults recognize when their churches prioritize building relationships with non-Christians and understand that the point is to genuinely care for friends, not to treat people as projects. Purposeful conversations allow them to connect with their friends' needs and longings. Michael, a young adult who attended a Covenant church in Chicago, described his pastor's emphasis on understanding people's struggles in the evangelism process in this way:

> One of the things heavily encouraged and prioritized [at church] is building relationships with non-Christians. . . . The bigger part is really getting to know the community. Getting to know what the needs are . . . what their sticking points are. Why they haven't come to faith and just what they struggle with in general. It's so easy to project on them what you think . . . they need, when you have no idea.[33]

Thus, young adult relational evangelism often follows a pattern of first initiating and building relationships with old and new friends outside the church, and then engaging in conversations about church, faith, or pastors. These conversations, generally initiated by the Christian friend, are attractive enough that emerging adults eventually respond to—or even ask for—invitations to church. Cultivating relationships, connecting faith or church to individuals' felt needs, and enthusiastically calling attention to faith, church, or Christian leaders are all critical points on the spiritual roundabout.

Second on-ramp: invite. After "initiate," a further significant characteristic of Christian communities that effectively reach and keep young adults is the practice of *invitation* into a hospitable culture. Church attendees who are excited about their faith and church communities

[32] Ibid., 65.

[33] Michael is a pseudonym. His name is changed to protect his identity. He now lives on the west coast. See further Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 134.

cannot help talking about them and are intentional about inviting friends and family into Christian community. Moreover, these churches take care to create inviting spaces for unchurched people, practicing radical hospitality toward guests and visitors.

Not surprisingly, these churches expect and prepare for unchurched guests. Some offer entry points outside of weekend services, but most emerging adults first connect to church through invitations to the main worship service. This means that weekend worship services need to be the kind of place where Christians can expect their unchurched friends to have a positive experience. We do not have to design our worship services for the unchurched, but we ought to consider adjusting our services to create an inviting church culture in which unchurched visitors can understand the flow of service elements, follow along, and feel welcome.

Making church services inclusive and hospitable involves translating unfamiliar symbols and church-laden language, so that unchurched newcomers can make sense of what we are doing and saying in the context of Christian worship. We should consider how to introduce the elements of a worship service to people unaccustomed to church. For example, we might briefly explain why we are doing what we do at a given point in a service, we could adjust the way we preach to better unpack unfamiliar ideas, or we could provide directions to help new people find their way around the building. These are all examples of creating an inviting church culture for guests. Such welcoming steps also signal to regular attendees that they can safely bring their unchurched friends without making them feel like outsiders.

Third on-ramp: include. The rapid inclusion of newcomers is the most striking feature of the churches in this study. Churches began the inclusion process from day one by welcoming visitors into environments that were friendly, orderly, and safe, and by clearly communicating where to go and what to do. Guests were invited to join small groups or similar communities early in their church experience, giving them places where they could be introduced to Scripture, ask questions, unravel their preconceptions about God and the church, and explore Christian faith in general. An inclusive church community, such as a small group, helps young adults traverse unknown and seemingly treacherous territory with the support of faithful Christian friends. In fact, a significant finding in my research of these effective Covenant churches is that "nones" and "dones" found communities within churches to belong to *before* they fully believed. For instance, Pastor Aaron Cho at Quest Church in Seattle

recognized compelling community as integral to the faith journeys of young adults that lead to transformation. He noted,

> I find that a part of the evangelism process, part of getting people to be on that journey is, "Are there others who are with me?" They feel like this journey is often isolated and long—they feel alone in it . . . things happen when we do things together in community. Questions are asked, questions are answered. Sometimes questions are asked and questions aren't answered; and I think the phenomena, or the miracle, is that people are not opting to leave. They're opting to stay, and they still are wrestling with unanswered questions. They may not say it this way, but you're still on this journey; God is doing something in you, and you're still staying and sticking with it. Getting plugged in to the church through small groups is the main way.[34]

When thinking about the inclusion of newcomers, it is essential to recognize that unchurched young adults must overcome many internal barriers to successfully connect to a church. Young people may have strongly negative impressions of church communities (often for quite valid reasons) and do not want to be influenced by them.[35] They certainly do not want to feel judged or pressured. Among the young adults I interviewed, many initially feared that the church would pressure them to do, think, or be something they were not, or judge them for something they already did, thought, or were. They learned to see past these fears, but they needed their church to meet them halfway by clearly and consistently demonstrating that they did not need to fear the church's rejection.

