

THE COVENANT  
QUARTERLY

May 2015

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## Comment

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*Hauna Ondrey, editor, teaching fellow in church history,  
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Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.... The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.  
—1 Corinthians 12:14, 21, 26–27

If an underlying contention runs through this issue, it is this: only at great cost does the church say “I don’t need you” to the particular ethnic communities that comprise its very body. The claim of both Max Lee and Bruce Fields is that the North American church desperately needs to *see* its need for the scriptural interpretations of minority Christian communities and biblical scholars; the two additional articles provide intercultural readings that further support this claim.

North Park Theological Seminary professor Max Lee begins the issue—and appropriately so, as it emerges from his course, Intercultural Biblical Interpretation. Lee introduces the goal, method, and benefits of reading Scripture interculturally, inviting the church to this practice of listening to one another with open ears and so together reading Scripture with new eyes. Two extended examples of intercultural readings follow, one from the Old Testament and one from the New, written for Lee’s course by graduates now serving the church.

Nilwona Nowlin advocates the necessity of reconciliation between African Americans and Africans in the United States *prior* to the possibility of reconciliation with white or other ethnic Americans. She offers a

reading of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers as a resource for this "family reunion" so that God might similarly take what was meant for evil and from it bring good (Genesis 45:5, 7; 50:20).

Erik Borggren explores how reading Scripture *from* a cultural context that is not one's own might expand our imagination to open up more fruitful readings. Borggren explores the response of Japanese Americans to internment during World War II as a means of collapsing a false opposition between Paul's call to "be subject to governing authorities" (Romans 13:1) and his locating the Christian's citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Borggren suggests a third way is opened by Japanese American resistance to the dehumanization of internment camps in the form of the art of *gaman*, "enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity" (quoted, [p. 32](#)).

Together Nowlin's and Borggren's papers demonstrate (1) how Scripture can provide resources *for* specific cultural communities and, conversely, (2) how reading intentionally *from* a particular cultural context may enable the church to read Scripture in fresh and faithful ways.

The issue closes with an article by Bruce Fields, associate professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. A guest lecturer in Lee's course, Fields delivered the 2015 Eaton-Jones Lecture at North Park, from which this article derives. Using Paul's imagery of the body of Christ, Fields argues that if the contribution of one *ethnic* part of the church is not received by the whole church, the entire body suffers. As a concrete example of this, Fields offers four lessons a black hermeneutic extends to the wider church. He secondly calls a black hermeneutic to self-evaluation through the balancing of theology and praxis and attention to the Christian tradition.

The ultimate concern of all four authors in the biblical readings they offer or advocate is love—love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. Nowlin makes the case that a healthy self-love is prerequisite to obeying Christ's command to love our neighbor as ourselves—and that this self-love is impeded by deeply rooted racism and the tension between Africans and African Americans symptomatic of it. Borggren calls the church to its fundamental identity as "a community in which the gospel is proclaimed, the idolatries of fear and power are rejected, and worship is expressed through the love of neighbor as oneself" ([p. 38](#)). Lee's conclusion captures well this common aim:

What better way can we love our neighbor than to take

steps to learn about the cultural histories that shaped their identities and somehow, in the process, empathize with their struggles and make them our own? What better way can we love ourselves by letting our neighbors help expose our invisible presuppositions and prejudices? And what better way can we love God than when we, as a united community of diverse believers, learn from one another's readings of Scripture so that we can obey its teaching with greater faithfulness? (p.14)

After reading the proposals that follow, these questions await your consideration.

For further resources and discussion on reading the Bible interculturally, join the conversation at [Forum: Dialoging with the Covenant Quarterly](#).

# Reading the Bible Interculturally: An Invitation to the Evangelical Covenant Church and Evangelical Christianity

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*Max J. Lee, associate professor of New Testament,  
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

**H**ow do Asian American, Latino/a American, and African American Christians interpret the Bible? When they apply and live out its message in their respective contexts, what can the wider church, especially European American Christians, learn from this lived theology? In this introduction, I seek to answer these questions as I address (1) *what* an intercultural interpretation of the Bible is, (2) *how* to practice it, and (3) *why* it matters for all Christians as we seek to proclaim God's word faithfully in our complex, pluralistic world.

## **The Short History of a Pioneering Course**

In spring 2009, a group of students of color petitioned the faculty of North Park Theological Seminary to modify the curriculum to reflect better the growing ethnic diversity of the Evangelical Covenant Church. From this request, a vision was born for a course on reading the Bible interculturally. With a group of eleven students, Bob Hubbard (now emeritus professor of Old Testament) and I launched a course titled "Ethnic American Biblical Interpretation" the following spring. The course integrated guest lectures from K.K. Yeo of Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and Bruce Fields of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, who, as faculty of color, graciously shared their expertise.<sup>1</sup> Since

1. These guest lecturers have also published in the area of ethnic biblical interpretation and theology. See, e.g., Yeo Khiok-khng, *What Has Jerusalem Have to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 1998) and Bruce Fields, *Introducing Black Theology: Three Crucial Questions for*

that inaugural course, I have offered the course twice more, changed the course title to “Intercultural Readings of the Bible,” and most recently added class visits to the DuSable Museum of African American History, the Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) Legacy Center of Chicago, and the National Museum of Mexican Art.

The following articles by Nilwona Nowlin and Erik Borggren are first fruits of this course, which continues to evolve and mature with each new group of students. It is my hope that the studies here will demonstrate what new questions can be asked from Scripture and what new and transforming insights can be gained when we read Scripture conscious of our own cultural location and with those whose ethnicity is different from our own.

## **What Is an Intercultural Reading of the Bible?**

### **A Preliminary Definition**

As I present it in my course, reading the Bible interculturally (RBI) is the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments from the social location of ethnic Americans whose cultural roots lie in non-European traditions. The semester begins with learning the cultural histories of Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans, African Americans, and other ethnic groups living in the United States. Only after this do we delve into how these communities, who have been formed by these histories, interpret Scripture and seek to embody the gospel in their contexts.<sup>2</sup> So RBI does not focus on global theologies. It does not explore, for example, how Africans read Scripture but rather how African *Americans* read Scripture. While studying the ancestral traditions of one’s culture is vitally important to the task of RBI, RBI nevertheless concentrates on how these same traditions are appropriated and expressed in a specifically North American context.

RBI as a method of biblical interpretation recognizes the distance that stands between the ancient contexts of Scripture and our contemporary contexts. For this reason we need to become students of history to determine what the text meant to its original, ancient audience (the process of exegesis), what it means today (the process of hermeneutics),

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*the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

2. See especially the following ethnic histories: Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998); Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2011); Thomas C. Holt, *Children of Fire: A History of African Americans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).

and how its message ought to be applied and practiced in the life and ministry of the church (the process of theological reflection). RBI, as I teach it, therefore uses the best of historical-critical tools, including the study of the Bible's original languages, to exegete the text. However, RBI recognizes that the *application* of the text has diverse cultural expressions in the life of the wider church whose membership consists of "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Revelation 7:9), and these embodied practices are a living theology that helps Christian communities understand better their own theological commitments.<sup>3</sup>

But to limit RBI to the processes of hermeneutics, theological reflection, and practice would be a misnomer. The cultural location of the reader does not simply shape their reception of Scripture's meaning. Rather, this location can aid in accessing its meaning through the process of exegesis itself. While avoiding the dangers of "eisegesis" (reading meaning *into* the text), RBI can help illuminate the text's meaning by drawing from the cultural, historical, social, and linguistic arsenal of the interpreter. Let me give a quick but poignant example.

One article that always proves illuminating for students in the RBI course is a chapter by Uriah Kim on the difficulties of translating the Hebrew word *hesed*, often rendered inadequately in English as "loving kindness."<sup>4</sup> Used some 246 times in the Old Testament, over half of which occur in the Psalms (as in Psalm 107:1, which reads: "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love [*hesed*] endures forever"),<sup>5</sup> *hesed* is a difficult term to translate. A single English gloss such as "mercy," "loving kindness," "steadfast love," "favor," or even "grace" does not convey the concept adequately.

The problem, as Kim points out, is that *hesed* has a semantic component of faithfulness or loyalty, in addition to mercy and kindness.<sup>6</sup> God has mercy and kindness toward Israel, but he also demonstrates his faithfulness to his people when he rescues them from their enemies (e.g., Exodus 34:6–7; Numbers 14:18–19; Psalm 17:7; 51:1; 86:13;

3. James McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 22–23.

4. Uriah Y. Kim, *Identity and Loyalty in the David Story: A Postcolonial Reading* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 30–60.

5. David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon, "hsd," in *NIDOTTE 2*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 211 [211–18].

6. Kim, *Identity and Loyalty*, 50–51.



117:2; 119:41).<sup>7</sup> In terms of human relationships, *hesed* describes affection between friends but also loyalty and mutual responsibility between them, as with David and Jonathan: “But show me unfailing kindness [*hesed*] like the LORD’s kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness [*hesed*] from my family, not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth” (1 Samuel 20:14–15, NIV).<sup>8</sup> There simply is not an English word that can encapsulate both the affection-mercy and faithfulness-loyalty dimensions of *hesed*.

However, Kim provocatively suggests that the Korean term *jeong* fills this semantic gap in the English lexicon.<sup>9</sup> *Jeong* denotes a kind of “stickiness” between persons due to a shared experience, or many shared experiences over time, that remaps relationships, loyalty, and responsibility across existing social boundaries.<sup>10</sup> In combat, for example, soldiers who began as strangers can become close comrades whose bonds of memory, loyalty, and friendship last well beyond the battlefield.

While I would not agree with the entirety of Kim’s book, his chapter-length study of *jeong*, which draws upon the cultural and social experience of the Asian American reader to illuminate what the Bible means by the Hebrew word *hesed*, illustrates well how RBI provides tools for exegesis and biblical interpretation. In the context of God’s dealings with Israel, to speak about YHWH’s *jeong* is a helpful way to explain how Israel experienced the Lord’s faithfulness-mercy as they witnessed God’s mighty acts of salvation on their behalf time and time again. The “stickiness” between God and Israel has a distinctly soteriological context in history. Even the *jeong* between David and Jonathan is based on a commitment to YHWH’s promises, particularly that David’s house would eventually reign over Israel and Judah (1 Samuel 20:14–15; 2 Samuel 22:51; 2 Chronicles 6:42). This mutual commitment to David’s reign, which demanded real sacrifices when Saul hunted down all of David’s followers, became the arena through which deep bonds of loyalty and affection were established (2 Samuel 23:1–17). *Jeong* encapsulates semantic dimensions of *hesed* that the English words “mercy” and “steadfast love” do not.

7. Baer and Gorden, “*hsd*,” 213–16; H.J. Zobel, “*hesed*,” in TDOT 5, ed. G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, trans. David Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 54–64 [44–64].

8. Baer and Gorden, “*hsd*,” 212–13; Zobel, “*hesed*,” 46–48.

9. Kim, *Identity and Loyalty in the David Story*, 54–58.

10. *Ibid.*, 55–56.

The ability of another language to fill in the semantic gaps left by English translations is just one of many ways RBI can help seminary students, pastors, lay leaders, and congregations become better interpreters of Scripture. I will let the articles in this issue demonstrate additional ways RBI aids the exegetical task, and even still, the articles do not exhaust all possibilities. Having explained what RBI is, I now suggest how it can be practiced.

## **How Do We Practice Reading the Bible Interculturally? A Working Method**

Latino biblical scholar Fernando Segovia holds that no one can automatically engage in a minority criticism of the Bible. A Latino/a American, for example, does not automatically interpret the Bible from a Latino/a American cultural location. He or she must intentionally read for the causes and concerns of Latino/a Americans.<sup>11</sup> What is more, Segovia argues that it is not possible for a non-Latino/a to employ a Latino/a hermeneutic, even if that interpreter became deeply invested in the culture, politics, and social causes of Latino/a Americans and endeavored to interpret the Bible with these interests in mind.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, by definition, for Segovia only a person born biologically as a Latino/a American, and “born again” culturally as a Latino/a American, can interpret the Bible from and for the Latino/a American church.

Segovia insists that someone not shaped by the particularities of an ethnic history cannot possibly develop the insider’s perspective, the cultural instincts, or the emotional and aesthetic tastes inherent to those raised within that ethnic community.<sup>13</sup> The person may study another culture with encyclopedic scope but, in Segovia’s view, will still never feel or think, love or hate, or have the same gut-reactions to life’s variegated tragedies as those who have occupied that space since birth.<sup>14</sup> Segovia declares that he would never attempt to interpret the Bible for an Asian American or African American context.

These are tough words to hear. However, they helpfully remind us that the desire to read Scripture interculturally demands hard work and perse-

11. Fernando Segovia, “Toward Latino/a American Biblical Criticism: Latin(o/a)ness as Problematic,” in *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, ed. Randall Bailey, et al., SBL Semeia Studies 57 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 201 [193–223].

