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Comment

Paul H. de Neui, professor of missiology and intercultural studies, North Park Theological Seminary

The year 2023 marks the 130th anniversary of events formative to the mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church. The year the cornerstone was laid in the building now known as Old Main on Foster and Kedzie was 1893, the same year the Covenant moved its school from Minneapolis (started in 1891) to Chicago. At that time during the Colombian Exposition a few miles south, representatives of the Covenant attended and presented at the World's Parliament of Religion, a milestone in what would become a global interfaith movement.

In this issue, we proudly present four articles on perspectives of interfaith understanding, with historical and aspirational links to the Evangelical Covenant Church. Writing as a reflective practitioner with years of experience in several countries, Covenanter Rev. Dr. Andrew Larsen shares his interfaith journey in "The Missing Peace and Our Muslim Neighbor: Reconciling with Theological Parochialism." Director of University Ministries at North Park University Anthony Zamblé invites a rethinking of how indigenous faiths can be viewed in his article, "A Reconstruction of African Religion through Adinkra Symbology." From my personal interest and participation with interfaith activities, I present "Up from the Ashes: the SEMC in Global Dialogue," which includes a description of the events leading up to the Parliament of World's Religions in 1893, how the Covenant was involved, and the full text of the presentation given by David Nyvall at that event. Rounding out this collection, Covenanter and active advocate in this area Kaleb D. Nyquist presents "The Parliament of the World's Religions and the Work of Creation Care: A Pragmatic Apologetic for Interfaith Engagement in Covenant Perspective." You will also find reviews of several recent publications that we highly recommend.

Many people participated in making this issue possible. First of all, we thank God for the visionary leaders of the past who in 1893 considered it part of the mission of the young immigrant denomination called the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant to participate in the World's Parliament of Religion, encouraging the few English speakers to participate on a wider platform. This legacy is one that we build upon today as the Covenant grows into the global mosaic where more and more voices know they belong together. Thanks to Kaleb Nyquist for the invitation to bring North Park Theological Seminary back into the dialogue with other religions at the 130th anniversary held in August this year. The event was especially meaningful for all of us who are educators and learners. Blessings to my brother Tony Zamblé for your work and global vision that impacts North Park University and myself, widening our vision to what Sankofa can be. Thanks to Andy Larsen for your gentle, humble spirit to provoke the Covenant to love and good works among our various faith traditions. Special thanks to William Barnett for his many years as books editor for the *Covenant Quarterly*. Your coordination efforts and efficient communications have been very much appreciated and will be missed. We are grateful to God for you. Most important, thanks to you, the reader, who will allow God's Spirit to use the words from these pages in your ministry to build, in the style of Matthew 7:24, constructively upon them.

The Missing Peace and Our Muslim Neighbor: Reconciling with Theological Parochialism

Rev. Dr. Andrew E. Larsen, peace activist and inter-faith facilitator

Introduction: Why and How Will We Engage?

One of the deep questions floating around conversations within many churches today drives the inquiry behind this article—how should we view, and engage, Muslims?[1] Our encounters with people of other faiths has become commonplace since the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, when the concept of interfaith dialogue was mostly the domain of academics or high-level church leaders. It was not normal for parishioners in a local church to think much about people of other religions, except perhaps to send missionaries to remote parts of the world to evangelize them.

I was one of those missionaries in the first part of my career, but being a missionary to predominantly Catholic Mexico was not a theological bridge that stretched very far. This changed for me in a big way in the second phase of my ministry as a pastor in the Seattle area when 9-11 occurred, and terror brought down the fragile, and particularly limited, understanding we had of Muslims.[2] I was a pastor in a suburban church and began to visit local mosques, seeking to understand our Muslim

1 My work is focused on Christian-Muslim relations and as I will argue in this paper is probably the most significant inter-religious challenge and conversation today. It is also the strategic reason for the focus of this article.