Fourth on-ramp: involve. To reach young adults, churches must involve unchurched people in the mission of the church as participants, not just as recipients. This is key. Young adults need opportunities to make meaningful contributions—to make a difference in their new community—in order to feel a deep sense of belonging. Churches effectively reaching young adults typically encourage young people to serve in the

[34] See Seversen, "Churches Reaching Emerging Adult 'Nones' and 'Dones'," 75-94.

[35] Putnam and Campbell write that "nones" purposefully reject the church due to the church's lack of Christian virtues and particularly for the church's stance on homosexuality, conservative politics, and exclusionary belief system. According to this argument, young people have a new moral sensibility and reject the church for its immorality. See in general Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace* (2010).

church *even before they make faith commitments.* Unchurched people are welcomed into spiritually appropriate ministry roles while they are still on their way to understanding Christian faith and discipleship. While this is a significant step in unchurched people's spiritual journey toward Christ, it may also be the most challenging step for churches that do not traditionally allow attendees to serve until they have formally joined the church or at least made a profession of faith.

Craig Groeschel, senior pastor of Life.church, reflected the views of many pastors in this study when asked why he thinks his church is reaching young adults. He commented,

> I used to think, and I still do think, that getting them connected relationally really, really matters. But I think that getting them contributing matters even more. That generation wants to make a difference more than they want to make a living. If the church isn't serving in the community or making a difference, that's a real turnoff. If the church is missional and making a difference, that's a plus. If there's a place they can use their gifts and help make a difference, that's a plus. If they can lead it, that's a hundred times better—if they can be in charge of something.[36]

Pastors such as Groeschel have figured out how to provide meaningful service opportunities for people journeying toward Christ—treating them as contributors, not just consumers. Unchurched young adults need to be guided toward places where they can make a meaningful difference, but where they will not gain spiritual influence over others before they are ready. They must be mentored by experienced Christians who will give them opportunities to develop in serving and discipleship, while also protecting the integrity of the church's teaching.

Fifth on-ramp: invest. Young adults were on the church leaders' radar either before or during their inclusion in community and involvement in service. Churches also reach young adults by investing in them. By helping young adults reach their potential, the churches in this Covenant study showed newcomers that the Christian community valued them and would give them opportunities to grow. Investing in young adults can include informal or formal mentoring, leadership development, accountability,

[36] See Severson, "Churches Reaching Emerging Adult 'Nones' and 'Dones'," 75-94, and Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 103.

or pastoral care. These processes help young adults discover their gifts and envision themselves as future leaders connected to God's mission.[37] Relationships thus established are mutually beneficial: young adults give back to a community in which they find belonging, and the church invests in the pre-conversion process of a new generation of Christians.

Attractive journey: attractive church. All in all, we see that unchurched young adults who join and remain in Christian communities do so because they are attracted to their church. It should be no surprise that they want others to experience what they are experiencing. As these newcomers experience inclusion in community, involvement in service, and investment by mentors, they gain motivation to invite their own friends and family to church. Emerging adults who find a place to belong and contribute to a life-giving church in turn invite others to enjoy the benefits they receive.

Full circle: why it is working. Covenant churches effectively reaching and keeping young adults have this in common: they enable a connection to the essential developmental work that is characteristic of emerging adulthood—exploring and landing identity. Churches that help with identity exploration and fit are stepping up to provide young adults with part of the scaffolding and support they need for the identity work of this developmental life stage. Thus, it is key for churches to (1) invest in and mentor young adults, (2) allow for opportunities to belong to a community before they fully believe in Christ, and (3) contribute to that community before they commit to faith in Christ. By receiving opportunities to experiment with Christian identity in the context of an inviting and compelling congregation, emerging adults can "try on" Christianity like a new garment, to see whether it fits them well. The church then becomes that sandbox: what Erikson defined as that social moratorium, where young adults experiment and play with what it is like to be a Christian, to see if they resonate with Christian faith and discipleship before they fully commit to becoming Christian.