12. *Ibid.*, 201–202.

13. *Ibid.*, 202–205.

14. *Ibid.*, 202.

verance in pursuing intercultural competence. Empathy is not cultivated overnight. Moreover, book study engenders only limited knowledge of a culture. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then perhaps one year of living, breathing, and interacting within a particular cultural space is worth a decade of academic study of the same culture. For this reason, I incorporate an experiential component into the course through required field trips. One can gain knowledge of the history of Japanese internment, for example, from Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore*.<sup>15</sup> It is another matter altogether to visit the JASC Legacy Center of Chicago and hear firsthand the story of a woman who survived the internment camps as a child.<sup>16</sup> Yet even extended immersion in a culture can never provide the knowledge and instincts of one born of a certain ethnic descent who identifies strongly with that cultural heritage. Segovia's caution, therefore, should humble all of us. We should hesitate to think that we could ever "figure out" a culture or ethnic group and interpret Scripture "for" that culture. Instead, knowing that we lack the cultural instincts of one born into an ethnic community not our own, we accept that the journey of seeing through another's eyes will require tears, sweat, and hard work over time.<sup>17</sup>

Being born Asian American does not mean that I can automatically read from and for Asian American communities. Segovia reminds me that I need to be born again culturally and apply myself to an intense study of my own cultural history. Only then can I adequately interpret Scripture in way that directly addresses the unique spiritual and communal challenges faced by Asian American churches.

Taking seriously Segovia's skepticism, I nevertheless remain optimistic that anyone can practice an intercultural reading of the Bible, even from within a cultural location that is not their own. And I am not alone. Benny Liew, in his book *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics?* also objects to the "unhealthy implication that only 'Asian American persons'

15. Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 395–404.

16. For more information on the JASC, visit their website, <http://www.jasc-chicago.org>, and especially their Legacy Center Archives and Library <http://www.jasc-chicago.org/legacy-center-archive-library>. Thanks to Kecia Stoot and Chris Hoskins who took the RBI course in summer 2012 (then called "Ethnic American Biblical Interpretation") and shared their conversation with Asya, a survivor of the Japanese American internment camps in Rohwer, Arkansas.

17. See the following experimental volume of essays where three authors of different ethnicities interpret Scripture from both their own cultural location and those of others: Charles Cosgrove, Herold Weiss, and K.K. Yeo, *The Cross-Cultural Paul: Journey to Others, Journey to Ourselves* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

(however defined) can participate in the production and discussion of Asian American biblical hermeneutic... the 'it-takes-one-to-know-one' assumption."<sup>18</sup> He instead offers an Asian American biblical hermeneutic that can be practiced by all and whose method can be applied to any intercultural reading of the Bible.

Liew defines RBI as an interdisciplinary enterprise that hinges upon both ethnic/cultural studies and biblical scholarship.<sup>19</sup> So long as one is willing to mine the literature, history, politics, and culture of a particular ethnic group, that person may seek to apply the biblical text to this specific cultural location, regardless of their own ethnicity or cultural location. Asian American studies, Latino/a American studies, and African American studies are well-defined academic disciplines, and the biblical interpreter who practices RBI needs to engage these disciplines critically. A good starting point for the novice is Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore*, Juan Gonzalez's *Harvest of Empire*, and Thomas Holt's *Children of Fire*<sup>20</sup>—all textbooks in the RBI course.

Concerning the second discipline, biblical studies, Liew makes a case for practicing a post-colonial hermeneutic.<sup>21</sup> While I find post-colonial interpretation helpful for its analysis of power relations within systems and its goal to empower disenfranchised minority communities, I have accepted Liew's invitation to pursue alternatives, opting instead for historical criticism. Despite its limitations, I believe the historical-critical method provides the best interpretative framework for allowing the biblical text to speak to us as "other" in its own historically contingent voice rather than overriding its voice with our own. Post-colonial and reader-response hermeneutics—indeed any method committed to meaning as a production of the reader—risk obscuring Scripture's "otherness." Historical criticism, by contrast, is committed to the theory that meaning is produced by the text and that authorial intent is accessible. It recognizes that there is an internal logic to the text that historical study seeks to illuminate rather than disrupt.<sup>22</sup> For this reason I employ historical-critical

18. Tat-Siong Benny Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? Reading the New Testament Intersections: Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 4.

19. *Ibid.*, 13–15.

20. See note 2 for full citations of these works.

21. Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics?*, 13–14.

22. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 208–13, 380–98.

tools in my intercultural readings, ever conscious of their limitations,<sup>23</sup> and continue my appreciation for post-colonial scholarship's effective exposure of tyrannical and unjust systems. We would all do well to consider the dangers of our colonized contexts even if we do not adhere to post-colonial scholarship's hermeneutical commitments.

Finally, practicing RBI includes a critical engagement with the secondary literature of scholars who have interpreted Scripture in Asian American, Latino/a American, African American, and other ethnic American contexts.<sup>24</sup> Minority biblical criticism is a burgeoning field in the academy, and there are many emerging scholars whose work in contextual interpretation and theology provides a sounding board for further dialogue and critical reflection.<sup>25</sup> The person who is new to minority biblical criticism would find the following collections a seedbed for fresh questions, ideas, and perspectives from a wide spectrum of scholars: Foskett and Kuan's *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*, Lozada and Segovia's *Latinola Biblical Hermeneutics*, Felder's *Stony the Road We Trod*, and Blount's *True to Our Native Land*.<sup>26</sup>

With personal grit, exegetical finesse, and theological nuance, the contributors to this issue have done the hard work of studying ethnic American histories, employing the best of historical-critical tools, and consulting the publications of biblical scholars of color. The contributors offer analogues between the ancient contexts of the Bible and today's cultural contexts, evaluating where such analogues succeed and where they break down. The authors have also been asked to ponder what American evangelicalism and the church at large can learn from RBI. How can RBI contribute to our Christian faith? I, too, will offer my suggestions below, knowing full well that I will not exhaust all the possibilities. My hope,

23. Kevin Vanhoozer, "Introduction: What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?" in the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. K. Vanhoozer, et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19–25.

24. Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics?*, 14–15.

25. Randall Bailey, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and Fernando Segovia, "Toward Minority Biblical Criticism: Framework, Contours, Dynamics," in *They Were All Together in One Place?*, 3–43.

26. Mary Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, eds., *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006); Francisco Lozada, Jr., and Fernando Segovia, eds., *Latinola Biblical Hermeneutics: Problematics, Objectives, Strategies*, SBL Semeia Studies 68 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014); Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Brian Blount, ed., *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

however, is that these suggestions provide enough *raison d'être* to inspire and encourage others to engage in reading the Bible interculturally.

## **Why Is Reading the Bible Interculturally Important? A Sincere Invitation**

One of the biggest ironies of biblical interpretation is the suspicion that RBI would encourage the interpreter to read something “foreign” into the text and as a consequence distort the text’s meaning. But the opposite is actually true. RBI, rather than encouraging “eisegesis,” functions as a mirror to help expose the reader’s own presuppositions so that he or she can interpret Scripture more faithfully. This is especially true for the dominant white majority in North America, who often is oblivious to the “whiteness” of its own readings of the Bible. Because most European Americans cannot even define what whiteness or white culture is, they often mistake their own enculturated readings of the Bible for orthodoxy and are sometimes too quick to label ethnic American readings as “unorthodox.” Diverse social locations give rise to diverse, and at times more faithful, interpretations of Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

Let me offer the example of Moses to illustrate white culture’s invisibility to itself and the resulting assumption that its enculturated readings of the Bible become orthodoxy for all. Justo González points out that a majority of European American Christians in the North Atlantic world understand Moses primarily as a lawgiver.<sup>28</sup> In their eyes, Moses stands for legalism, especially vis-à-vis Jesus, the great legalism-buster. Alternatively, ask a Latino/a American who Moses is, and it is likely that he or she will think of Moses the savior and liberator of God’s people.<sup>29</sup> Rather than contrasting Moses and Jesus, Latino/a American Christians view Moses as a type of Christ. Christ is the new Moses who delivers God’s people from slavery under sin into a grander salvation. The African American tradition also views Moses as liberator, encapsulated in such treasured

27. A helpful collection of scholarly essays on the ideological structures of race and racism is George Yancey, ed. *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* (New York: Routledge, 2012), especially the opening essay by Karen Teel, “What Jesus Wouldn’t Do: A White Theologian Engages Whiteness,” 19–25. For a specifically evangelical discussion of whiteness, I strongly recommend Bruce Fields’s short book *Introducing Black Theology*, especially his chapter “What Can Black Theology Teach the Evangelical Church?”

28. Justo González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 80.

29. *Ibid.*

spirituals as “Go Down Moses,” “Didn’t Old Pharaoh Get Lost,” and “Ride on Moses.”<sup>30</sup>

European American presuppositions against legalism can distort the way people read Moses, the Pharisees (the followers of Moses), and Jesus (an anti-Moses?) in the gospel narratives. Moreover, the caricature of Moses as legalist, and Jesus as the end to legalism, fails to recognize that Jesus does not release us from the requirements of the moral codes of the law but in fact *heightens* them (cf. Matthew 5–7, especially 5:17, 20).<sup>31</sup> Staunch opposition to legalism can lead one to subscribe to a lower moral standard and abandon pursuing the holiness to which Christ has called us. As I read some of the most recent monographs on gospel Christology, I find the Latino/a American and African American portrayals of Moses as a savior, deliverer, and liberator, and Jesus as a new Moses, closer to what the New Testament teaches.<sup>32</sup> The gospels not only portray Moses positively as a savior figure but present Jesus as a fulfillment of Moses—the savior and deliverer who has ushered in a new exodus, and with it calls for a greater standard of holiness, justice, mercy, and piety from God’s people.<sup>33</sup> What a shame it would be if the Latino/a American readings of Moses as deliverer acquiesced to the hegemony of white readings of Moses exclusively as the lawgiver! Our Christology would be bankrupt of a more faithful interpretation of Moses as prefigurement of Christ in Scripture.

Despite the specificity of the above example, I want to emphasize that *all* Christians, European American, Asian American, Latino/a American, African American, and other ethnic identities, hold invisible presuppositions and biases that need to be exposed. As sinners we all have the potential to distort what the Bible teaches; therefore, we need one another as conversation partners and fellow theologians. If Latino/a American

30. The lyrics to these African American spirituals can be found at <http://www.negrospirituals.com/songs>, accessed July 14, 2015.

31. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 58–73 and John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1992), 1–13.

32. See, e.g., Michael P. Theophilus, *Jesus as New Moses in Matthew 8-9: Jewish Typology in First Century Greek Literature* (Perspectives in Philosophy and Religious Thought 4; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013) and John Lierman, *The New Testament Moses: Christian Perceptions of Moses and Israel in the Setting of Jewish Religion*, WUNT II, 173 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004).

33. Theophilus, *Jesus as New Moses*, 37–68, 175–81; Lierman, *The New Testament Moses*, 258–88.

readings of the Bible can illuminate biases within white Christianity and lead to a richer understanding of Moses and Christ, I, too, as an Asian American biblical interpreter have much to learn about myself, my neighbor, and the gospel from RBI. By hearing how Scripture speaks to a cultural location I do not normally occupy, my presuppositions can be exposed, and new insights can be gleaned.

I could go on to list other advantages of RBI, many of which have been noted by other scholars of color,<sup>34</sup> but I want to provide space for the authors of the remaining articles to share their own discoveries of what our Christian communities can gain from intercultural biblical interpretation. Instead, I end with an invitation to the Evangelical Covenant Church and to evangelical Christianity as a whole. Let us read the Bible together from our diverse ethnic locations, champion the interests, causes, and passions of our Christian brothers and sisters, and be formed by one another's Spirit-led embodied practices.

If the two greatest commandments are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength (Matthew 22:37–38; cf. Deuteronomy 6:4–5) and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39–40; cf. Leviticus 19:18), then the entire body of Christ must try to read the Bible interculturally. What better way can we love our neighbor than to take steps to learn about the cultural histories that shaped their identities and somehow, in the process, empathize with their struggles and make them our own? What better way can we love ourselves by letting our neighbors help expose our invisible presuppositions and prejudices? And what better way can we love God than when we, as a united community of diverse believers, learn from one another's readings of Scripture so that we can obey its teaching with greater faithfulness?

I hope you will join me and the contributors of this issue on an epic journey of embodying the gospel for all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages, for the glory of God and for his mission in our divided and broken world.

34. What Fields, for example, says about black theology applies to RBI: (1) RBI helps the reader address systems of corporate sin and structures of oppression that a post-Enlightenment European American audience tends to ignore; (2) RBI helps combat the idolatry of racism in its many forms; (3) RBI can help expose theological deficiencies in the Christian traditions that cater to specific cultural groups and ignore the struggles of others; and (4) RBI gives the church a prophetic voice by addressing issues of injustice that the dominant culture tends to miss or intentionally mutes. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology*, 51–69.