2 See movie produced by John Yeager and the author of this article, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: One Man's Journey to Find the Heart of Palestine*, https://worldlyholiness.com/movies-study-guide-from-peacetalkers-to-peacemakers.

neighbors but also to help people in my congregation make distinctions between what we witnessed that day and the religion of Islam, the second largest religion with nearly 2 billion adherents spread across the globe and perhaps as diverse in expression as Christianity. I found we too easily projected onto the entire Muslim world the images of what we witnessed on September 11. We became easily persuaded that they all hated us.

It wasn't a stretch to understand how my church and much of Western Christianity became weaponized by political and cultural powers against Muslims. Since Christianity still remains the largest religion globally, and since our particular history with Islam has been fraught with much conflict, fear, and misunderstanding, the work of peacemaking seemed both the correct path forward for me personally and also urgent for the church.

It would have been heartening in the aftermath of 9-11 to find many within my congregation automatically leaning into the ethic of love taught by Jesus Christ. But that wasn't my experience. It honestly felt like we were mimicking our larger culture, wanting to engage in a holy war against Islam. This approach was easily veiled as a fight for our lives, our communities, and our country against Islamic terrorism. Nuance and clarity were lost along with the biblical teaching on love of enemies. We were unable to see, in point of fact, that Muslims were not our enemies.

This created a bit of a midlife, ministerial crisis for me. Something was missing. And my leadership in the church did not seem to be helping to correct our syncretism, the corruption of our faith, our capacity to explore the theological and religious world of Islam, or show hospitality to our Muslim neighbors and refugees, many of whom themselves were escaping some of the horrors we ourselves were witnessing. We seemed to be allowing the world to squeeze us into its mold.[3]

One of my early mentors in peacemaking, Glen Stassen, helped me see one of our principle stumbling blocks in our own Christian discipleship that presents as an Achilles heel in the work of peace. I grew up with a truncated idea of peace. In his foreword to Willard Swartley's important book, *The Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*, Stassen mentions the following:

3 Romans 12:2 reads, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves you towards the goal of true maturity" (Phillips).

> Swartley points out that the word peace appears one hundred times in the New Testament, and reconciliation four times. But New Testament theologians write more about *reconciliation* than peace, and often limit it to individual reconciliation with God—without significant attention to God's work to reconcile us with others or with enemies—and sometimes move it off the stage of history into a purely future eschatology waiting in the wings invisible in our actions and invisible to observers' eyes. They often reduce it to inner peace with God, without attention to God's will for peace among God's creatures.[4]

In a curious twist of biblical proportions, in the last few years there has been a perceptible movement away from broad support and enthusiasm in the work of peacemaking beyond a committed core of people. Some in the pew and church mission committee meetings are scratching their heads. A few phone calls and emails even questioned what our objective is in praying "with Muslims" instead of "for" them from our Christian enclaves and prayer closets. We encountered significant pushback from a leading evangelical pastor in the Seattle area in our early efforts.[5] Suspicion of our objectives and dissatisfaction with our modus operandi seemed to echo in conversations with some churches. Not all, thank goodness. But enough to give us pause. In my own denomination I received a detailed letter from one church, full of questions regarding my premise for engaging Muslims. Why did I have such deep relationships with Muslims and Palestinians, and why was I challenging the idea that the modern state of Israel was anything but a miracle in the desert that seemed to portend the second coming of Christ?

Our first steps in peacemaking with our Muslim neighbors were clearly an adventure with very few maps or mentors. Thankfully, I found a few, but many times I felt like an imposter, clearly not an expert in peacemaking. As I grew in my understanding of Islam and began to consult with others who were already on this path, I became more convinced that

4 Glen Stassen, foreword to Willard Swartley, *The Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), x.

5 Our initial ventures engaging Muslims in the Seattle area were passionately criticized by Mars Hill founding pastor Mark Driscoll after this article was published: Janet I. Tu, "Evangelicals Extend a Hand to Muslims," *The Seattle Times*, September 7, 2010, https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/evangelicals-extend-a-hand-to-muslims/.

a posture that Jesus articulated in the Gospels should be our primary approach: Blessed are the peacemakers. Build bridges, engage our "other" as a human being before we categorize them by tribe, geography, or place in life. Everyone has a story. Listen. While responses in the mosque were overwhelmingly positive and constructive, even though some were trying to convert me to Islam, something interesting began to happen back in my church community.

