

Book Reviews

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Cindy S. Lee, *Our Unforming: De-Westernizing Spiritual Formation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022), 154 pp., \$24.

Cindy S. Lee's book promised to help get me outside of myself and my western framework and to experience formation through a new lens. It did not disappoint. Lee intentionally speaks to people of color like herself who have been formed by cultural norms that ignore the rich, non-western and non-white cultures of their heritages and origins. As a white western reader, I also felt welcomed into a meaningful conversation between Lee and her primary audience—readers of color from diverse backgrounds.

Lee lays the groundwork for the unforming and de-westernizing conversation by carefully defining key terms such as *spirituality*, *soul*, *unforming*, and *postures*. She then describes the challenge before us: "Our collective soul as a church will atrophy if one culture or tradition holds the power and control over what is taught and practiced in the church" (2). She names racism and the need to address it in our unforming and

leads the reader on a journey into communities of color and non-western traditions. Drawing on a rich diversity of theological voices, Lee invites the reader to sit at their feet through frequent references to their lives and work. Her annotated bibliography of recommended resources is worth the purchase price of the book (151–54).

Our Unforming moves through three main themes called “cultural orientations.” Sub-themes within each orientation are called “formation postures.” The first orientation Lee presents is cyclical, i.e., following a cyclical journey into wholeness (16) rather than a linear progressive journey toward perfection (17). We turn from linear to cyclical by embracing non-western formation postures toward time, remembering, and uncertainty. Anyone seeking to foster security in God during uncertain times will benefit from Lee’s insights into a cyclical orientation: “Rather than asking what’s next, we can ask, How am I changing in this season? How am I experiencing God in the waiting?” (34).

The second orientation is experiential. Western evangelicalism lives in the world of thoughts and ideas and tends to be heavily cerebral. Lee instead guides her readers to turn from cerebral to experiential, reassuring us that, “We are not trying to understand God but to experience God” (60). Lee observes, “We need to redefine spiritual formation not as growing or learning, which can be centered on the mind, but as our dynamic and tangible everyday encounters with and in the Spirit” (61). The formation postures of imagination, language, and work/rest facilitate our entry into an experiential orientation. Readers who hunger for a greater sense of connection with both God and others will find hope as they follow Lee’s movement toward the experiential: “It forms us in a posture of listening, seeing, and being with one another before trying to define one another” (82).

Lee’s third orientation invites us to turn from the individual to the collective through formation postures of dependence, elders, and harmony. Dependence is “where the spiritual life begins; we realize that we can’t rely on our own efforts, but we need God, creation, and community” (110). In contrast to individualism, collective orientation also greatly values the elders who have come before us. Lee grew up with her grandmother, and observes, “The evangelical church taught me that my story as a Christian began with my own private decision to follow Jesus . . . , but I learned from Ahma that my faith actually began generations earlier and comes from my community” (118). Lee builds masterfully upon the theology of hospitality inherent in the Trinity that

is beautifully embodied in collectivist cultures: “Individualist cultures... should not be teaching the global church about...hospitality...Hospitality is not an event or a practice; it is a cultural way of being in community that we need to learn from collectivist cultures” (102).

The book whets the appetite for an even deeper plunge. Its brevity can be disappointing to the reader for whom these orientations are completely new. Reading it serves only as an introduction to a journey that must continue with exploration beyond its covers. Depending on how quickly one reads, it is possible to finish this book in under five hours. Depending on how much unforming and de-westernizing one has to do, however, unpacking, integrating, and applying its full meaning might take years.

BARBARA ANN ETTINGER

Joseph W. Handley Jr., *Polycentric Mission Leadership: Toward a New Theoretical Model for Global Leadership* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books, 2022), 191 pp., \$16.99.

Joe Handley describes our world as increasingly complex, disrupted, and challenged, a world hurting for a new approach to leadership that is less hierarchical, less centralized, more collaborative, and more multi-sourced—namely, polycentric. Polycentric leadership aims to operate from many centers. Handley, currently serving as CEO of A3 (formerly Asian Access), writes for an audience encountering similar challenges in their own highly globalized contexts. The essential theory he presents grew out of his own experiences. His PhD studies confirmed that his ideas are not new, but well-practiced historically. Handley doesn’t articulate an entirely original theory; rather, he organizes and adds his own layers and angles to a preexistent one.