Naming the tensions. Michael Emerson raised two significant questions in his thoughtful review of *Not Done Yet* in the spring 2021 issue of *Covenant Quarterly*: (1) "Does belief matter? What if the unchurched

[37] Sharon Duloz Parks describes the importance of mentoring and the role of the mentoring community in identity exploration for young adults searching for their place in the world. See Sharon Duloz, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 13, 165-202, 213-220, 236-242, 268-271.

young people actively belong and participate, but never actually believe and commit to Christ and Christ-like lives?"; and (2) "Are there any limits to their involvement in the church?"[38]

Attractive churches will gather people who are at different points along a faith spectrum. Some are curious yet eventually may not continue their journey to become true followers of Christ. Others, like most of those young adults interviewed in *Not Done Yet*, will eventually believe in Jesus, grow in their faith and understanding, and continue to trust and follow him as genuine disciples. We remember that in the Gospels, some of those gathered around Jesus eventually turned away from him, while others persevered and continued to follow Jesus.[39]

Does belief matter? The reader may wonder what these young adults did believe after their short time incorporated into the life of the church—between six months to a few years. Emerging adults were asked to share a few statements related to what they believe about Jesus. Space prohibits a long list here, but the following selection of comments describes the transformation these emerging adults were experiencing with the aid of their churches and the work of the Holy Spirit:

> "I believe Jesus is the Son of God and that there was an irreparable barrier between God and men that could only be healed through the sacrifice of God's son, Jesus. And if we believe in Christ then he can save us and repair our relationship with God, and we can have eternal life." (Adam)

> "I believe that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I believe that he is my God. I believe that he came to earth to live a life we could never live, to die a death we rightfully deserved, so that we can be reunited with him and our Father in heaven." (Michael)

> "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and lived a perfect, sinless life. He died for my sins. He's my advocator and through him I am blameless before God. He came so that I could have eternity with Christ. God raised him from the dead after three days and he overcame death." (Shea)

[38] Michael O. Emerson, review of *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults,* by Beth Severseen, *The Covenant Quarterly* 79 (2021): 56-58.

[39] For example, John 10:31-42 records responses of both opposition to and belief in Jesus.

> "I believe that he resurrected and died. I believe that Jesus is God in human form. He's like God in flesh; a hundred percent God and a hundred percent human. [I believe] that his story is true, that he resurrected and died for our sins. (Tessa)[40]

Certainly not all young adults invited to belong and participate in church and who are mentored by mature believers will make full faith commitments to Jesus Christ. Still, we have much to celebrate and to hope for when we observe how these new believers had a developing understanding of Jesus's life, ministry, death, resurrection, and salvific work on their behalf. It became clear from their interviews that these young adults were going through profound shifts in attitude, affinity, activity, and allegiance. Perseverance over time will indicate whether these shifts are prompted by socialization or conversion.

Six recommendations for getting started. As a church leader, then, where can you initiate, invite, include, involve, and invest in young adults at your church? Here are some suggestions.

First, thoughtfully consider a model of biblical evangelism that encourages and mobilizes congregants to initiate, develop, and deepen relationships with unchurched people, especially young adults. Provide ideas for nurturing friendships and talk about faith with young adult "nones" and "dones." An effective model will help your congregation understand evangelism as a form of collaboration with God's Spirit, to help people take steps toward trusting and following Jesus.[41] Church leaders should genuinely invest in relational evangelism: model it, teach it, preach it, resource it, and commit to it for the long term.

Second, establish the expectation that non-Christians will be welcomed at your church. Encourage ministry leaders and teams to minister to newcomers by praying for them to come, preparing for their presence, and addressing their needs when they arrive. Work with each ministry in your church to set goals for extending hospitality and being inclusive of unchurched guests.

Third, mobilize congregants to invite close non-Christian friends to church and bring them into Christian community. Inclusion in small groups or other regular gatherings, where participants share life together, is particularly valuable for unchurched young adults.

[40] See further Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 203-20.

[41] This is a paraphrase of the Evangelical Covenant Church's definition of evangelism.

Fourth, look for places where young adults who don't know Jesus can contribute to your church community where they will not have spiritual influence. Provide opportunities for young adults to get involved, pursue their aspirations for making the world a better place, and explore Christianity. Invite leaders to identify volunteer positions that would be a good fit for pre-Christians and post-Christians, to create and to create new openings for unchurched people to become involved in meaningful ways.

Fifth, evaluate how well your church invests in young adults, and think strategically about how to improve this investment. Identify mentors who can guide young adults through the leadership development and discipleship process. Identify young adults to invite into mentoring and leadership development. Invite previously unchurched and non-Christian young adults into formal or informal mentoring relationships shortly after their first visit to church.