The deeper we went into peacemaking the less we became featured heroes of the church, "reaching Muslims for Christ," as I was when serving as a foreign missionary. The first time I was commissioned by my denomination to work among Muslims in fact, financial and emotional support were flush. But several years into this work, and after returning from the foreign field, I lost financial support from some churches because I was local and appeared more intent on peacemaking than evangelism.[6] One pastor even told me that the kinds of things we were doing, such as helping local churches engage Muslim neighbors in their own community, was not "strategically aligned" with the mission of his church!

Some people did follow our lead and join us in the mosque. But others wanted to know first whether we worshiped the same God. Others still asked if my goal in making friendships with Muslims was for evangelism. Were any Muslims converting to Christianity?

I began to ask myself, was I on the wrong path? Was I outside of God's will somehow?

I dove deep into Scripture and began to seek out mentors like Rick Love, the founder of Peace Catalyst International, and others. The more I prayed and studied, the more I became convinced we were on the cusp of something important and being led by the Holy Spirit. I was not always confident I was moving in the right direction but with growing conviction kept taking the next step forward and deeper into personal relationships and bridge building. I began to see God act in ways that surprised me and pulled me deeper into places I never imagined.

Within a few years I was invited to speak in a mosque for a community event addressing how we were building bridges as Christians with our Muslim neighbors. The Imam of that mosque was trying to do the same thing with his community, including churches in the area. After I spoke to a crowded mosque one evening along with a Catholic priest and several lay leaders of other Christian organizations, the Imam handed

6 Curiously, I've shared more about my relationship with Jesus Christ, doing some kind of evangelism in other words, explaining important ideas in Scripture, correcting misunderstandings, as a peacemaker than as a missionary.

me a check as a speaker fee. That surprised me! As it did the treasurer at our denominational headquarters in Chicago when they received a check from my now very good Muslim friend for our work in peacemaking.

I began taking church groups and their pastors to Friday prayers across the country, in rural communities as well as key urban centers like Detroit and Chicago where majority Muslim communities are found. I also began to travel to Muslim majority countries as a friend of Muslims to learn more and go into the trenches on deeper theological questions with the Quran and Bible both open before us.

I also served as an advocate for human rights in Palestine for several months, seeking to address issues of human rights and injustice toward marginalized communities. We made two movies telling the stories of peacemakers—Jewish, Palestinian, Christian, Muslim, and secular people, all working for peace. A few years ago, I was a guest at the United Nations for an event hosted by Muslims to discuss ways to build inclusive societies. In all of these new spaces, I never was anything but a self-declared follower of Jesus Christ, seeking to bear witness to his love for all people.

This journey has thrust me into reading my Bible with fresh eyes. One of my important discoveries is featured in this article. I found amazing parallels between the Samaritans of Jesus's day and Muslims today.

The intent and scope of this article can in no way answer every question surrounding interfaith engagement and dialogue, or the state of the church today vis-à-vis our Muslim neighbors; but it is an honest effort to engage theologically the question of engaging our "religious other." My experience is largely limited to the Abrahamic faiths and the encounter between Islam, Christianity, and to some degree Judaism as it relates to peacemaking work in Israel and Palestine. Since I am a Christian leader, I will look critically at my own community, thus following one of the important ideas planted by Krister Stendahl in these kinds of space, that we should not compare our best with the other's worst.[7] In other words, seeking to diminish another religion for the sake of winning the "divine beauty contest" will not be employed in this conversation. We will look at some of the disconcerting responses to Islam in the church and broader society, responding with an examination of some important New Testament teaching to help us reflect and respond to engaging our Muslim neighbors.

Perhaps a leading question should be asked at this point. What script

7 Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* (New York: HarperCollins, 2019), 65.

are we following when we think of Muslims? As Christians, do we lean toward loathing or loving Muslims? I have seen a lot of the former and not enough of the latter. I understand how fear shapes us and the amygdala is hardwired to respond in ways to preserve our lives. Some of us effectively work through biases and analyze culture, media, and systems that seek to predetermine our responses. Thankfully, there is a middle ground where some have dipped their toe in the water, but perhaps like the topic of Christian-Muslim relations itself, the vociferous margins are what we know and hear more about. Not everybody finds themselves in these extremes, however; many are somewhere in the middle.