# To Save Many Lives: Exploring Reconciliation between Africans and African Americans through the Selling of Joseph

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A long time ago in the land of warm waters, there lived two brothers born of the same mother. . . they grew up inseparable, until one day one of the brothers disappeared. And no matter how hard the villagers searched, he could not be found. And then one day, in a distant land of cold winters, the daughter of one brother walked towards the daughter of the other. With every step, they grew closer until finally they walked past each other like masked strangers, one never noticing the other.<sup>1</sup>

Conversations toward racial reconciliation tend to focus on a black/white binary—or perhaps white and another ethnic group of color. Such conversations assume people of color *want* to engage in this dialogue and that they are adequately *equipped* to do so. If we dig a little deeper, we may find that many do not engage in these discussions because they are ill-equipped. In the case of the African American community, I believe the general disengagement with this topic is rooted in our corporate struggle to live out Jesus’s command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). In my view, we cannot effectively love our neighbor because we are in the midst of an identity crisis that inhibits our ability to love ourselves. We will not be able to fully love ourselves until we resolve this identity crisis, and this resolution cannot happen

1. Peres Owino, *Bound: Africans versus African Americans*, Nyar Nam Productions (2014).

until we make peace with our history by reconciling with our African brothers and sisters.

The story of Joseph offers resources for African and African American reconciliation. Joseph's being sold into slavery by his brothers finds a parallel in the history of African Americans. Despite the years of pain, shame, and marginalization his brothers caused, Joseph was able to forgive them and be reconciled to them. Is a similar reconciliation possible between African Americans and Africans today? My paper pursues this question, drawing from the Joseph narrative, arguing finally that reconciliation is needed between these two communities. I explore how it can be done, so that, as with Joseph, God may continue to take what was meant for evil and turn it into something good.

### **A Family Experiences Pain, Shame, and Loss: The Transatlantic Slave Trade**

The opening quote offers a poetic depiction of the relationship between Africans and African Americans and its root. The brother who disappeared became a victim of the transatlantic slave trade, and the rift began. The result, even today, is conflict between two ethnically connected groups and distinct pains for each. As New Testament scholar Allen Dwight Callahan states, "The mass deportation of people from Africa to the Americas was nothing short of catastrophic for Africans on both sides of the Atlantic."<sup>2</sup> Many Africans still experience a sense of loss and guilt, while African Americans experience a sense of dislocation and loss of identity that can result in anger toward Africans.

The transatlantic slave trade drained Africa's human resources. It was the bleeding of Africans to the "New World" that took the largest toll on Africa, with ongoing ramifications for contemporary African nations.<sup>3</sup> Many Africans who remain on the continent still suffer the trauma and grief of losing a loved one. In her [autobiography](#),<sup>4</sup> [Zambian AIDS activist Princess Kasune Zulu](#) recounts her own family's history with the slave trade, imparted to her by her grandfather. He shared stories of slave

2. Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 51.

3. Elikia M'bokolo, "A Hundred and Fifty Years after France Abolished Slavery: The Impact of the Slave Trade on Africa," *Le Monde Diplomatique English Edition*, April 2, 1998, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://mondediplo.com/1998/04/02africa>.

4. Princess Kasune Zulu with Belinda A. Collins, *Warrior Princess: Fighting for Life with Courage and Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

traders who disguised themselves as missionaries and traders to earn the trust of local villagers, of women going to fetch water, never to return. He recounted the disappearance of his own ancestor, alerting Zulu to her personal, biological bond with African Americans. With sorrow and shame, her grandfather acknowledged their complicity in the trade, accepting that the African people stood guilty alongside the foreigners. The knowledge that his own people could commit such a traitorous act caused him visible pain, and he admitted, “The scars have never healed.”<sup>5</sup>

Ongoing perseverance in the face of waves of dehumanization brought about by slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and other atrocities testifies to the resilience of African Americans. Yet resilience does not erase the substantial losses suffered through this serial oppression. For example, African Americans still bear the consequences of intentional attempts to sever slaves from their African culture in order to discourage escape. One concrete means of severing cultural roots was the slave owner’s giving his slave a “Christian” name—as illustrated famously in Alex Haley’s *Roots*, as Kunta Kinte wrestles with the entwined realities of “surrender[ing] his name [and] his heritage.”<sup>6</sup> When he first realizes his master has renamed him, he is filled with rage and wishes to shout, “I am Kunta Kinte, first son of Omoro, who is the son of the holy man Kairaba Kunta Kinte.”<sup>7</sup> A slave master often referenced and documented slaves by “their” first name only. It is painful for me to know that my last name is nothing more than the surname of the man who owned my ancestors and that it impedes my efforts to fully trace my lineage. This is but one of the many ways the pain, shame, and loss caused by the slave trade live on for African Americans. This swelling of emotion culminates in anger, rooted in the knowledge that our brothers sold us.

Despite the primary agency of European slave traders and the demand generated by their counterparts in the Americas, many African Americans harbor resentment toward Africans because of their complicity in the trade. I have heard firsthand accounts of how this resentment, along with the desire to distance ourselves from anything African, has led African Americans to lash out at Africans here in the United States, perhaps in an unconscious effort to transfer the feelings of pain, shame, and loss. The village mindset of the African American community owes much

5. *Ibid.*, 183–85.

6. Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Vanguard Books, 2007), 328.

7. *Ibid.*, 275–76.

to its African ancestors. In African culture, family extends beyond one's biological family, and even the act of "giving away" a daughter in marriage requires the support and involvement of the bride and groom's entire families. Given the high value placed on community, the selling of community members is a significant violation of tradition—a significant betrayal and not a common practice. This corporate sense of betrayal still plagues many African Americans, as amply illustrated in the recently released documentary, *Bound: Africans versus African Americans*.

Over the course of three years, Kenyan-born writer and producer Peres Owino brought together fourteen Africans and African Americans. In interviews and group conversations this group discussed the tension that exists between their respective communities, exposing the individual and communal pain, shame, and loss. The film also includes contributions from community leaders and scholars, including Joy DeGruy, author of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*.<sup>8</sup> This important work reveals how the effects of generations of slavery continue to negatively impact African Americans in ways that many have come to accept as cultural tradition. Is there hope for reconciliation between Africans and African Americans? I suggest that we may find a resource in another story of family betrayal—the selling of Joseph.

### **A Family Experiences Pain, Shame, and Loss: The Selling of Joseph**

The location of the Joseph story (Genesis 37–50) within the Pentateuch reflects its function within the larger story of Abraham. It explains how the Israelites came to live in Egypt and demonstrates the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him and his family (12:2–3).<sup>9</sup> The selling of Joseph occurs in the very first chapter of the cycle (Genesis 37). The text narrates the favor Jacob bestows upon Joseph (v. 3), leading to sibling rivalry (v. 4) that is worsened by Joseph's "tattling" (v. 2) and boasting about his dreams of his family bowing to him (vv. 6–11). This creates a bitter pill for his jealous brothers to swallow. Miguel De La Torre notes the brothers' inability to greet Joseph peacefully (v. 4) as further evidence of the deterioration of

8. Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005). A DVD version and study guide are also available.

9. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 2 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 357–58.

the fraternal relationship.<sup>10</sup>

This is the climate into which Jacob obviously sends Joseph when he tasks him with checking on his brothers in the fields and returning with a report of their well-being (v. 14, in the Hebrew *shalom*, contrasting with v. 4). As Joseph approaches his brothers, they recognize him from a distance, perhaps because of the multicolored tunic he wore—a tangible reminder that he was the apple of their father’s eye. This stirred up their hatred even more, and they “plotted” against him (v. 18). They quickly come to a decision to kill him and his dreams along with him, using a statement Gordon Wenham translates, “let’s murder him.” The Hebrew verb used here, *harag*, usually refers to the illicit taking of a human life (cf. Genesis 4:8, 14; 12:12). It also describes the fate Jacob narrowly escaped when Esau plotted to murder him in Genesis 27:41–42.<sup>11</sup> Convinced by Reuben to throw Joseph in a pit instead, the brothers callously ignore Joseph’s pleas from the pit, which they will later regret (Genesis 42:21). Joseph references the evil intent of his brothers’ actions in Genesis 50:20, long after their reunion. Their pitiless aggression extends even to their father, as they deceptively present Jacob the multicolored tunic, shredded and bloody.<sup>12</sup>

When Reuben discovers his brothers have sold Joseph, he tears his garment in mourning, foreshadowing Jacob’s reaction to the news. Reuben grieves not only for himself in the loss of Joseph, but perhaps also because he knows how it will affect their father. And Jacob does mourn greatly. He refuses to be comforted and vows to mourn Joseph publicly until the day he dies (Genesis 37:35). The sons know they were not as beloved in Jacob’s eyes, yet his pain still impacts them. Although Reuben wanted to save Joseph, after the sale he joins in his brothers’ deception of Jacob (37:31) and suffers the emotional consequences of his sin.

As the narrative shifts to Joseph, now a slave in a faraway land because of his brothers’ betrayal, Genesis 39–41 recounts Joseph’s process of being elevated from the pit to the palace. These chapters reveal little about the emotional impact of these events on Joseph. When we come to chapter 43, however, we see a glimpse of Joseph’s inner life when his brothers bring Benjamin to him on their second journey to Egypt. The moment is so emotionally overwhelming that Joseph rushes out to cry and compose himself (vv. 30–31). Chapter 45 opens with Joseph’s being

10. Miguel A. De La Torre, *Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 301.

11. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 353.

12. *Ibid.*, 356.

overtaken by years of emotion, weeping loudly as he finally reveals his true identity to his brothers (vv. 1–3).

Yet the Joseph narrative is not only a story of betrayal. It is ultimately a story of reconciliation and redemptive good. Joseph speaks peace to the brothers who could not speak peaceably to him (cf. Genesis 37:4). With tears and kisses (45:15) he seeks to assuage their fear and guilt. They seek no forgiveness, however, until their guilt turns to fear after Jacob's burial (Genesis 50:15). Afraid that Joseph's kindness was motivated by his love for Jacob and not for them, they plead for Joseph's forgiveness, describing their actions as crime (*pe·ša'*), sin (*wə·ḥaṭ·tā·tām*), and evil (*rā·'āh*), offering themselves as slaves to Joseph (Genesis 50:16–18). Despite the pain, shame, and loss Joseph endured as a slave and prisoner in a strange land, he expresses his desire for reconciliation at his first revelation and reaffirms it in light of his brothers' plea for forgiveness. In both texts Joseph assures his brothers that, though their actions were indeed evil, God brought good from these ill intentions—the saving of many lives (45:5, 7; 50:20): “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.” This moment of reconciliation is what causes many Christian scholars to consider Joseph a type of Christ, an innocent man whose suffering brings reconciliation to his brothers and life to the world.<sup>13</sup>

The Joseph story presents a strong example of how God's plan for human life can overcome any obstacle and that “delayed is not denied.” However, in the midst of celebrating Joseph's faithfulness and the faithfulness of God, it becomes easy—surprisingly easy—to overlook the underlying themes of loss and pain, reconciliation and redemption. It is these themes that offer a source of hope for those who seek reconciliation between Africans and African Americans.

### **Bringing It Together: An Intercultural Reading of the Joseph Story**

How then might the Joseph narrative empower the same reconciliation between Africans and African Americans—even redemption of the tragic history of the transatlantic slave trade? While there are details of the Joseph story in its historical and cultural context that cannot ever be reshaped to speak to the situation between Africans and African Americans, there is one specific detail I wish to highlight as a parallel. Joseph

13. Ibid., 356.

was sold into slavery by his brothers and all parties experienced some level of pain, shame, and loss as a result. It is my hope that this story can be used as a way to encourage Africans and African Americans to move toward reconciliation and redemptive good, just as Joseph chose reconciliation with his brothers in spite of the trauma he had endured because of their actions.

**Reconciliation.** The strained relationship between Africans and African Americans mirrors the conflict between Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 21. Two women were being oppressed by a patriarchal system, but rather than together facing their common oppressor, they were at odds with one another. Relationships between Africans and African Americans are complicated by beliefs that Africans “look down on” African Americans because we are no longer “full blooded” Africans and have become “westernized.” The phrase “hurt people hurt people” is apt. However, at the root of it all is an underlying system of white supremacy that fuels the fire of the tension between these two groups. My hope is that those who are not members of these two groups do not use the conflict to justify racist behavior but would instead acknowledge that the conflict is the symptom of a larger problem.