In chapter one, Handley describes our rapidly changing world where historical leadership models practiced by default for decades are failing in their deliverables. A centralized model, Handley argues, simply does not fit or work sufficiently. In contrast, “decisions that are just in time and appropriate for the local context” (22) can result from a collaborative, decentralized leadership that embraces different contexts, cultures, and moments. In chapter two, he establishes polycentric leadership as

a historical practice and argues against one-way leadership in favor of multi-directional leadership, a kind of perichoretic dance as found in the Trinity. Chapter three brings the reader from theory to praxis. Using Ephesians 4, the GLOBE leadership study, and examples from General Stanley McChrystal (which I particularly appreciated given my love for his book *Leaders: Myth and Reality*), Handley begins to add texture, color, and emotion to what polycentric leadership could look like when applied.

Chapter four presents the segment of a dissertation in which other leadership models are examined. Handley utilizes Allen Yeh's polycentric missiology concepts to describe his own polycentric mission leadership, which is described by the following values: collaborative, communal, diverse, free, relational, and charismatic. Handley recognizes his new model is untested and recommends further examination. Handley spends chapter five unpacking his qualitative research interviews with thirty-three Lausanne Movement leaders and organizes themes and threads into the above values. Finally, in chapter six, Handley looks ahead by applying polycentric leadership to the Lausanne Movement as well as to other mission movements, and in doing so, he points toward future studies needed to fully flesh out polycentric leadership.

Polycentric mission leadership is needed more than ever in "such a time as this." For many of us, the pandemic years have accelerated our desire for leadership that is less hierarchical, more willing to share power, and in a word, humble. Jesus, pointing to how other leaders sought power and position, told his disciples it was "not so among you" (Matt 20:26). Handley points to a "not so among you" form of leadership. While the Spirit of God is moving all of us toward that city where Christ shall reign as "Lord of lords and King of kings" (Rev 17:14), at present we find ourselves in contexts, cultures, and moments that require all kinds of leadership styles, polycentric included. These styles may act as layers to be added onto other styles, eschewing false dichotomies. Handley's desired outcome is not the exclusive practice of a certain style but ultimately the achievement of "better and more representative outcomes," and "decisions that are just in time and appropriate for the local context" (22). In the end, Handley is practicing what he preaches by offering his own observations as a fellow collaborator and practitioner among other global collaborators and practitioners. For Handley, polycentricism is not only relevant but imperative in our ever-changing world as the nature of mission shifts from centrism to "from everyone to everywhere" (48). If you desire to lean in and engage rather than insulate and judge our

cultural moment, *Polycentric Mission Leadership* might be the agility handbook for your adaptive Christian leadership practice.

PETER SUNG

Christian T. Collins Winn, *Jesus, Jubilee, and the Politics of God's Reign* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023), 267 pp., \$29.99.

The death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, quietly frames this book. Although Floyd's killing is only mentioned in passing, reading Winn's book as a response to this event locates its sense of urgency in a particular context, and makes sense of why it concludes with a brief meditation on George Floyd Square in Minneapolis.

On one level, *Jesus, Jubilee, and the Politics of God's Reign* is a biblically grounded theological study of the overlapping themes of the Jubilee and the kingdom of God, beginning with the OT/HB (chapter one focuses on the Psalms; two on the prophets; three on apocalyptic literature, mostly Daniel 7–12); and then exploring how these two themes take unique shape in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Chapter four covers Jesus's teaching and ministry and offers a sustained argument against spiritualizing Jesus's teachings. Chapters five and six cover Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, narrated as vindication of "Jesus the victim" and of Jesus's kingdom way of life. Winn focuses almost exclusively on Jesus's human identity as "the true human covenant partner" (185).

On another level, the book is a theological critique of racial capitalism, an underexplored term mentioned occasionally throughout (11, 139, 208). Many readers might have benefited from a more thorough explanation of racial capitalism—its history, its precise manifestations, and perhaps alternatives or efforts to resist it. For example, the discussion of "enclosures" and the practice of what Winn calls "commoning" was one of the most interesting parts of the book, but it was so brief that it left me longing for more. Sprinkled throughout the book are short sections relating the biblical themes to modern-day Black liberation movements—for example, linking the Psalms to the spirituals, blues, jazz, and hip-hop (33); I always found those sections evocative although short and sometimes buried within other sections.