Many people are just curious, do not want to offend a Muslim coworker, and wonder about Sharia law, jihad, or what is really meant when a Muslim says, "Allah akbar." Some pundits and leaders behave like arsonists seeking to pour the accelerant of misunderstanding, fear, and hate in order to divide and intimidate.[8] Consequently, we find in our current political climate a way of thinking and behaving toward Muslims that is shaped and impacted fundamentally by Islamophobia.

In my experience many of the questions people raise in church audiences reflect a deep suspicion if not outright fear of Islam which has been shaped by Islamophobia, but in most cases without ever meeting or knowing a Muslim. A growing number of religious leaders are working to improve Christian-Muslim relations,[9] but a recent study found that more than three in four U.S. evangelicals say they have never, or infrequently, interacted with Muslims.[10] Consequently, they are apprehensive of Muslim immigration and their presence in our communities but for reasons and motivations that arise out of false ideas about Islam and fear of the Muslim world. Whatever one thinks of Muslims, as followers of Christ we must respond, framed by the teaching of Jesus Christ. As a Christian leader I need to help answer people's questions but more important guide and disciple the church. Clearly we have a challenge.

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8 Thomas L. Friedman wrote an excellent opinion piece on "Arsonists and Firefighters" in *The New York Times*, June 28, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/29/opinion/sunday/thomas-l-friedman-who-is-setting-the-sectarian-fires-in-the-middle-east.html.

9 Peace Catalysts International, a group I collaborated with for over 10 years, is one good example, and Religion News Service writes about several others in Aysha Khan, "Evangelicals and Muslims See Similarities in Faiths and Favor Closer Ties, Survey Says," March 20, 2019, https://religionnews.com/2019/03/20/evangelicals-and-muslims-see-similarities-in-faiths-and-favor-closer-ties-survey-says/.

10 Khan, "Evangelicals and Muslims See Similarities in Faiths," https://religionnews.com/2019/03/20/evangelicals-and-muslims-see-similarities-in-faiths-and-favor-closer-ties-survey-says/.

As Rabbi Marc Schneier mentions,

> "Evangelical Christian-Muslim relations is today's largest interreligious challenge, and the poll shows that there are causes for concern and elements of hope and optimism on both sides to narrow the divide."[11]

Islamophobia and the Church

Many studies have been conducted over the years seeking to understand the rise in Islamophobia both in our country and within the church. A revealing study conducted by LifeWay Research several years ago charted a disturbing trend within evangelical circles. They conducted two iterations of their polling with the same questions in 2010 and in 2015,[12] therefore ascertaining a trend line. It was not just a snapshot in time, in other words, but helped chart movement in a direction of increasing Islamophobia, not decreasing. An important distinction between mainline pastors and evangelicals is that the former view Islam as a religion of peace, love, and compassion while the latter see Islam as violent and dangerous. Sadly, even within the overall research, a growing number of all pastors labeled Islam violent, combined with a decrease in numbers of those who viewed it as spiritually good.

There are additional current trends on Islamophobia, with strong, though not exclusive links to "evangelicals" and more generally, "conservative white Protestants."[13] In an important article in *Foreign Policy* magazine, author Chrissy Stroop cites the first time hearing Islam equated with terrorism: It was from the pulpit in her church. This happened in 1998, before Islamophobia was mainstream. The pastor had just completed a serious reading of the Quran in his own studies and concluded that "a good Muslim should want to kill Christians and Jews." I bump into this issue often in churches where "experts" make facile conclusions about

11 Khan, "Evangelicals and Muslims See Similarities in Faiths," https://religionnews.com/2019/03/20/evangelicals-and-muslims-see-similarities-in-faiths-and-favor-closer-ties-survey-says/.

12 Florence Taylor, "Islam Is 'Dangerous,' Say Over Half of US Protestant Pastors, *Christianity Today,* October 23, 2015, https://www.christiantoday.com/article/islam.is.dangerous.say.over.half.of.us.protestant.pastors/68518.htm.