Sixth, identify unchurched young adults who may already be present around the fringes of your church. What specific steps can your church take to draw them into your community, encourage them to stay, and help them grow in faith? Do not leave them on their own to navigate your church—take the next step alongside them.

Conclusion

My qualitative research has shown that Evangelical Covenant Church congregations that are effectively reaching and retaining young adults tend to take five actions to help integrate evangelism into the life of the church community—these churches (1) initiate compelling relationships with young people who have not committed to faith in Christ, (2) enthusiastically invite unchurched young adults to church and offer radical welcome and acceptance when they arrive, (3) include newcomers in Christian community and let them belong before they believe, (4) involve unchurched young people in service opportunities early in their church experience, and (5) mentor and invest in young adults on their

[42] The methodology for this qualitative study included 34 interviews of one to two hours in length. Identifying effective churches in reaching and retaining unchurched emerging adults was triangulated by conducting an online church survey sent to 875 Covenant churches, interviewing Covenant Conference Superintendents asking for churches effective in their geographic Conferences at reaching young adults, and through the research method known as "snowballing." Lead pastors (in the case of two churches, associates were interviewed) and emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 33 who

way to faith in Christ.[42]

Young adults who are invited, included, involved, and invested in—from the beginning of their church experience—tend to commit not only to Christ but to Christian community as a whole. They feel a deep attachment to the church that has walked with them in their journey toward Christ, and they lead others into the church using the same on-ramps that brought them into the community. Covenant churches making a positive difference in the lives of emerging adults are providing places for identity exploration and mentoring spaces, at the time when young adults are acutely attuned to searching for their place in the world. As Christians initiate, invite, include, involve, and invest in their still-unchurched friends, the evangelism roundabout continues to make disciples who in turn make more disciples. In this way, the church can sing no longer a dirge, but with hope, a new stanza:

> Where have all the young adults gone? Long time passing.
> Where have all the young adults gone? Long time ago.
> Where have all the young adults gone? The church has
> invested in them, everyone.
> Help us to ever learn.
> Help us to ever learn.[43]

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made first time faith commitments to Christ at pastors' churches were interviewed. These interviews were then coded using NVivo qualitative research software.

As I noted in a previous essay, "My selection process took into account church size, geographic location, environment (suburban or urban), age, and ethnic makeup, aiming to include a broad range of Covenant congregations. Aside from the omission of Latina/o and Hispanic churches the study reflected the ethnic composition of the Covenant including eight multiethnic, nine white, one African American, and one Asian church. It included eight suburban and eleven urban churches, representing all geographic regions in the Covenant except Alaska and the southeastern United States. One Canadian church was included; the rest were located in the USA. The study included two churches with over 10,000 attendees, three over 1,000 attendees, three with 500-999 attendees and nine with 175-499 attendees. The number of new young adult faith commitments in the previous twelve-month period required to qualify for the study precluded smaller churches." See Seversen, "Churches Reaching Emerging Adult 'Nones' and 'Dones.'"

[43] Credit goes to current North Parker (NPTS student) Eliza Stiles for her contribution to the wording "The church has invested in them" in what is overall my own original stanza to *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?*

Book Reviews

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John E. Phelan Jr., *Separated Siblings: An Evangelical Understanding of Jews and Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 360 pages, $25

Everything I knew about Judaism, for too many years, I learned from *Fiddler on the Roof* and Chaim Potok novels. This left me with a limited and inadequate view of Judaism. When I was a pastor at Simi Covenant Church in California, I became good friends with the director of a Jewish retreat center. We spent hours talking about our respective faiths. My friend taught me about his beliefs and practices, and the rituals of Judaism that sustained him. I also heard about the pain Jews suffer as a minority religion, including the injustice and horror Jews have suffered at the hands of Christians. Through dialogue, my understanding of Judaism deepened. Our faith differences did not distance us from each other, but rather gave us new insights into each other's religion and enriched our own faith journeys. I sensed that I was only scratching the surface of Jewish thinking, heritage, and history. Then came Jay Phelan's book!