Even so, this does not mean that antagonistic behavior between African Americans and Africans should continue. I wholeheartedly support efforts to bring about racial reconciliation between blacks and whites in the United States (as well as other racial/ethnic groups), but I believe this cannot be fully realized until the African American community is reconciled to itself. People of color cannot effectively engage in reconciliation efforts with whites until they are secure in their own cultural and racial identity.<sup>14</sup> We in the African American community cannot love our non-black neighbors until we address our internalized oppression and learn to love ourselves. However, we cannot effectively reconcile with one another until we address our “identity crisis,” which requires reconciliation with our African brothers and sisters. Therefore, I believe a “family reunion” with Africans is one way to move further in this process. Such a reconciliation requires confession, repentance, lament, and forgiveness.

Confession demands truth-telling. Just as Joseph’s brothers name their sin for what it is (Genesis 50:17), confession and repentance require an accurate identification and naming of the wrong(s) inflicted. The

14. Allan Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 87.

third chapter of the recently published book, *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith* offers a starting point for such confession.<sup>15</sup> The process of reconciliation is aided when we allow space for lament. It is striking how prominently weeping features in Joseph's process of reunion and reconciliation (Genesis 42:24; 43:30; 45:2, 14–15; 46:29; 50:17). Finally, while forgiveness can happen apart from reconciliation—and sometimes circumstances require that it does—in this case, I want to propose that forgiveness and reconciliation go hand in hand. Johann Christoph Arnold says that hating never helps, so forgiveness must involve a conscious decision to stop hating.<sup>16</sup>

These themes are helpfully explored in *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing*, the inaugural publication of the Resources for Reconciliation series, written by Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, co-directors of the Duke Divinity's *Center for Reconciliation*.<sup>17</sup> Katongole and Rice argue that lament requires the *unlearning* of the obstacles of speed, distance, and innocence.<sup>18</sup> To counter these, they suggest practices of pilgrimage, relocation, and public confession. That is, the discipline of lament can be developed when we slow down, close the distance between ourselves and the other party, and are courageous enough to name the truth—to be disturbed and remember the “awful depth of brokenness.”<sup>19</sup>

It seems difficult to navigate this when we are generations removed from the “original sin” of selling fellow Africans into slavery. Máire Dugan's Nested Theory of Conflict holds that the longer a society or group has been plagued by violence, trauma, or conflict, the longer it will take to resolve the issues.<sup>20</sup> The issues that have created conflict between Africans and African Americans as well as African Americans and the dominant white culture in the United States have existed for

15. Mae Elise Cannon, Lisa Sharon Harper, Troy Jackson, and Soong-Chan Rah, *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014). Cf. Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015).

16. Johann Christoph Arnold, *Why Forgive?*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 5.

17. Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing* Resources for Reconciliation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

18. *Ibid.*, 90–92.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Máire A. Dugan, “A Nested Theory of Conflict,” *A Leadership Journal: Women in Leadership—Sharing the Vision*, 1 (July 1996): 9–20.



hundreds of years. For this reason, such a reunion must be a sustained effort and not a one-time event. Being told to “get over” a centuries-old wound when African Americans lament this history is not realistic or appropriate. The church especially should make space for corporate truth-telling, confession, lament, and forgiveness over the repressed history and ongoing effects of slavery.

I strongly recommend that Covenant churches with significant populations of Africans and African Americans consider partnering with each other and use Peres Owino’s film *Bound* as a point of departure for a journey toward healing and reconciliation. Because genuine relationship is a key component of any kind of reconciliatory effort, churches embarking on this journey should ensure adequate time is spent on building authentic relationships. For example, a potluck gathering could offer a visual representation of the historical connection between these groups. In addition, the similar textures, smells, and flavors of the foods would engage the senses, creating a deeper connection similar to what one would experience at a family reunion.

**Redemption.** Upon the death of Jacob, Joseph’s brothers fear that without their father’s protection Joseph may return their evil for evil. Joseph seeks to allay these fears, saying, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today” (Genesis 50:20). Paul echoes this logic in Romans 8:28: “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” Neither text suggests that God causes tragic situations or that the ends justify the means when the means are evil. Rather this story demonstrates God’s ability to create something good from the bad so that God may be glorified. God can and does bring good out of the most hopeless situations. In Joseph’s situation, being sold into slavery by his brothers was indeed an evil act. However, this evil act ultimately resulted in Joseph’s being in a position to keep his family—and all of Egypt—alive during famine.

As Africans and African Americans pursue reconciliation, how might the evil of slavery and the tragedy of inter-familial conflict be redeemed? How might Africans and African Americans participate in God’s redeeming work to bring good from evil? I offer just one possibility, suggested by the Joseph narrative. Like Joseph, African Americans have landed in a prosperous nation. We have access to resources that may be less accessible or inaccessible to our brothers and sisters in Africa. We can use these resources to support ongoing efforts of Africans to address life-threatening

epidemics impacting their communities such as hunger, violence, and lack of access to medical treatment. We, like Joseph, have an opportunity to use our circumstances to save many lives.

### **Concluding Reflections: Homecoming**

As I prepared for my first trip to Africa, I was somewhat anxious because I did not know how I, as one of three African Americans in a group of seventeen, would be received by the Zambians. When our hosts greeted me, they did so by saying, “Welcome home.” Zambians in stores or on the street assumed I was African and were often surprised to discover that I was from the United States. However, no one ever treated me poorly after discovering my nationality. In fact, they affirmed me by telling me that I had roots in Africa, even if I could not identify them. This trip was a homecoming, and coming home was healing. This experience is captured in the following journal excerpts:

Thursday, May 14, 2009, 11:36 p.m.

I feel like somehow...when my feet touched African soil, my ancestors gave a sigh of relief...because they'd believed for generations that God would one day bring them home—whether in person or through their descendants.

So my soul rejoices because my ancestors rejoiced...and we rejoice together, celebrating God's goodness and faithfulness.

Sunday, May 17, 2009; 5:20 p.m.

...I am here because a kidnapped African survived the Middle Passage...and their descendants survived slavery, Jim Crow, etc. And when I come home to Africa...somewhere, the family of that kidnapped African will know that God kept them—because I stand here today.

While my time in Zambia amplified my feelings of loss, it simultaneously brought a sense of peace and belonging as I looked into the faces of Zambians and saw the faces of my friends and family members from home. The welcome I received in Africa heightened my awareness of the broken relationship between Africans and African Americans in the United States. My relationships with the Zambians helped me realize the need for a more communal reconciliation.

As African Americans are reconciled with our African brothers and sisters, we will experience healing in our communities, enabling us to more fully live out Jesus's command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

This process will also provide needed healing to Africans, just as Joseph's family needed and received healing. As both groups move toward the hard and healing work of reconciliation, as the two brothers are reunited, we will be strengthened for the redemptive work of "saving many lives," impacting generations to come.

## **Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21: Paul’s Call to True Citizenship and to *Gaman***

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**I**t does not require an election year for questions of church and state to emerge in political and religious discourse. Everyone, it seems, has a differing opinion on same-sex marriage, abortion, immigration, health care, social welfare, taxes, and war. In a properly functioning democracy such discourse, dialogue, and dissent are to be expected, indeed, welcomed. The questions become more complicated, however, when clearly oppressive policies are implemented and unjust wars initiated. How are the Christian and the church to respond to the state in the face of such political realities?

A lack of imagination begets a lack of adequate responses. And such lack of imagination is far too often shaped by narrow and binary approaches to Romans 13:1–7—Paul’s only explicit instruction on the relationship between the church and state. The history of interpretation of Paul’s instruction on the relationship between the churches and the governing authorities in Rome is vast and divided. Unfortunately, this division can easily reduce Paul’s teaching to an “if you’re not for me, you’re against me” political ethic. In other words, when it comes to the proper stance a Christian should hold toward the state, biblical interpreters and political theologians argue either that Paul advocates accommodation, cooperation, and assimilation or that Paul is a counter-imperialist who advocates resistance and disobedience.

In this paper, I will revisit Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21 through the lens of Japanese American internment in American concentration camps. This will involve my entering, as an outsider, into the

history, literature, and art of Japanese Americans during World War II, and, in light of their experience, offering a new way to read and interpret these texts. Such a reading reveals the inadequacy of the unimaginative and binary categories of assimilation/resistance and cooperation/disobedience. Rather, through the literature, art, and stories of Japanese Americans, we are able to find a fresh reading of Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21 in which citizenship in heaven enables submission on earth, which in turn empowers hope-filled resistance rooted in love of neighbor.

### **Japanese-American Internment: History, Literature, Silence, and Art**

“You do not belong in this country. You are not an American.”<sup>1</sup> These words, directed toward Fred Korematsu, a Japanese American living in the United States at the inception of World War II, capture the external racism and the internal struggle for identity endured by one community on the sole basis of race and ethnicity. This racism and fear became institutionalized in the unjust policy of Executive Order 9066, which permitted the internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans in camps throughout the western United States. Signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, Executive Order 9066 read, “I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, and the Military Commanders, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded.”<sup>2</sup> A superficial reading of this order identifies “any or all persons” as anyone deemed a threat to national security. In actuality, the policy was directed toward “alien enemies”<sup>3</sup> of Japanese ancestry and resulted in the imprisonment of nearly 120,000 Japanese and Japanese American individuals, many of whom were American citizens by birth.<sup>4</sup>

In the face of such injustice, how were Japanese Americans to pursue

1. Eric Paul Fournier, *Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story*, DVD, directed by Erik Paul Fournier (New Video Group, 2006).

2. Franklin Roosevelt, “Executive Order 9066,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=74&page=transcript>.

3. Roosevelt, “Executive Order 9066.”

4. Frank M. Yamada, “What Does Manzanar Have to Do with Eden? A Japanese American Interpretation of Genesis 2–3,” in *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, eds. Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, SBL Semeia Studies 57 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 103.

justice, affirm human dignity, and preserve their ethnic identity? These questions created significant divisions within the camps between the various Japanese American communities and generations.<sup>5</sup> Some, such as the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), opposed any challenge to the military orders and considered the best response for survival to be full cooperation with and commitment to the United States.<sup>6</sup> Others pursued political action and believed resistance was the most appropriate response.<sup>7</sup>

The tension between compliance and disobedience only intensified when the War Relocation Authority (WRA, the civilian agency responsible for detention and relocation) introduced the misguided and ill-advised loyalty registration process in early 1943.<sup>8</sup> An effort to prepare Japanese American internees for resettlement, the WRA loyalty program was intended to strengthen American perceptions of Japanese loyalty and to mitigate anti-Japanese racism.<sup>9</sup> The loyalty program consisted of two parts: (1) a questionnaire directed toward Issei (first-generation) and Nisei (second-generation) men and women to record each person's attitude toward the United States and (2) the planned creation of an all-Nisei combat team to fight in Europe.<sup>10</sup> Questions 27 and 28 on one questionnaire asked, "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?"<sup>11</sup>

Among the Issei, the questionnaire and registration process were met with great resistance and, ultimately, silence (cf. n. 9). For the Nisei, how-

5. Yamada, "What Does Manzanar Have to Do with Eden?", 103.

6. Fournier, *Of Civil Wrongs and Rights*.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Daisuke Kitigawa, *Issei and Nisei: The Internment Years* (New York: Seabury, 1967), 115.

9. Kitigawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 119.

10. *Ibid.*, 116.

11. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 397. In his "collective autobiography of the Japanese American community," Daisuke Kitigawa records Question 28 as two separate questions: "a) Do you pledge your loyalty to the government of the United States and promise to abide by the laws of this country?; b) Do you forswear your allegiance to the Emperor of Japan?" While many Issei were willing to answer yes to the first question, they could not answer yes to the second question as long as the United States prohibited Asians from applying to be naturalized as United States citizens. For them to answer yes would render them "a people without a country" (Kitigawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 117).

ever, there emerged essentially two ways to preserve their ethnic identity. One option was to be a “no-no boy” and refuse service in the United States Armed Forces—due to the denial of their rights as citizens—and forswear any allegiance to Japan, to which they had no official citizenry relationship.<sup>12</sup> The second option was to prove their loyalty to the United States through valiant service in the military.<sup>13</sup> Those who refused military service were eventually prosecuted as draft resisters, convicted of draft evasion, and sentenced to three years in federal prison.<sup>14</sup> Although President Truman signed a pardon in 1947 for all draft resisters, the no-no boys were shunned by much of the Japanese American community; indeed, the JAACL did not offer an official apology for its opposition to the draft resisters until 2002.<sup>15</sup>

This painful story of disagreement and conflict over Japanese American ethnic identity, loyalty, and citizenship is well told in John Okada’s novel *No-No Boy*. Indeed, it is through the main character’s experience of identity and citizenship that he, and we, gain a third lens through which to view loyalty, breaking down the overly simplistic categories of obedience and disobedience. Ichiro Yamada, Okada’s protagonist, is a no-no boy. The story begins upon Ichiro’s return to his hometown of Seattle after two years in prison for draft evasion. From the start we are confronted with the reality of Ichiro’s pain and isolation through the words of an old neighbor, fellow Japanese American and Army veteran, Eto Minato. A barroom conversation that begins with, “Hey, Itchy”—Ichiro’s nickname—quickly turns into: “No-no boy, huh? Rotten, no-good bastard Jap! Go back to Tokyo, boy.”<sup>16</sup>

There is great power in naming and being named, for names convey identity, which offers a sense of power—or in Ichiro’s case, a sense of powerlessness.<sup>17</sup> For Japanese and Japanese Americans, one’s reputation,

12. Fumitaka Matsuoka, “Creating Community Amidst the Memories of Historic Injuries,” in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*, eds. Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazar S. Fernandez (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 35.