13 Chrissy Stroop, "America's Islamophobia Is Forged at the Pulpit: White Evangelicals' Apocalyptic Fantasies Are Driving U.S. Policy," *Foreign Policy*, March 26, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/26/americas-islamophobia-is-forged-in-the-pulpit/.

Islam from a superficial reading, cherry-picking texts from the Quran to support a slanted perspective. And this often occurs without their personally knowing a Muslim layperson or Imam. It could be compared to a non-Christian making stereotypical statements about Christians by reading the conquest texts in Joshua or Deuteronomy or listening to Franklin Graham online. The author of this article further points out that "the presidency of Donald Trump has been shaped by the fear of decline in power and influence among conservative white Protestants." This only exacerbates the current growth of Islamophobia in the church.

However, as author Khaled Beydoun mentions, it is not just a conservative Christian issue. Even Bill Maher, a liberal talk show personality, often makes ghastly caricatures of Islam on his shows, mentioning on *Real Time with Bill Maher* that the Quran is "Islam's hate-filled holy book."[14] Beydoun further notes, "though Islamophobia coming from the left is often more latent and harder to detect than that which emanates from the right, and particularly the far right, it is still there."[15]

For a variety of reasons this trend increased and was leveraged under Donald Trump's presidency with the support of evangelicals helping to create a robust aversion and antagonism toward Muslims, viewing the entire world of Islam under the banner of Islamophobia.[16] It must not escape us that immediately after becoming president in 2016, Trump leveraged Islamophobia as a key pillar of his presidency, making it mainstream and part of his policies. Unleashed a day after Trump's inauguration, Islamophobia became "an ideology that drove the president's political worldview and motivated the laws, policies, and programs. The Trump moment marked a new phase of transparency in which explicit rhetorical Islamophobia aligned, in language and spirit, with the programs the new president was poised to implement."[17] And sadly, white evangelicals caught this virus. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding finds evangelicals to be the religious or ethnic group in America most likely to hold Islamophobic views, with 44 percent having a negative

14 Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 30.

15 Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 31.

16 Kristen Kobes Du Mez, a professor of history at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, argues this point repeatedly in *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020).

17 Ibid., 13.

view of Muslims, double the number who viewed Muslims favorably.[18]

Islamophobia has historical roots in Christianity. As evangelicals, our theological ancestors the Reformers failed to improve much on the medieval Christian ideas about Islam that justified "violence and aggression against the Turks." Martin Luther, in ways similar to other Protestant reformers, employed negative images of Muslims to rally support for war against the Turks.[19]

It may be helpful at this point to define Islamophobia. A fresh, comprehensive definition is offered by Khaled Beydoun, a Muslim himself, in his very helpful book on the topic. He states that Islamophobia is:

> The presumption that Islam is inherently violent, alien, and unassimilable, a presumption driven by the belief that expressions of Muslim identity correlate with a propensity for terrorism. Islamophobia is the modern progeny of Orientalism, a worldview that casts Islam as the civilizational antithesis of the West and that it is built upon the core stereotypes and baseline distortions of Islam and Muslims embedded in American institutions and the popular imagination by Orientalist theory, narratives, and law.…Islamophobia is not an entirely new form of bigotry, but rather a system that is squarely rooted in, tied to, and informed by the body of misrepresentations and stereotypes of Islam and Muslims shaped by Orientalism.[20]

Implications in Our Current Reality

How is this translated into lived experience for Muslims in the US in their daily lives? A recent Pew Research study based on analysis of new hate crimes from the FBI found the number of assaults against Muslims in the United States rose significantly between 2015 and 2016, right in the middle of the presidential campaigns in 2015-2016. The most recent figures according to this study reported 127 assaults in 2016, exceeding by a significant number, the previous high reported in 2001.

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18 Callum Paton, "White Evangelicals Are the Most Islamophobic Americans, Poll Shows," *Newsweek*, May 23, 2019, https://www.newsweek.com/white-evangelicals-are-most-islamophobic-americans-poll-shows-1433592.

19 Todd Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 57.

20 Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 29.