For me, and for many evangelicals, Phelan reminds us that our understanding of Judaism ends around 70 AD with the destruction of the Second Temple and picks up again with the Holocaust (Shoah) and the establishment of the State of Israel in the mid-twentieth century. "Most of the history of the Jews … is unknown and unappreciated by most Christians. It is … difficult and daunting history. It is the story of a vulnerable people living at the sufferance of others under the constant threat of extinction. But it is also the story of a remarkable intellectual and spiritual flourishing under these most difficult circumstances" (p. xviii).

Emerging out of his deep friendship with a rabbi in Chicago, Phelan shares his appreciation for and deepening understanding of the richness and variety of Jews and Judaism. He gives his evangelical readers insights in ways that are both respectful of a people and their history, and help those outside of that faith to access this tradition.

In the first eight chapters, Phelan explores themes and persons found in what Christians call the Old Testament: Abraham and identity, Moses and revelation, commandments and law, prayer, righteousness, the Land. Then, in chapters nine and ten, he reminds us that Jesus and Paul were both Jews, liberating them from the evangelical tendency to make them like us. Though an outsider, Phelan respectfully examines these themes through a new lens—a Jewish lens—and he invites the reader to view these themes from a new vantage point as well.

Separated Siblings continues with an overview of the last two thousand years of Jewish history. We learn about the sacred texts of Judaism: Tanakh, Mishnah, and Talmud. Phelan goes into depth explaining key topics including Midrash, stories of rabbinic leaders, the painful centuries of persecution, and Jews living in diaspora. Phelan then offers a critical account of Judaism's most recent history: the Holocaust, Zionism, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the wide spectrum of modern-day Judaism. We find Judaism to be a living, dynamic religion; a vital, varied, community of faith and practice. Throughout his discussion, Phelan breaks through evangelical stereotypes and misinformation, helping the reader to gain a new perspective and understanding of Judaism.

In the final chapter, we are invited into something deeper. We are encouraged toward dialogue between Jews and evangelicals, to humbly learn from and listen to each other, to become friends. We recognize our differences, but we celebrate what we share in common. We cultivate deeper faith convictions while holding these convictions with a sense of grace, humility, and curiosity. As Swedish theologian Krister Stendhal

reminds us in his "Three Rules for Religious Understanding," we look to Jews and Judaism and find room for "holy envy," a window into the living faith of Judaism which can enrich our own Christian faith.

This book offers a model and a hope for Christian-Jewish reconciliation. We are separated siblings who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and seek to do his will. We stand together, bearing the image of God (pp. xviii, 304). Today, as anti-Semitism is increasingly raising its ugly head, this book calls us to remember and lament the horrors of the past. We must stand against hatred toward our "separated siblings." We are convicted by the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as he witnessed the hate-filled, murderous actions toward Jews in Nazi Germany: "Only those who cry [out] for the Jews may sing Gregorian chant."[1] We remember and pledge: Never forget, never again.

KURT N. FREDRICKSON

Matt Jenson, *Theology in the Democracy of the Dead: A Dialogue with the Living Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019), 352 pages, $27.99

Christian tradition is the lifeblood of the church, even though some parts of the church are more enthusiastic about tradition than others. Tradition ensures that our reading community is as large as it can be. If reading sacred Scripture is an act best done in community, then reading it with a community stretched across both geography and time gives the best kind of reading. Matt Jenson's *Theology in the Democracy of the Dead* helps readers do exactly this by introducing them to several key figures in the history of Christian thought. Each figure sought to know Christ, read Scripture, and articulate the truth of the Christian faith within their own historical and cultural contexts.

Jenson does an excellent job bringing figures such as St. Anselm of Canterbury and Martin Luther to life with biographical sketches located toward the beginning of each chapter. These sketches remind us that each of these theologians was first and foremost a person living in a specific time and location, and subject to all of the idiosyncrasies of life that every person experiences. Jenson does not shy away from various biographical

[1] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision. Man of Courage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 512.

details indicating that the theologians covered did not always work with the full support of those around them, or that they had moral failings of their own. He tells us the story of St. Thomas Aquinas's abduction at the hands of his brothers to prevent him from joining the Dominicans, as they believed joining the Benedictine order would better advance the family's status (p. 131). The reader also hears hints about the full role of Charlotte von Kirschbaum in Karl Barth's household (p. 278).

Each chapter provides the major themes of the theologian's work, working directly from primary texts and explaining the concepts in ways that will be clear to readers at a variety of levels. A bibliography at the end of the book offers a good set of primary and secondary resources on the various thinkers. The book would be enhanced by a list of primary texts for readers who have not previously read these authors. Someone new to St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, would likely benefit from suggestions on where to start in such a large body of writing.