13. Matsuoka, “Creating Community,” 36. Matsuoka notes that from their service in the European theater during World War II, the all-Nisei 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team earned the most distinguished medals in the history of the United States military.

14. Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 213.

15. Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy*, 214.

16. John Okada, *No-No Boy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 3–5.

17. Peter Yuichi Clark, “Biblical Themes for Pastoral Care Revisited: An Asian American Rereading of a Classical Pastoral Care Text,” in *Semeia 90/91: The Bible in Asian*

relationships with community and family, respect, honor, and shame all coalesce in a name.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Ichiro's struggle for his own identity is a struggle to know his own name, to know to what or to whom he belongs. Gazing at his mother, Ichiro laments to himself, "It is not enough to be American only in the eyes of the law and it is not enough to be only half an American and know that it is an empty half. I am not your son and I am not Japanese and I am not American."<sup>19</sup> For Ichiro his name was not Itchy, Yamada, Jap, or American; his name was essentially no name at all, merely No-No Boy.

Ichiro's words not only illumine his struggle to know his own name but the way this struggle is rooted in the meaning of loyalty. Shaped by Confucian teachings, Japanese and Japanese Americans place a high value on filial piety: the needs of the family always supersede individual needs.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, filial piety is embedded within an understanding of the state as a paternalistic institution with the emperor as the common father.<sup>21</sup> In Japanese tradition, loyalty is not an individual free choice, but predetermined: to be Japanese is to be loyal to Japan.<sup>22</sup> With this context in mind, Ichiro's refusal to serve in the armed forces begins to make sense. For Ichiro, the judge's refusal to move his parents to the same camp only underscored the travesty of injustice inflicted upon thousands of good American families. Therefore, Ichiro refused military service, and the judge "who supposedly represents justice"<sup>23</sup> sent Ichiro to jail. According to the judge, racist America, the "loyal" Nisei, and Ichiro himself, Ichiro's loyalty to his parents and the *ideal* of the real country to which he belonged was nothing less than disloyalty.

It is through Ichiro's interaction with a Mr. Carrick that he eventually realizes that despite his disobedience he is indeed a citizen of the true America and not an America that would set in place such unjust demands. In the course of a job interview at an engineering office, Ichiro mentions he is not a veteran. Assuming the interview is over, Ichiro instead captures

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*America*, eds. Tat-siong Benny Liew and Gale A. Yee (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2002), 299; reprinted in *Pastoral Psychology* 54, No. 4 (2006): 355–76.

18. *Ibid.*, 300.

19. Okada, *No-No Boy*, 16.

20. Deborah Hearn Gin, "Asian American Ethnic/Racial Identity Development," in *Asian American Christianity Reader*, eds. Viji Nakka-Cammauf and Timothy Tseng (Castro Valley, CA: Pacific Asian American & Canadian Christian Education Project and the Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity, 2009), 188.

21. Kitigawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 120.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Okada, *No-No Boy*, 31.



a glimpse of “the real nature of the country against which he had almost fully turned his back.”<sup>24</sup>

“‘I am sorry, Ichiro,’ he [Mr. Carrick] said, ‘sorry for you and for the causes behind the reasons which made you do what you did. It wasn’t your fault, really. You know that, don’t you? . . . You mustn’t blame yourself.’”<sup>25</sup>

In the face of historical injuries, remembering rightly the pain of alienation and oppression is a necessary step toward the restoration of one’s communal identity rooted in human dignity.<sup>26</sup> In Mr. Carrick’s genuine apology and acknowledgment of Ichiro’s pain and struggle, Ichiro found “someone who cared” and “who understood the suffering of the weak.”<sup>27</sup> In Mr. Carrick’s apology, Ichiro heard his name again for the first time, and realized his own country’s “mistake was no less unforgiveable than his own.”<sup>28</sup> All along, Ichiro had been questioning his loyalty as a citizen of the wrong America, one that would unjustly imprison and demand recognition from those it would not recognize. His name, Ichiro, could be associated with the *true* America, and he had indeed been a citizen of and loyal to *this* America. In this realization, Ichiro found new life. And in new life Ichiro resolved, knowing full well healing and reconciliation remained far off, that he had “to love the world the way I used to. . . . to love it and the people so I’ll feel good, and feeling good will make life worth while.”<sup>29</sup>

In Okada’s *No-No Boy*, we find the categories of cooperation versus disloyalty insufficient, that Nisei disobedience does not necessarily mean disloyalty when viewed through the lens of true citizenship. In a similar fashion, through Japanese American art from the internment camps we find the use of silence to be a form of resistance, a way to maintain Japanese ethnic identity.<sup>30</sup> Through drama, song, poetry, dance, bonsai, rock gardens, sumo, and judo, the Issei and Nisei expressed their fundamental virtues of perseverance, loyalty, forbearance, and sacrifice for the common good, and in so doing resisted normalization or Americanization.<sup>31</sup> One

24. Ibid., 153-4.

25. Ibid., 152.

26. Matsuoka, “Creating Community,” 37.

27. Okada, *No-No Boy*, 153.

28. Ibid., 154.

29. Ibid.

30. Gary Y. Okihiro, “Religion and Resistance in America’s Concentration Camps,” in *Readings in American Religious Diversity*, eds. Jon R. Stone and Carlos R. Piar (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 2007), 507.

31. Okihiro, “Religion and Resistance,” 506.

Japanese virtue, pervasive in the artwork of Japanese American internment and requiring further reflection, is the virtue of *gaman*.

The Japanese word *gaman* means “enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity.”<sup>32</sup> Living in horse stalls, surrounded by barbed wire, and guarded by soldiers, the Issei and Nisei persevered and resisted; the simple yet beautiful objects they made are a testimony to “the art of *gaman*.”<sup>33</sup> One series of watercolor paintings and a painted woodcarving depict the barracks, guard towers, and factories in the camps; notably absent, however, are any people. One artist explained, “I felt that this was simply no place for people to be living.”<sup>34</sup> Subtly, but not silently, the art of *gaman* affirmed the human dignity of the imprisoned Issei and Nisei—of the powerless and the oppressed—by proclaiming loudly, “We do not belong here!” The art of *gaman* also “silently” affirmed the human dignity of the voiceless through its portrayal of beauty, creativity, and the value of work. For example, the internees painstakingly crafted incredibly beautiful and detailed brooches and corsages from tiny shells dug out of dry lakebeds.<sup>35</sup> With paint, scrap, and found materials transformed into art, the interned refused to believe the accusers’ lies that being Japanese required normalization. In silent resistance, all these artists offered their accuser the tunics and cloaks of thousands of Japanese and Japanese Americans (cf. Matthew 5:4). Indeed, they were a people who declared that any cooperation or silence that fails to affirm human dignity is not *gaman*.

On a superficial level, the image of quiet and submissive Japanese and Japanese Americans in American internment camps portrays accommodation, cooperation, and assimilation. Similarly, the image of no-no boys refusing to serve in the armed forces depicts disobedience and disloyalty. However, the history, literature, and art of the Issei and Nisei offer us a deeper and far more complex perspective; namely, loyalty and true citizenship often resemble disloyalty, and silence and submission can reflect protest, resistance, solidarity, and self-preservation. In light of the inadequacy of binary categories to describe the experience of interned

32. Delphine Hirasuna, *The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps 1942-1946* (Berkeley: Ten Speed, 2005), opposite cover page.

33. *Ibid.*, 7.

34. *Ibid.*, 95, 100.

35. For examples, see Hirasuna, *The Art of Gaman* and “The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps, 1942-1946,” an online exhibit of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, <http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/gaman>.

Japanese and Japanese Americans, let us now turn to Paul's teaching in Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21.

### **Romans 13 and Philippians 3: Citizenship and Submission Reimagined in Christ**

Paul's teachings in Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21 have long presented difficulties for biblical interpreters. On the one hand, in Romans 13:1–7—dubbed by one scholar “the Achilles’ heel for all anti-imperial readings of Paul”<sup>36</sup>—Paul appears to offer a full endorsement of the Roman governing authorities as servants appointed by God.<sup>37</sup> In Philippians 3:17–21, on the other hand, Paul disregards Roman citizenship, offers a scathing critique of worldly power and ethos, and affirms the eschatological hope of Christ's reign and coming salvation.<sup>38</sup> Similar to the overly simplified images of interned Japanese Americans, we can too easily and falsely depict Paul's teachings in Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21 as either a submissive endorsement of the state or a call to heavenly citizenship that refuses to acknowledge earthly political structures. Rejecting these binary categories and drawing upon the themes of true citizenship and *gaman*, I argue that Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21 cohere in a profound call to the church to find its true citizenship in heaven. This heavenly citizenship enables submission on earth—a submission rooted firmly in Christ—which empowers hope-filled resistance to the unjust ways of this world through love of neighbor.

Before developing the thematic links between the experience of Japanese American internment and Paul's teachings in Romans and Philippians, it is necessary to root our two passages in their historical contexts. The book of Romans was written sometime between 57 and 59 CE in the midst of the relatively peaceful initial five years of Emperor Nero's reign.<sup>39</sup> Fresh in Paul's memory and that of the Christian community in Rome, however, would have been the expulsions of Jews from Rome under Tiberius in 19 CE and Claudius from 41 to 54 CE.<sup>40</sup> Given the return of Jews and Jewish Christians to Rome during the start of Nero's

36. Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 36.

37. Richard J. Cassidy, *Paul in Chains: Roman Imprisonment and the Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 27.

38. *Ibid.*, 191.

39. *Ibid.*, 26.

40. *Ibid.*, 24.

reign,<sup>41</sup> part of the rationale for Paul's letter to the churches in Rome was to care for this small community of Jews and Gentiles in the midst of external dangers or conflicts that could potentially threaten the community itself.<sup>42</sup> Some scholars suggest that Paul's concern for the relationship between the churches and civil authorities in Romans 13 was due to the presence of enthusiasts proclaiming freedom from human structures (e.g., Ernst Käsemann<sup>43</sup>), agitation, and dissension incited by Jewish nationalists (e.g., Marcus Borg<sup>44</sup>), or a disturbance over taxes as noted by Tacitus (*Annals* 13.50) and Suetonius (*Nero* 10).<sup>45</sup> While Paul's ultimate rationale remains uncertain, it is important to highlight that, despite the relative peace early in Nero's reign, the socio-political context of Romans 13 was not that of an empire that debated with its citizens what constituted good citizenship. Rather, obedience and submission were demanded, and the political and governing authorities of the day were more than willing to subjugate and exploit the population for their own purposes.<sup>46</sup>

Paul's letter to the Christians in Philippi was written around 60–61 CE while Paul was imprisoned, likely in Rome.<sup>47</sup> The city of Philippi held the unique status of being a colony of the Roman Empire, a source of pride but also of potential conflict for the Christians living there.<sup>48</sup> The physical geography of Philippi was patterned after Rome, and those who lived in Philippi were highly Romanized.<sup>49</sup> Beyond these limited facts, much of the historical context of Philippians remains the subject of great disagreement (e.g., the identity of Paul's opponents throughout

41. Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 305.

42. Arnold T. Monera, "The Christian's Relationship to the State According to the New Testament: Conformity or Non-Conformity?" *Asia Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (2005): 111.

43. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 352.

44. Marcus Borg, "A New Context for Romans XIII," *New Testament Studies* 19 (1972): 205–18.

45. William R. Herzog II, "Dissembling, a Weapon of the Weak: The Case of Christ and Caesar in Mark 12:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 21, no. 4 (1994): 351–52.

46. Herzog, "Dissembling," 340–41.

47. Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd. ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 1.

48. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, rev. ed., (New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 363.