But as always, it is important to put a face to these numbers. These are real people whose lives have been tragically shortened due to hate and aggression which has far too often found currency in the church.

I still have vivid memories of the murder of three Muslim American students, Yusor, Razan, and Deah in North Carolina. Khaled Beydoun writes about them in his book, but I remember well the impact, both within and outside of the Muslim community. This story, like many others, demonstrates how interconnected we are in the world. They were shot dead in their own apartment in North Carolina on February 10, 2015, but the outpouring of empathy and community support touched down in Seattle where I live. A few days after the incident, I was able to join a large gathering in downtown Seattle, filling the Westlake Park for a service of memorial, lament, and prayer. I was deeply impacted by the vigil the Friday evening after the murders, standing with many of my Muslim friends. Many of the signs held by young Muslims expressed the traumatic feeling of being Muslim in America saying things like, "It could have been me," and, "Am I next?"

More recently, after another hate crime killing 51 Muslims at Friday prayers in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019, we witnessed an outpouring at a local mosque on the east side of Seattle just four days later. Our friend Aneelah Afzali said, "It's all around us and we're all sort of inundated with Islamophobia."[21] Aneelah, who is the executive director of MAPS-AMEN (American Muslim Empowerment Network), put together an impromptu Islamophobia teach-in and invited many local religious and civic leaders, including our State political leaders Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson and U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal. One of the speakers, Nayab Khan, was personal friends with one of the victims at Christchurch, telling a packed community room at the mosque of over 2,000 people that his friend "gave his life last Friday while trying to save others in the mosque. He saw his son getting shot and falling in front of his eyes."

These overt acts motivated by a culture of Islamophobia, while they ebb and flow, seem only to be increasing, moving upward on the curve, raising the question for Christians, what is our role in combating this trend? How should we engage and think about our Muslim neighbors? What is Christ's call to us in this crisis today? Should we jump on the bandwagon of fear? Do we loathe our Muslim neighbors, or is

21 Michael Spears, "Capacity Crowd and Interfaith Vigil and Anti-Islamophobia Teach-In," *Kiro7 News*, March 19, 2019, https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/interfaith-prayer-vigil-held-for-new-zealand-shooting-victims/931808037/.

Jesus calling us to something different? I believe this is one of the most important issues of Christian discipleship today. As people of the Bible within the evangelical tradition,[22] I am curious whether in fact we [23] allow Scripture to shape our worldview or how we would answer the questions above about engaging our Muslim "others." Which of the 31,000 verses that comprise the entirety of the Bible do we consider essential guides to faithful Christian discipleship, and which ones are readily ignored?[24]

Jesus Challenges Samaraphobia Then and Now

I have stumbled upon a newfound interest and love for the Gospel of Luke recently. It has helped me come to grips with the challenge of Islamophobia. In particular, a series of texts leading up to a more familiar text for many—the parable of the Good Samaritan—has jumped off the page in a new way. Too often we read the high points of Scripture but fail to grasp how the author sets a favorite parable or verse in context, missing something profound. For me, Luke 9:51 and following, where Jesus begins to "set his face" to go to Jerusalem, has opened a new panorama that speaks to our modern-day relations with Muslims. In this section Jesus begins traveling from his native Nazareth in Galilee toward Jerusalem but does not take the typical route for first-century Jewish pilgrims. Many commentators cite this pericope as Jesus's transition to the last phase of his ministry on earth, his death, and resurrection, and all the things around his last chapter centered in and leading up to Jerusalem. It consumes pretty much the rest of the Gospel of Luke and is rich with important theological framework that I offer as part of the answer to the question of this article—how should we engage our "Muslim other"? Luke tells the story here of the problematic Samaritans, who are probably the best example for Christians to consider today when thinking about Muslims.

The lead into this section sets the stage in an important way. In Luke 9:49, John, one of the star pupils following Jesus, complains that they saw someone driving out demons in the name of Jesus, but they tried to stop them, because "he was not one of us." Justo González notes the idea behind this short encounter in the minds of the disciples: "Those

22 The National Association of Evangelicals has articulated four "evangelical distinctives" with the first and foremost as upholding the Bible as the ultimate authority for life and doctrine. Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 5.