There is much to be praised with this book. It will clearly be valuable both for the classroom and for Christian readers in a variety of vocations and situations. At the same time, there is one key omission—the presence of any women. Jenson acknowledges this as a potential problem. He comments, "The fact is, few women wrote formal theology at a high level before the last couple centuries" (p. 3). He raises this issue in the context of the larger question posed to him by a colleague: "Is this a democracy or a meritocracy? Do I really mean to extend theological suffrage 'to the people,' or only to the best and brightest? We might ask further whether this isn't an aristocracy, with only people of a certain status gaining the right to vote" (p. 3). Both concerns seem linked here.

There are women who wrote theology at a high level prior to the modern era. Jenson is right to note that there were not many of them, but it can also be pointed out that not many people at all were writing theology at a high level prior to that era. Theology was often written by those who had the education to read the tradition and write about it, which inevitably left many people out for much of Christian history. To write a theology text that excludes consideration of the women who were writing in the field seems problematic. Including Julian of Norwich, for instance, would have given readers a better sense of some of the diversity within the medieval tradition. For that matter, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, mentioned in the book, was a theologian in her own right who could have been given a longer treatment within the chapter on Barth.

Perhaps the most important issue still to be resolved (and somewhat

outside the scope of Jenson's book) is, who gets to write theology and who determines which voices are centered? If theology is to be a democracy, and if it is to matter for the people in the pew moving forward, it needs to include a diversity of voices—not only those speaking to the present situation, but also reading and responding to the tradition and determining how that tradition is understood in the context of new work. In our context today, it is crucial that we seek out the fullness of human experience and the theology that comes from that experience. It is only in doing that work that Christians will be equipped to address all that our present situation demands.

MARY VEENEMAN

K. James Stein, *From Head to Heart: A Compendium of the Theology of Philipp Jakob Spener* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2020), 348 pages, $15.99

It is my privilege to write this review of James Stein's *From Head to Heart: A Compendium of the Theology of Philip Jakob Spener*. The title deserves two comments. First, the use of the word compendium is most accurate. Stein has translated excerpts from Spener's writings (7,000 pages!) and arranged them in the form of a book on theology and ethics. Each of the appropriate loci is treated. This is Spener on Spener.

The second comment is related to the expression "from head to heart." A layperson had listened to Spener and asked, "How does one get this from the head to the heart?" The problem with this is that Pietism got associated with "heart religion" in the sense that it was often accused of interiorizing the faith and reducing it to feelings, thus allowing an individualism to dominate.

The importance of reading this book is to discover that Pietism via Spener did seek "heart" and "the other." It includes an exposition of the neighbor, neighbor love, and love of the enemy. This section needs to be read with the section that distinguishes legal obedience from evangelical obedience (comprising several points). For example, the former is an imposition from the outside and resented; the latter arises from within and from a new nature.

Stein includes an extensive excerpt regarding Spener's work regarding the poor. The concrete administrative procedures are included. Just how massive this is, is outstanding, and includes a reference to Francke's

work in Halle.

Spener is well-known for his emphasis on the new birth. By conviction, he held and preached the Lutheran doctrine of baptismal regeneration. But what about people who became dead in their sin and trespasses? The new birth was the fruit of genuine repentance and faith in Jesus Christ's forgiveness. Spener called people to repentance and new life.

He distinguished the new birth from renewal. Renewal required effort and did not happen all at once. Renewal involves a process of strengthening and a crucifixion of the desires of the flesh. Such persons see the daily need of God's grace.

If Spener were present to me, I would like to ask him why he was so sure humans lost the image of God in the Fall? James 3:9 seems to say otherwise. So does Genesis 9:6. In my work with abuse victims, one of the central points I tell them is that an abuser may pile up images of desecration after desecration, but one they cannot touch is the *imago Dei*. That is the person's pushback, and it cannot be taken.