49. Cassidy, *Paul in Chains*, 191.

the letter and the sequence of events surrounding its writing).<sup>50</sup> What can be gathered from the letter itself is that the church in Philippi was facing opposition and suffering for the sake of the gospel (Philippians 1:29).<sup>51</sup> In light of this persecution, Paul invites the church in Philippi to discipleship marked by the suffering of the cross (Philippians 1:27–30, 2:5–11, and 3:8–10)<sup>52</sup> and grounded in the heavenly reality of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Philippians 3:20).<sup>53</sup>

The parallels of the historical contexts between Romans and Philippians are strong. Both are letters written to churches living at epicenters of Roman power and the imperial cult. Furthermore, neither of these Christian communities sat in positions of political power or influence.<sup>54</sup> Given this degree of asymmetrical power relations, the primary problem scholars identify with Paul's teaching in Romans is his failure to acknowledge the potential for unjust authorities.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, from these parallel socio-political contexts, it is important to see that Paul is not offering an ethical assessment of the Roman Empire or its governing authorities; rather, Paul's instruction in both letters is a message for the church. Romans 13:1–7 is embedded within the context of Paul's call to a spiritual worship made manifest through love within the community itself and toward the state (Romans 12:1–13:14).<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Philippians 3:17–21 draws upon Paul's earlier imitation language in Philippians 2:5–11 and 3:2–15 to call the church to follow Christ's (and Paul's) example of self-giving love, and to do so in their present reality of persecution and suffering based on the heavenly reality of Christ as King and Savior. Therefore, in Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21, Paul is seeking the welfare of these Christian communities by calling the church to bear witness to the reign of Christ as communities defined by and rooted in love.

In light of the historical context of Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians

50. Silva, *Philippians*, 8.

51. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 363.

52. *Ibid.*, 363.

53. Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 461.

54. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Word Books: Dallas, 1988), 770.

55. Herzog, "Dissembling," 354.

56. Jonathan A. Draper, "'Humble Submission to Almighty God' and Its Biblical Foundation: Contextual Exegesis of Romans 13:1–7," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 63 (June 1, 1988): 35.

3:17–21, it is possible to sketch relevant parallels between the Christians in Rome and Philippi and the Japanese and Japanese American Christians imprisoned by the United States during World War II. Just as Paul would not see any potential for the small communities in Rome and Philippi to shape the policies of the Roman Empire, so too were the Japanese and Japanese American Christians powerless in the face of the injustice of Executive Order 9066. Any resistance to the military orders, from breaking curfew to refusal to evacuate their homes or refusing military service, was met with prosecution, imprisonment, and isolation. Furthermore, Paul's concern over disunity within the churches in Rome and Philippi underlies his call to love, peace, and joy.<sup>57</sup> In a similar way, perceptions of Christianity as pro-American threatened the identity and solidarity of the Japanese American Christian community. Deemed traitors, many Japanese and Japanese American Christians were humiliated and intimidated by the larger non-Christian Issei and Nisei communities, and it resulted in many leaving the church for Shintoism and Buddhism, both seen as pro-Japanese.<sup>58</sup>

Given these contextual parallels, the themes developed earlier of true citizenship and *gaman* serve as helpful lenses for understanding Paul's reminder that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20) and his admonition that "every person be subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1). The word translated "citizenship" in Philippians 3:20 is the Greek word *politeuma*, and it appears only here in the New Testament. *Politeuma* may be translated as "commonwealth" or "state." O'Brien emphasizes the dynamic sense of *politeuma*, similar to the sense of *basileia* as "reign" rather than "kingdom."<sup>59</sup> Given Philippi's pride as a Roman colony, O'Brien argues that Paul is reminding the Philippians that they belong to a heavenly commonwealth, and their lives were to reflect this heavenly reality.<sup>60</sup> While emphasizing the active sense of *politeuma* is helpful, O'Brien's translation, "commonwealth," deemphasizes the *status* that belonging to such a commonwealth offers—namely, the Philippians were *citizens*, a community tied to a true heavenly place with full rights dependent on Jesus as Savior and Lord.<sup>61</sup> In the story of *No-No Boy*, true

57. N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 79.

58. Okihiro, "Religion and Resistance," 502.

59. O'Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 460.

60. *Ibid.*, 461.

61. Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, Vol 3, trans. and ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 131.

citizenship for Ichiro was not tied to his disloyalty to the unjust political structures that failed to recognize him. Rather, true citizenship for Ichiro was rooted in his belonging to a true, just, and compassionate America. It was in this reality that Ichiro found freedom and hope to love; the status of true citizenship enabled the activity of true citizenship. Ultimately, the problem for Ichiro—and for us—is that no earthly power or governing authority is always true, just, and compassionate in every way and for all time. Paul’s reminder to the Philippians is a reminder of this very reality, and yet, it is a reminder for the church rooted in hope. Christians do indeed belong to a true and just kingdom; therefore, the church bears full rights to love and serve one another (Romans 12:9, 13:8; Galatians 5:13; Philippians 2:1–11) fully submitted to Jesus as Savior and Lord who has the power “to subject all things to himself” (Philippians 3:21).

From Philippians 3:20–21, we find that our true citizenship is not contingent on the just or unjust character of particular governing authorities but, rather, is founded upon the eschatological reality of Christ’s reign as sovereign over all things. Submitted to Christ as King, then, Paul admonishes the church in Rome “to be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1).<sup>62</sup> The verb here is passive (*hypotassesthō*): Paul calls the church to recognize and accept the social realities ordered by God.<sup>63</sup> By contrast, to resist (*antitassomai*) the authorities, refers to embracing a posture that rejects the right of the government to exercise authority.<sup>64</sup> Neither posture is to be confused with obedience or disobedience. Furthermore, the kind of resistance Paul rejects is not to be confused with a hope-filled resistance rooted in the reality of Christ’s kingdom. Faithful submission and hope-filled resistance acknowledge the state’s authority and can even accept the just or unjust consequences of such resistance, yet resist still by bearing witness to the present and future reality of Christ’s kingdom.

This call to faithful submission and hope-filled resistance, especially

62. While the immediate context of Romans 13:1–7 is not explicitly eschatological (Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 762), the broader context of Romans 12:1–13:14 is bracketed by two explicitly eschatological texts, Romans 12:2 and 13:11–14 (Monera, “The Christian’s Relationship to the State According to the New Testament,” 112). I do not question that Paul’s theological framework through the entirety of his teaching to the church in Romans 12 and 13 is eschatological; nor do I doubt that the church in Rome would have heard in the background of Romans 13:1–7 that God is King.

63. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 761.

64. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 799.

in light of unjust powers, can be communicated in a way that is oppressive, even destructive. However, acknowledging that Christ is the true King—to whom the church belongs and from whom the church derives its name—enables the church to reimagine submission, resistance, and the church's cruciform identity through the lens of Japanese *gaman*, “to endure the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity.” Far from passive silence, a call to Christian *gaman* is a call for the church through worship to “discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). A call to Christian *gaman* is to affirm human dignity, for all women and men are created in the image of God. A call to Christian *gaman* is to reject *shikataganiania* or “it cannot be helped,”<sup>65</sup> and practice truth-telling, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration through the power of God's indwelling Spirit in light of an eschatological vision of the kingdom of God. Finally, a call to Christian *gaman* is a call to pursue this eschatological kingdom to which the church belongs through love of neighbor and enemy, for the kingdom of God cannot come through violence, vengeance, or hatred (Romans 12:9-21).<sup>66</sup> In the face of injustice, Paul calls the church to *gaman*, “to be subject to the governing authorities,” for in submission Paul is creating the space within which the church can “meaningfully dwell”<sup>67</sup> and practice hope-filled resistance by rejecting lies, affirming human dignity, and pursuing *shalom* through love of neighbor.

“Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States?” “Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America?” Trusting Christ as King, to whom one belongs and with whom all allegiances rest, the Christian is invited to heavenly citizenship and, in the face of such injustice, to *gaman* in a community submitted to Christ and rooted in worship. In this hope-filled space, a new community is reformed and reimaged—a community in which the gospel is proclaimed, the idolatries of fear and power are rejected, and worship is expressed through the love of neighbor as oneself.<sup>68</sup> May the church be reminded of our

65. Hirasuna, *Art of Gaman*, 7.

66. Wright, *Paul*, 79.

67. John W. Marshall, “Hybridity and Reading Romans 13,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31, no. 2 (2008): 172.

68. Monya A. Stubbs, “Subjection, Reflection, Resistance: An African American Reading of the Three-Dimensional Process of Empowerment in Romans 13 and the Free-Market Economy,” in *Navigating Romans Through Cultures: Challenging Readings by Charting a New Course*, ed. Yeo Khiok-khng (K.K.) (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 190.



true citizenship in heaven and call to *gaman* “to the glory of and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11), “through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Romans 16:17).

### Reflection on *Gaman* Today

In this paper, I sought to enter, as an outsider, into the history, art, and experience of Japanese Americans and of their internment during World War II by the United States government. I also sought to reread Romans 13:1–7 and Philippians 3:17–21 through the lens of that history and art. The fruit of this exercise is not simply a fresh reading of these texts offered as advice to other marginalized and oppressed peoples. Rather, fruit is yielded when I stop reading as an *outsider*, and read as one who learns from, reimagines with, and serves alongside those who are marginalized and oppressed.

One issue that demands such movement currently is immigration. What does it look like to be a citizen of Christ’s kingdom *and* be submitted to the governing authorities of the United States in the face of the ongoing crisis of undocumented workers, families, and children in our cities? Are the categories of legal/illegal, loyal/disloyal, secure borders/amnesty, obedient/disobedient, or American/anti-American sufficient? When it comes to the treatment of undocumented workers on our farms or construction sites, what does it look like to reimagine submission and resistance in light of the cruciform identity of the church? Do we demand and establish just labor practices at the cost of higher priced goods? What do submission and resistance look like in the tension between the deportation of parents and the well-being of children? Do church leaders transform parishes into safe houses at the risk of arrest or imprisonment? What do submission and resistance look like when so much of this conversation is driven by fear of the “other” while clinging to the illusion of power and order?

We may not come to identical answers, yet we must ask these questions. We may not agree on the practical pursuit of submission and resistance in the case of United States immigration.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, I submit that the invitation to *gaman* alongside our “alien” neighbors—much like our “alien enemies”—challenges us to reimagine a hope-filled space where the gospel is proclaimed and confessed, where the idolatries of fear and

69. For a basic overview of Christian responses to the United States immigration crisis, see M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013) and Hauna Ondrey, “The U.S. Church and the Immigrant: A Survey of Ecclesial Response,” *Covenant Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2008): 19–36.

power are rejected, and where *shalom* is sought through sacrificial love of neighbor. May we truly be a people of *gaman* who walk alongside each other in the way of the cross and the power of the resurrection!

# The One and the Many: What Can Be Learned from a Black Hermeneutic

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**H**ow can unity be conceived amid the diversity of creation? What is the ground of unity, and how does one recognize it? To what extent is there room for diversity? This ancient problem of the one and the many extends even to the church of Jesus Christ. We encounter a ground for the unity of the church in Ephesians 4:4–6 (ESV), “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” Concurrently, the biblical text provides a ground for the integrity of individuals who make up the church, the many, in the body imagery of 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 (ESV), “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” In this same chapter Paul warns that division in the body is harmful; if one part does not function or is disregarded by other members, the whole body suffers (12:22–26).

We might apply Paul’s body imagery to individual churches (the many) comprising the one church of Jesus Christ (the whole). For the purposes of this reflection, I consider churches sharing a particular racial or ethnic heritage as together forming one part of the larger body of the universal

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church. If the contribution of this part is not accepted, or is too quickly assumed to be non-essential, then the church as a whole suffers. Though many areas could be analyzed under this question of the one church and its many members, the focus of this article is on the potential contribution of black hermeneutics to the church.

To further set the stage, I will borrow from the North African bishop Augustine of Hippo (d. 430 CE). In his classic work, *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine delineates the twofold task of biblical hermeneutics: “There are two things which all treatment of the scriptures is aiming at: a way to discover what needs to be understood, and a way to put across to others what has been understood.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the pastor or teacher must first understand the text’s message and, second, determine the most effective means of communicating this message to a specific audience. Thus, for Augustine the task of biblical hermeneutics has not been accomplished until the message has been communicated clearly. This entails the art of rhetoric, or persuasion.

The art of rhetoric bridges the *content* of Scripture and the *context* in which its content is communicated. Effective communication of Scripture’s message, then, requires an awareness of the sociocultural, political, economic, and religious context of one’s audience. Wrong analysis of these settings will negatively affect the discovery of the text’s meaning, its communication to the church, and its reception. The interpreter of Scripture is also shaped by a sociocultural, political, economic, and religious milieu. For this reason the hope of accomplishing the hermeneutical task depends ultimately on the entire church studying and proclaiming together. If one part is missing or rendered inoperative, the entire process is compromised.

To put it differently, the task of biblical interpretation extends beyond the study of Scripture to include cultural hermeneutics. To employ the definition of Elizabeth Sung, cultural hermeneutics is “the theory, theology, and practice of interpreting cultural (and social) systems.”<sup>2</sup> This type of study is necessarily interdisciplinary, requiring the perspectives of multiple investigators. As in the church, limited voices risk limited conclusions.

Within this article I seek to demonstrate how a black hermeneutic can contribute not only to the particular life and ministry of the black church but also to the one church wherever it is found. I draw from the

1. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 1.1.1.