23 Though I struggle with the term "evangelical" and find myself increasingly not aligned with the movement, this is my background, the church in which I was baptized, discipled, ordained, commissioned, and have served for over 30 years.

24 Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 5.

who did not belong to their group did not have the right to use the name of Jesus."[25] González, also an eminent church historian, further notes that at "the time Luke wrote his Gospel, the Christian movement was beginning to expand far and wide, and no one had control of that expansion."[26] Church hierarchies finally emerged, as is natural perhaps to any movement, in efforts to organize the chaos and determine who was part of the church and who was not. González observes that churches and denominations have acted in this way ever since, wielding authority to determine who is in and who is out. In this passage John is modeling what we know is all too common: "How can others who are not of our theological tribe use the name of Jesus as if he were theirs and insiders like us?" The disciples were drawing a circumference around who could appropriately even refer to Jesus or use his name in spiritual issues. As we shall see further in just a few verses, the idea of a particular border between "us" and "them," between orthodoxy and heresy, between those of our tribe and those who are enemies became huge. Alliances for the disciples seemed to conflict with Jesus's bigger idea of who was in and who was out. Jesus answers the disciples with, "Do not stop him, for whoever is not against you is for you."[27]

This sets the context for what follows and should not be detached in the reader's minds. Clearly Jesus is drawing lines of engagement, and as we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan, even making important statements about who can inherit eternal life, who better observes God's laws, and who really practices loving God and neighbor. Jesus was pushing the envelope with an inclusion and openness to the enemy Samaritans, making his early disciples very uncomfortable. This in itself is a critical factor that may help Christians today shape their own approach to our religious other. As N.T. Wright comments on this passage, "The disciples have to learn that God's kingdom may be going forward through people they don't know, who aren't part of their group. Things are not always straightforward."[28]

Indeed, the story of the journey Jesus started in Galilee, which would eventually take him to the cross on Golgotha in Jerusalem, took a troubling turn for the early disciples, especially for James and John, two of

25 Justo González, *Luke: Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), Section #2451.
26 Ibid.
27 Luke 9:50.
28 N.T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 118.

Jesus's close disciples. The normal route for religious pilgrimages of Jews to Jerusalem from the north would seek to avoid Samaria, the location of the troubling "religious other" for the early disciples and later the emerging first-century church. But Jesus seems to be driving deeper on his mission, shaping a model for his disciples as he engages the troubling Samaritans. This of course is not the only encounter Jesus has with Samaritans, nor the only time the disciples were troubled by what Jesus was doing. The story of the Samaritan woman at the well does not appear in Luke but the point is similar to this one.[29]

Fresh in the minds of a few of the disciples (Peter, James, and John) was the recent experience on the Mount of Transfiguration and the bizarre night vision with appearances from Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28-36). These, you might remember, were the heroes in the story of God's chosen people on their pilgrimage to the promised land. The story of Elijah had to be one of the top five told among pilgrims at night around the campfire on their journey to Jerusalem. Elijah, if you remember, was the one who called down fire to kindle the wood on his altar in the big challenge against the 450 prophets of Baal in the contest on Mount Carmel, proving whose God was bigger (1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 1-2). Baal of course was in the royal city of Samaria and the center of the Canaanite religion. There is no way the disciples hanging out with Jesus would not have this story on their minds as they encountered the inhospitable reception from the Samaritans in Luke 9:53.

González suggests this passage "could serve as a basis for reflection on the way in which Christians have often dealt with those they consider heretics."[30] I couldn't agree more. To the degree Christians consider Muslims enemies, heretics, or "religious other" within the tent of Abraham, this section in Luke must form part of the foundation of our response. James and John, in the great tradition of Elijah modeling "my God is greater, my God is bigger," wanted to call down fire on the hated Samaritans who refused them hospitality. It may seem an extreme reaction for the simple fact of not serving Arabic coffee to some travelers on the road, but clearly this incident is the tip of the iceberg of deeply felt animosity that went both ways. And Jesus would have nothing of this religious animosity between the Samaritans and his disciples!