Finally, among the churches with a heritage in Pietism, the Evangelical Covenant Church might have profitably learned something from Spener. In its desire for a "holy people" and for "truly regenerate communicants," it separated the "sheep from the goats." But Spener said that the holiness of the People of God was from the presence of Christ and the holy sacrament, and not the people. Maybe the early Mission Friends could have learned something from Spener who taught the new birth as passionately as they did but could release the church to the judicial and redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

In the meantime, Spener employed a metaphor regarding the Lord's Supper that, if explored in sermons and teaching, might have helped the Mission Friends think differently, or at least less militantly about having communion services for believers only. Spener also addressed this issue but recognized Jesus's words about awaiting the time of judgment, yet not ignoring flagrant sin. Spener spoke about the medicinal value of the Word and Sacrament. This sentence calls for personal and congregational reflection: "We do not always have enough nourishment from the Word of God but also require the more costly medicine that we receive in the Lord's Supper." Let it be said that therapeutic metaphors are no less concerned for truth than juridical metaphors. And such metaphors can apply to congregations as well as persons. But it requires some form of care which the conventicles provided, and by means of which individuals were equipped to care for others. Congregations could be renewed from

within by such renewal innovations as conventicles if they were put to responsible use.

PS: I completed my doctoral work under Dr. Stein, writing a dissertation on another Pietist, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1689–1752). Dr. Stein knew how to ask questions that kept a writer true to the topic. I recall that day early in my writing when he stopped me and asked me to reduce my thesis to one paragraph. It was a crucifixion! But it was the moment which freed me to write and later to work with students on their theses. Dr. Stein taught by teaching. My deepest gratitude.

JOHN WEBORG

Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2021), 256 pages, $19.99

When author and speaker Beth Moore announced via Twitter that she was formally severing her relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention due to its explicitly patriarchal theology, millions of American evangelicals responded with shock and confusion. Moore had long been a prominent figure in the denomination, but her recent support of female pastors and preachers made her the target of increasingly vicious attacks from clergy and laypeople alike. One person who was likely unsurprised by these events is scholar Beth Allison Barr, whose latest book delves into the complicated history of complementarianism. Having recently endured her own painful separation from a church community that does not affirm women in ministry, Barr weaves together personal anecdotes with the narratives of forgotten female leaders, revisionist histories that have intentionally dismissed the contributions of women, and the ulterior motives behind modern institutions and publications.

Barr notes that although women have found ways to challenge or transcend their subordinate role over the centuries, patriarchy has shapeshifted as cultures and ecclesiastical structures have changed, resulting in ongoing inequalities that have been baptized in the name of "biblical values." Despite the modern evangelical obsession with these so called "biblical values," Barr skillfully argues that complementarianism is not, in fact, a scriptural mandate nor a divinely ordained hierarchy, but rather a man-made creation built on ancient power dynamics and a decidedly un-Christlike lust for power and control.

While Barr is not a biblical scholar or a theologian, she is an excellent historian, and this slim volume is well researched and thoughtful as it navigates these controversial topics. Drawing from the expertise of countless talented scholars, most of whom are female, Barr's text is both compelling and relatable as she shares her academic conclusions and personal reflections with clarity and conviction. Readers will be entertained by Barr's exploration of a wide range of topics, which move chronologically from the biblical world to the present day and include a new perspective on Paul, the rise of the cult of domesticity during the Protestant Reformation, and a heresy that lurks behind the Southern Baptist Convention's modern understanding of subordination.

Although not explicitly named, Barr's main focus is on specifically Western history and predominantly white narratives, with little attention given to non-Western Christianity and non-white figures. Moreover, this text most directly addresses the culture of modern evangelicalism, largely ignoring the rich tradition of female voices in mainline and African American denominations. This white, evangelical audience is certainly one that will benefit from Barr's analysis, but the book may not be as engaging for Christians outside of this demographic. Perhaps the most important audience for Barr's text is the white male, evangelical pastor who will need to reckon with his own role in creating or supporting these damaging narratives, and to relinquish some of his authority in order to make room for gifted female colleagues and lay leaders.

Overall, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* is a necessary and timely addition to the current academic and religious dialogue surrounding gender roles, women in ministry, and the uncertain future of evangelicalism. Readers who seek to increase their understanding of patriarchy and its relationship to the church and vocational ministry should supplement Barr's book with such similar titles as Kristin Kobes Du Mez's *Jesus and John Wayne* (New York: Liveright, 2020), which helpfully names how whiteness intersects with toxic masculinity, and Aimee Byrd's *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), which continues Barr's prophetic challenge to congregations and denominations. In the end, Barr's book not only asks us to confront our patriarchal assumptions, but gives hope that by identifying them we have the power to correct those narratives and create an inclusive church that invites all to participate.

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