2. Email to author, February 1, 2015.

disciplines of black and womanist theology, both of which stress “the black experience” as a unique starting point for biblical interpretation and theology. Elsewhere I have provided the following description of the black experience:

There are a number of aspects that make up the black experience, including stories, tales, and sayings of African Americans that have developed as they have endured existence in a racist society. These expressions of life may also be in the form of songs, poems, narratives, and music. The black experience is about uncovering reasons to affirm African American personhood, culture, and values when much in the surrounding sociocultural setting undervalues such manifestations. These positive affirmations contribute to the development of communal structures that keep members of the community from despair and inactivity.<sup>3</sup>

It is this realm of experience that gives rise to a black hermeneutic. Womanist theology engages in critical reflection on the distinct experience of black women. While acknowledging the co-experience of racism with black men, Jacquelyn Grant insists that sexism “has a reality and significance of its own because it represents that peculiar form of oppression suffered by Black women at the hands of Black men.”<sup>4</sup>

In affirming black experience as fertile ground for a black hermeneutic, there must be additionally a means of evaluating this “experience” itself. At this juncture, I will only mention two critical elements that can provide an evaluative lens for “experience” while also recognizing it as a valid contributor to the church’s biblical instruction and application. These are the Scriptures and the theological formulations of the church constructed over centuries of life and ministry. I will have more to say below on the contribution of the historic church. Incorporating these two foundational elements, we can confirm the specificity of James H. Evans’s claim that “The sources of African-American theological affirmations are the Bible, the traditions of African-American worshipping congrega-

3. Bruce L. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology: Three Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 16.

4. “Black Theology and Black Women,” in James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 422.

tions, African-American culture, and the African-American worldview.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, a black church possesses a richness that need not always assume a strict “hermeneutic of suspicion,” as voiced by British black theologian Anthony G. Reddie. For Reddie the black interpreter must “read the Bible in an ideological way, looking with suspicion and thinking critically at how the power relations and structures are in evidence in the text.”<sup>6</sup> To do so, the reader interrogates the text with questions such as, “Who has power in this story?” “Who is disadvantaged?” “Who benefits or who loses out?” and “How is God’s liberative presence displayed in the text?”<sup>7</sup> A black hermeneutic should draw from some of Reddie’s concerns, but if too suspicious of all particulars in Scripture, it may blunt Scripture’s capacity to evaluate “experience,” and thus threaten the hermeneutical task for which this experience comprises one source. Against the backdrop of a potentially distorted hermeneutic, the black church, itself, would be hindered in its ministerial task as Augustine counseled centuries ago:

The interpreter and teacher of the divine scriptures, therefore, the defender of right faith and the hammer of error, has the duty of both teaching what is good and unteaching what is bad; in this task of speaking it is his duty to win over the hostile, to stir up the slack, to point out to the ignorant what is at stake and what they ought to be looking for.<sup>8</sup>

### **What Can Be Learned from a Black Hermeneutic?**

A black hermeneutic is a construct of slave narratives, sermons, songs, and the voices of countless faithful believers in the Lord Jesus Christ trying to make sense of Scripture and God’s action in their lives amid various forms of oppression. A black hermeneutic, then, is not only a way of reading and communicating the messages of the Bible; it is also a way of interpreting the complexities of life. It is interpreting a life full of joy and sorrow, of faith in God and times of doubt and darkness. Scripture is then interpreted and communicated through this interpretation of life’s complexities. What can the church at large learn from this interpretation? I offer four suggestions.

5. James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 27.

6. Anthony G. Reddie, *Black Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 98–99.

7. Ibid.

8. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 4.4.6.

First, the church can benefit from the presumption of holism that characterizes a black hermeneutic, in both its reading of Scripture and life's multiplicity. The interconnectedness of the sacred and the secular is assumed: all aspects of life bear the marks of, and are subject to, the divine. Womanist thinkers are particularly helpful on this point. Delores Williams, incorporating Alice Walker's definition of "womanist," argues that a womanist is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female."<sup>9</sup> J. Deotis Roberts compares the holistic ministry of the black church to the Jewish synagogue:

The black church, like the synagogue, is the center of life for many black people. It nurtures and sustains them psychologically and spiritually. In some cases there is provision for food, shelter, and health. All the concerns for the nurture of the young—their education, talent, and skill development—are high priorities.<sup>10</sup>

Evans roots this sense of life's interconnectedness in the African influence on black Christianity, noting that it encompasses the spiritual realm: "The participation of the ancestors and the living dead in the life of the community, along with the supreme value placed on procreation and the birth of children, means that the community in African traditional thought is held together by the power of ancient memory and immediate anticipation."<sup>11</sup> Because all relationships are extremely important, all forms of oppression are resisted as violations of proper human relationship. Such oppression leads not only to the dehumanization of the oppressed but also to the desensitizing and dehumanization of the oppressor.

Because of life's interconnectedness, even early black theologians rejected a bifurcation between theology and politics that enabled white Christians to confess certain doctrines while denying or limiting their socio-political application. If, for example, one affirms that all human beings are made in the image of God, what then is the ground for denigrating the personhood and worth of another in order to maintain racially

9. Williams cites Walker's words from *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983) in "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices" in James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1980-1992* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 265.

10. J. Deotis Roberts, *The Prophethood of Black Believers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 29.

11. Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 144.

oriented socio-political constructs? The fiery abolitionist, David Walker, for example, would write about some southern preachers:

They think it is no harm to keep them in slavery and put the whip to them, and why cannot we do the same!—They being preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, if it were any harm, they would surely preach against their oppression and do their utmost to erase it from the country; not only in one or two cities, but one continual cry would be raised in all parts of this confederacy, and would cease only with the complete overthrow of the system of slavery, in every part of the country.<sup>12</sup>

Walker vehemently attacked such preachers because of the devastating inconsistency between what they preached concerning biblical truth in some areas while being culturally captivated in the matter of slavery.

Second, a black hermeneutic contributes to challenging the hermeneutical hegemony of the dominant academic culture. The recognition is now standard that exegetical skill does not prevent exegetes' socioculturally shaped priorities and values from influencing their interpretations. For this reason the contribution of minority biblical and theological scholars is critical for a fuller understanding of Scripture. In calling for this contribution, I am not diminishing interpretive practices foundational to dominant culture academic communities. Rather, I seek to advocate for the necessary presence—and not only presence, but voice—of scholars and pastors of multiple racial-ethnic backgrounds at the hermeneutical table. The term voice suggests respect, the genuine acknowledgment of possible contributions made to the discussions. One thinks here of Riggins R. Earl Jr.'s assessment that "Black protest theology dared challenge Whites' claim to know God apart from their ethnic others in the Black community."<sup>13</sup> This may be difficult for some members of the dominant culture to accept, but for the church's sake, such acceptance of minority voices is a matter worth considering with all sincerity. The desire to understand and communicate biblical truth as fully as possible should motivate careful attention to minority interpretations.

12. David Walker, "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Preachers of Religion" in *African American Religious History*, ed. Milton C. Sernett (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 196.

13. Riggins R. Earl, Jr., "Black Theology and the Year 2000" in *Black Theology*, Vol. 2, 54.



Cain Hope Felder notes that not only is the Sunday eleven o'clock hour still the most segregated hour in the United States, but that during this hour racial and ethnic groups bring God and Scripture into their preset, socializing structures.<sup>14</sup> Felder delivers a needed warning concerning the "valorization" of any racial/ethnic group above another, which engenders the "tendency to subvert the Bible's vision and authority."<sup>15</sup> Susan Sontag argues that the role of a black hermeneutic is twofold: to dismantle the world that undergirds American Christianity and to help African American Christians to see themselves as God sees them.<sup>16</sup> This "dismantling" is black hermeneutics' contribution to challenging the givenness of the dominant Christian culture's hermeneutic.

Third, the history of oppression that informs a black hermeneutic can highlight dissonance between faith claims and action, thus serving as a call to knowledge of God matched by obedience to his will. Take Scripture's teaching regarding humanity as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). The *imago Dei* is a ground of unity for all human beings, even while this humanity is manifested diversely in each human being, in the many. Regardless of the diverse manifestations of God's image among the many, as image-bearers all persons are of equal worth before God. Action consonant with this confession should be most evident in the church of Jesus Christ. To treat human beings as human beings, with respect and dignity, is one of the surest tests for authenticity of any faith claim.

Recall Frederick Douglass's scathing appraisal of Rigby Hopkins, a minister and slaveholder. After condemning the so-called "Christianity" of the slaveholders, Douglass exposes the utter hypocrisy of Hopkins, who never missed an opportunity to whip any slave who committed any small violation of his will.

And yet there was not a man anywhere round, who made higher professions of religion, or was more active in revivals,—more attentive to the class, love-feast, prayer and preaching meetings, or more devotional in his family—that prayed earlier, later, louder, and longer—than this same reverend slave-driver, Rigby Hopkins.<sup>17</sup>

14. Cain Hope Felder, "Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism and Biblical Interpretation," in *Black Theology*, Vol. 2, 186.

15. *Ibid.*, 187.

16. Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 23.

17. Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 1845.

It could be argued fairly that this extreme example is inappropriate to this paper precisely because it is so extreme. Such an egregious manifestation of dehumanization is more easily recognized and condemned. More insidious forms, however, often go unseen and unacknowledged. One may render the “other” invisible, for example, by working and acting as though a black person, or black people, were not present. A lack of personal address, lack of eye contact, an ignoring of presence can be every bit as dehumanizing as blatant hostility.

Fourth, intimately related to the third, is the need to embrace our divine imaging in all aspects of relationship building and maintenance. There have been, and still are many, who hold that the divine image in which we are made is largely the immaterial or spiritual dimension of our being. Augustine, for example, argued that the image “refers to the interior person, where reason and intellect reside.”<sup>18</sup> Augustine finds this further supported by the fact that humans walk upright: “This signifies that our mind ought to be raised up toward those things above it, that is, to eternal spiritual things. It is especially by reason of the mind that we understand that the human person was made to the image and likeness of God, as even the erect form of the body testifies.”<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas also located the image in a human being’s intellect or reason.<sup>20</sup> Karl Barth understood the image in terms of being able to have an “I-Thou” interaction between beings as indicated by the fact that both male and female were created in the *imago Dei*.<sup>21</sup> Other examples could be cited, but views range from an emphasis on the immaterial (mind, intellect) to functional interpretations of the image.<sup>22</sup>

While not dismissing these immaterial or functional understandings of the *imago Dei*, I want to insist on the *totality* of our being as constituting the image of God. This has two applications I want to flesh out because of their relevance to the black community and their impact on the effective ministry of the black church. The first application explores the significance of the body; the second addresses the communal implications of the *imago Dei*.

I begin with words Malcolm X still shouts through the printed page:

18. Augustine, *Against the Manichees*, 1.17.28.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Anthony Hoedema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 36.

21. *Ibid.*, 49.

22. See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 465-67.

Because those who oppress know that you can't make a person hate the root without making them hate the tree. You can't hate your own and not end up hating yourself. And since we all originated in Africa, you can't make us hate Africa without making us hate ourselves. And they did this very skillfully. And what was the result? They ended up with 22 million Black people here in America who hated everything about us that was African. We hated the African characteristics. We hated our hair. We hated our nose, the shape of our nose, and the shape of our lips, the color of our skin. Yes we did. And it was you who taught us to hate ourselves simply by shrewdly maneuvering us into hating the land of our forefathers and the people on that continent.<sup>23</sup>

Much has happened to cultivate the embrace of our "Africanisms," especially since the 1960s with Malcolm X and others advocating the embrace of our black bodies, as James Brown sang "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud." To this day, however, womanist theologians in particular speak of the need to embrace who we are and how we look. Many of us readily declare "Black is beautiful," but with a high Black on black crime rate, is there still a danger that a type of self-hatred may be in play still?

All human beings need to revisit the biblical truth that we are made in the image of God and our bodies are indeed precious and should be treasured in all their various shapes, sizes, and colors. As Evans reminds us, the spiritual life is always embodied: "The body is not a hindrance but a vehicle for the true expression of the spiritual. This spiritual essence is, for all practical purposes, inseparable from the body, because both make up the totality of the human person."<sup>24</sup>

Because we are made in God's image, we are communal beings. This should not be surprising because the God who made us subsists in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). Each of us needs others to become and do all that we are created to become and to do. Relationships are precious because we are designed to function in community. No one "makes it" on his or her own. To embrace our full humanity is to embrace others in community.

23. Malcolm X, "Not Just an American Problem, but a World Problem," in *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, ed. Bruce Perry (London: Owen, 1969), 166.

24. Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 101.

## What Can a Black Hermeneutic Learn?

Just as the church can learn from the contribution of a black hermeneutic, so too can that hermeneutic learn from the larger church. Already alert to the impact of the interpreter's situatedness, a black hermeneutic must engage in continuous scrutiny of its *own* hermeneutical lenses, pursuing means of accountability and self-evaluation. I here offer two potential sources for this self-evaluation. I call first for balance between the theoretical and the practical in biblical study and ministry, and second for fuller engagement with the Christian tradition.