While it is occasionally a bit technical (I had to look up the word "chthonic" at one point), it is well-written by someone who moves with

ease in both academic and church circles. Winn engages an admirable breadth of conversation partners, notably James Cone (like Cone, Winn describes Jesus's crucifixion as a lynching), Jürgen Moltmann (adopting his suffering God motif), and Karl Barth, but also feminist and womanist scholars, such as Elizabeth Johnson, Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz." A brief acknowledgement of the gendered challenges of "kingdom" and "reign/rule" language could have strengthened the feminist contributions.

Despite Winn's identity as a pastor, I sometimes wondered about the role of the church; the end of the book frequently mentions "communities of faith" but rarely uses the word church or churches. The book repeatedly invokes a concrete way of life made possible by the Spirit, but the one example given (the George Floyd Square) was explained in less than three pages and, while current when the book was published, has since become more uncertain.

The book is a helpful resource in many other ways (such as the concise, clear explanation of the Son of Man background in Enoch on pages 81–82). Some fascinating themes were touched on but not spelled out or engaged with in depth, such as the claim that Jesus's atonement is representative rather than substitutionary (151–52), but the footnotes provide a wealth of resources for digging into whatever trails the reader wants to pursue further.

The heart of the book, for me, is on the very last page: "[T]o dissolve the bondage of white supremacy and to abolish the structures of racial capitalism that have so deeply disfigured all of humanity, indeed the earth, and especially those who have lived on the underside of the modern world, is in such profound continuity with the reign of God that Jesus embodied, the kingdom that he calls his disciples to enter into, that it would be hard to imagine a more urgent task for followers of Jesus to pursue" (208). In some ways, I would have liked the book to begin with this claim rather than end with it, but it is an important claim—indeed, a crucial one—that leaves me hoping this book and its call will find a wide audience.

REBEKAH EKLUND

Darren T. Duerksen, *Christ Followers in Other Religions: The Global Witness of Insider Movements* (Regnum, 2022), 206 pps., \$19.

Christ Followers in Other Religions: The Global Witness of Insider Movements, by Darren T. Duerksen, analyzes how the Spirit of God is at work through the creation of “alternative missiological imaginaries.” Many individuals have followed Christ in recent decades while remaining part of their non-Christian religious tradition. Be it Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Native American, God’s Spirit is at work in the lives of each of these religious groups. This book shows how their witness and understanding can break our preconceived notions of Christian mission and discipleship as Westerners. Through the global witness of insider movements, our Western notion of understanding missions and discipleship can be challenged, expanded, and de-centered in the Christian church.

This book helped me to understand that God can build bridges between two religious traditions at the same time. God’s Spirit doesn’t limit Godself to just people of one religion. The Holy Spirit works to point practitioners of other faiths through their religions to the personhood, deity, and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus reveals himself as God to people of other faiths, meaning that he is the One they choose to truly worship as their ultimate God.

An example of this among the Native community is Terry LeBlanc, an Indigenous theologian, who connects the work of Christ to both creation and the land. As a Native American, LeBlanc holds faith in Christ that melds both indigenous beliefs and practices with that of allegiance to Jesus. Casey Church, a Native follower of Christ, reflects on the importance of Christ for his Native people by saying, “Native American lifeways and identities are continually under stress. To survive we must regain what we have lost of our world by redefining and reshaping what remains” (112). As Duerksen observes, “For Casey, this need for wholeness, the recreation, is what he sees Christ providing for him, his people, and all creation” (112).

The witness expressed through these “alternative missiological imaginaries” provides a model that not only reaches practitioners of other faiths but also breaks our preconceived notions of Christian mission and discipleship as Westerners. Through the global witness of insider movements, our Western notions of missions and discipleship can be challenged, expanded, and de-centered in the Christian church.

Although this book has the potential to challenge, expand, and de-

center our understanding of Christian mission and discipleship, it isn't for everyone, including laity. Even though it's written to a specific academic audience, I found it challenging to grasp in ways I could apply. I am giving *Christ Followers in Other Religions: The Global Witness of Insider Movements*, by Darren T. Duerksen, four out of five stars. Readers will find this book both challenging and thought-provoking. I recommend this book to missiologists and missionaries alike who are working amongst Christ followers of other religions in their respective ministry contexts.

RYAN C. WENDT