Regarding the first, Evans uses the language of hermeneutical and praxiological balance. He warns against black religion neglecting either, retaining instead a commitment to holistic ministry:

On one side, the devaluation of the hermeneutical aspect can lead to a rampant anti-intellectualism in black religion that not only destroys its critical edge, but abandons its historic radical intellectual tradition. On the other side, a rejection of the praxiological aspect can lead to a dispassionate sterility in black religion that blunts its imaginative and emotive creativity.<sup>25</sup>

A black hermeneutic jeopardizes its potential to contribute to the church in general if it does not scrutinize Scripture both through its particular, experiential lens and with academic rigor that engages the larger academic community. This commitment to academic integrity cuts the ground under any who would dismiss as intellectually inferior studies engaging an explicitly black hermeneutic. Moreover, rigor in study will be increasingly required as members in the black churches become more educated and sophisticated in thought. At the same time, this hermeneutic must always be informed by the practicalities of ministry, attuned to a grass-roots understanding of people's day-to-day lives.

Additionally, a black hermeneutic—and the community for which and from which it arises—must continually give ear to the voices of Christian history. The early church fathers, for example, may be too quickly dismissed because of their inattention to oppression and dehumanization as understood by contemporary black and womanist thinkers. James Cone, for example, expresses concern that these ancient Christian leaders failed to recognize liberation as the essence of ethics for the God

25. *Ibid.*, 24.

of Scripture.<sup>26</sup> In support of this assertion, Cone offers Augustine's view of slavery, somewhat correctly identifying Augustine's conviction that "slavery was due to the sinfulness of slaves. Therefore he admonished 'slaves to be subject to their masters . . . ' serving 'them with a good-heart and a good will . . .'"<sup>27</sup> In *The City of God*, from which Cone's observation is derived, Augustine states: "The first cause of slavery, therefore, is sin, with the result that man is made subject to man by the bondage of this condition, which can only happen by the judgment of God, in whom there is no unrighteousness and who knows how to assign different punishments according to the merits of the offenders."<sup>28</sup> Slavery, then, is a manifestation of sin, though God may use it to punish those in need of correction. There is no hint of slavery being limited to a particular race.

Yet this provides a fitting example of my own concern. That is, if we dismiss ancient Christian writings as unserviceable rather than engaging them more deeply, we risk forgoing doctrinal precision along with the godly application of knowledge which is wisdom. Augustine continues his discussion by offering a moral interpretation followed by an eschatological interpretation: "Clearly it is a happier lot to be enslaved to a man than to be enslaved to lust: in fact it is the very lust for domination itself, to mention no others, that ravages the hearts of mortals by exercising the most savage kind of domination over them."<sup>29</sup> The worst kind of bondage, then, is to be a slave to one's own lust. Here is a thought worthy of consideration. Augustine's eschatological interpretation that follows states, "so that, if they cannot be freed by their masters, they can at least make their own slavery free in a sense, that is, by serving their masters not with cunning fear but with faithful love, until all unrighteousness passes away, all human rule and power are brought down, and God is all in all [cf. 1 Corinthians 15:28]."<sup>30</sup>

Admittedly, Augustine was a product of his time, as were all Christian thinkers throughout the history of the church. But when a writer is read in the church 1600 years after his death, there are good reasons for this continued attention. We would do well to take a second look when a part of the Christian tradition initially seems useless or even offensive.

26. James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 183.

27. *Ibid.*, 182.

28. Augustine, *City of God*, 19.15.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

In any era, the church in all its diverse manifestations was doing great things. It was also doing some horrible things. Should the Lord tarry, one wonders what kind of evaluation the church of today will receive?

## **Conclusion**

The fulfillment of the hermeneutical task requires serious study of the biblical text to determine its message. The task, however, is not complete until there is the careful communication of the message to an audience in its situatedness. If the analysis of one or the other is awry, the hermeneutical task is impeded. The fulfillment of both requires multiple participants. If the black church and its hermeneutic are not given voice in the analysis of both the biblical text and the sociocultural environment, the hermeneutical task is dramatically hindered. It is hindered not only for the black church but for the entire church.

The black church and the church of the present dominant culture run the risk of neglecting the root system of the Christian faith. The dominant culture church runs the risk of missing love for all family members through the claim of defending the truths of the faith. The black church, with black theology as an example, runs the risk of neglecting the wisdom of the historic church. Borrowing from the thought of Malcolm X, it is difficult to love the church in all its manifestations, and it is difficult for the church to function, if the roots themselves are neglected.

## Book Reviews

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*Mark Tao, pastor, Immanuel Covenant Church, Chicago, Illinois*

*John Weborg, professor emeritus of theology,  
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**Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (IVP Academic, 2014), 252 pages, \$25.**

In his latest work, Amos Yong inspires us to dream of a revitalized future for evangelical theology, enriched by Asian American diasporic perspectives. Yong contributes to this renewal project by offering his own Asian American Pent-evangelical theology of migration.

In surveying emerging Asian American voices today, Yong observes that while Asian American scholarship is rising within the general study of religion, Asian American evangelical contributions are weak by comparison. Why is this?

Yong suggests that a significant factor is the tendency of dominant North American evangelical theology to emphasize orthodoxy and regard its subject and task as ahistorical. Thus a false dichotomy results between “doctrine” and “context”—a dichotomy many Asian American evangelicals have come to accept. Consequently, their work conforms to this dominant view, and Asian American evangelical theologians fail to produce theology rooted in the fertile soil of their life experiences. The latter they regard as subsidiary rather than central to the task of theology.

Yong submits that a more robust evangelical theology will come when Asian American approaches are integrated. Not only will this more adequately reflect the pluralism within evangelicalism, it will also reform and renew it. To this end, Yong introduces an “Asian American Pent-evangelical” treatment of the Acts narrative with attention to the category

of migration. Just as the Holy Spirit “immigrated,” transgressing borders and spaces of marginalization, so too the apostolic community was called to live as an immigrant people, pursuing God’s mission of transformation. With this context in mind, Yong offers a pneumtological theology of economics and migration, through reflection on the experience of undocumented Fuzhounese immigrants in New York City’s Chinatown. In this he demonstrates the power of Jesus’s jubilee ethics to challenge the organizing logics of a global capitalist economy. Yong concludes that just as early church ecclesiology challenged surrounding economic structures, our increasingly transnational world calls the church today to a new “calculus” of migration theology.

Yong’s work is a reminder that the future of global evangelical theological scholarship is shifting, and contributions from the Asian diaspora are already coming to the fore. One only has to look so far as the umbrella movement in Hong Kong and Justin Tse’s work on evangelicalism and the public sphere, or domestically at Paul Lim’s work on global evangelical attitudes toward human trafficking.

In spite of these marked shifts, it is not certain that widespread institutional transformation of evangelicalism is practically achievable. Moreover, gaining traction at a local level is surely replete with challenges. How does one explore interfaith dialogue with a congregation that considers the traditions of their ancestors anathema? How does one preach a pneumetological economics to a congregation committed to economic neoliberalism? It also remains to be seen what particular role an Asian American Pent-evangelical perspective will have in the project of evangelical renewal. How will it differentiate itself from Asian American post-liberal and post-conservative migration theologies?

In envisioning a different future for evangelical theology, Yong directs us to witness the work of the Holy Spirit in our own time. In considering the migrations of the Spirit, Yong calls us to a migration of our own: *emigrating away from* conventional notions of evangelicalism and *immigrating to* new horizons by extending our sight to the Asian American diaspora. May this call fall on open ears as we look ahead to a new future.

MARK TAO



**Roger E. Olson and Christian T. Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism: Retrieving an Evangelical Tradition* (Eerdmans, 2015), 204 pages, \$18.**

The title of this volume by Roger Olson and Christian Collins Winn tells the reader it is “more” than a history. To read this work is to engage in *apologia* via the discipline of historical research. So, this opening to chapter 6:

A major thesis of this book is that Pietism, as described here, the movement launched in Germany by Philipp Jakob Spener and carried forward by August Hermann Francke, Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, and others, and its ethos, is a largely neglected root of contemporary evangelicalism worthy of being rediscovered and embraced by evangelicals. Scholars of Pietism often point out a bias in the literature about American religious history in favor of New England Puritanism that has tended to obscure other equally important impulses, including especially Pietism. (p. 108)

In order to give this thesis historical trajectory and substantiated structural support, the book begins by showing “How a Good Word Got a Bad Reputation.” It is followed by a chapter on Pietism’s antecedents, two on its classical beginnings, and a kind of interlude, “A Portrait of Pietism: Its Authentic Hallmarks.” There follow chapters on “Pietism on the New Soil of Great Britain and America” and on its reinvention in the nineteenth century. The final chapter features three American thinkers (Donald Bloesch, Richard Foster, and Stanley Grenz) and one European (Jürgen Moltmann) who make intentional references to Pietism and its shaping influence. The conclusion, “Pietism as a Way of Doing Theology,” contains *in nuce* a critique and constructive trajectory for the theological task. As the authors propose, “What Pietism opposes is not right belief but dead orthodoxy—right belief without right affections” (p. 182). The tradition Olson and Winn seek to reclaim and retrieve does not want for complexity as to its sources and legacies. Readers will be introduced to the diverse antecedents and the subsequent outgrowth of Pietism through history, some quite far from its classical sources.

Pietism is often dismissed as too subjective, mired in experience, ingrown, lacking in intellectual rigor, and oblivious to social concern. Olson and Winn have this stereotype in mind as they craft this histori-

cally based *apologia*. Take the theme of neighbor love. The authors begin with Johann Arndt, for whom love of neighbor was nearly equivalent to love of God, and proceed through the immense social service institutions under Francke at Halle, the work of Johann Wichern among disenfranchised youth, and the Blumhardts' work in healing that came to America through persons such as Cullis and A.J. Gordon.

Nor should it be overlooked that in America the Lutheran Pietist H.M. Muhlenberg continued the Halle tradition, and under the Schmuckers the love of neighbor produced some new things in synodical ministry: the formation of the Franckean Synod (the name gives its Halle roots away!) in upper New York was anti-slavery, pro-temperance, pro-women's rights, and the "first mainline American denomination to ordain a black man" (p. 121). This is not the story of an ingrown, self-possessed movement. This is not to say that some Pietists did not live out this history. But its founders, as Spener said, found hope in God's promised better times.

I will offer one point of critical reflection. The authors argue that "the Pietists were synergists with regard to salvation—believing that human cooperation with God's grace was necessary . . ." (p. 95, n. 53). Synergism of course is a complex issue, notoriously difficult to adjudicate. Where I want to enter the conversation is to indicate that for Spener and Bengel the issue may require more nuancing, since they encountered the issue of synergism on more fronts than soteriology.

In Part II of the *Pia Desideria*, Spener develops a paragraph on the theology of promise that undergirds his idea of "God's promised better times" to come. But behind this is the Lutheran theology of promise. When the conventicle is born together with the study of God's word as an act of service to the world, it is also an act of faith in this promise. In the German text of the *Pia* Spener names this an *occasion* (*Verlassung*, a word no longer used) for God to work but not a *cause*. Spener and especially Bengel's later defense of an earthly eschatological kingdom also serves my inquiry. Both were accused of violating article 17 of the Augsburg Confession, which had been interpreted to identify any interpretation of an earthly kingdom as either Jewish or Anabaptist. Spener and Bengel in particular argued in protest, using a Lutheran methodological principle that just as God was the sole actor in the design and process of salvation, so will he be in the eschatological kingdom. I think there lurks here a kind of rebuttal of synergism, especially in relation to Anabaptism.

My point is that in Pietists like Spener and Bengel there was, in

my view, an awareness of the danger of synergism and a preparedness to answer it on Lutheran terms. When it came to the origin of faith, Spener used the term the “ignition [*Entzündung*] of faith,” not unlike Werner Elert’s expression in his *The Structure of Lutheranism* that the origin of faith is a pure mathematical point. Francke’s intense emphasis on repentance differed from Spener’s more passive “new birth.” This is not without outcomes in Covenant history. J. M. Sanngren and E. August Skogsbergh had conflicts over this very issue, Sanngren being more influenced by C. O. Rosenius and Skogsbergh by the American revivalism of Moody. For Sanngren as for Elert, the Word will do its work of fruit-bearing in its own way and in its own time. So as Pietism left its classical moorings and found itself in new ecclesiastical environments, it underwent a Schmucker version of Lutheranism, a Wesleyan reception of Bengel, and so on. But my point is that the issue of synergism is one of intricate complexity.

Do read this remarkable book. Pietism is a story worth telling. Olson and Winn put us in their debt and show us that studied ignorance of an influential tradition is not a virtue. Thank them for demonstrating that evangelicalism has sources in Wittenberg as well as in Geneva, in Halle as well as in Princeton, and that these twin cities need a long conversation.

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