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29 John 4:27, "The disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a (Samaritan) woman."

30 González, *Luke*, location 2527.

Who Were the Samaritans and What Will We Do?

A little background on the Samaritans is in order. It is a piece I missed growing up in the evangelical church, at least in terms of how different and how hated they were by Jesus's first disciples. My sense of the Samaritans perhaps epitomizes how most modern readers skip over some of the underlying drama between the Samaritans and the early Jewish Christian community. I used to read about Samaria and the Samaritans as just a point on the map, merely a neighboring town in the adjacent county. Perhaps they had their own mascot and soccer team and shared some friendly rivalry at the end of the season each year, but I did not understand that they were bitter enemies.

One of the key points in Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well was that the woman knew there was a disagreement between the Jews and the Samaritans regarding the proper place to worship. "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:20). In the century preceding these stories in the Gospels, the Samaritans had established a "breakaway Temple" on Mount Gerizim, where Jesus had the conversation with the woman at the well. This was problematic, to such a degree that the Maccabees went into Samaria and burned that temple down. But the animosity between these two groups was even more current than the previous century. "In Jesus' lifetime, a lone pilgrim crossing from Galilee through Samaria to the Temple in Judea was killed by a band of Samaritans. A larger band of Judeans went into Samaria and executed those who had killed the pilgrim."[31]

This entire pretext in Luke sets up the conversation Jesus had with a young lawyer, an expert in the law, and the parable of the Good Samaritan. Much has been taught about the general moral fortitude of the Samaritan in this parable, but rarely do sermons feature the background of the extreme animosity between the Samaritans and early Christian community, which would have been principally Jewish. As N.T. Wright correctly assesses, much is at stake, then and now, as to whether we will use the God-given revelation of love and grace as a way to boost our own isolated security and purity as the young lawyer tried to do, or to extend that love and grace to the whole world,[32] as the Good Samaritan modeled.

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31 Terrence J. Rynne, *Jesus Christ, Peacemaker: A New Theology of Peace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), Location 1561.

32 Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 129.

The young lawyer believed they should build a fence around the scope of love they were expected to exercise, but Jesus upset his theological parochialism. The message of Jesus and the gospel is "so wide-ranging, and so surprising, that many will find it shocking." Muslims are clearly our "religious other." The question remains, how will we engage them?

In a video we produced several years ago to describe our early approach to Muslims I tried to explain what we were discovering. In taking a stand against the spike in assaults toward Muslims we sought to counter the fear, anger, and occasional violence witnessed against our new friends in the Muslim community. Instead of fear or indifference, we came as fellow human beings with open arms. "My Muslim friends know I am a Christian pastor, but when I come to them and want to know them as a fellow human, and approach them with open arms, I get a reciprocal response. This is a human problem, a global problem. If we can't work and be as Jesus calls us to be, we have failed in our calling to Christ and are failing the world."

A Reconstruction of African Religion through Adinkra Symbology

Anthony Zamblé, director of University Ministries, North Park University

Failure to seriously engage African culture is the root of much of Africa's challenges today. Fela, the giant of Afrobeat music, makes this point on his *Why Black Man Dey Suffer* album.[1] He points out that the reason we Africans cannot reach our collective potential as a people is that we have lost, among other things, our connection with our ancestral roots. Emmanuel Katongole makes a similar point from political theology when he writes, "Africa's inception into modernity is a lie. Modernity claims to bring salvation to Africa, yet the founding story of the institution of modern Africa rejects Africa itself."[2] Molefi Kete Asante makes a similar point relative to the African American experience in the US. While not completely dismissing the nihilism or Afro pessimism view espoused by such luminaries as Cornell West, Asante makes a powerful case:

> If we have lost anything, it is our cultural centeredness; that is, we have been moved off our own platforms. This means that we cannot truly be ourselves or know our potential since we exist in a borrowed space. But all space is a matter of point of view or interpretation. Our existential relationship with the culture that we have borrowed defines what and who we are at any given moment. By regaining our own platforms, standing in our own cultural spaces, and believing that our way of viewing the universe is just as valid as any, we will achieve the kind of transformation that we need to participate

1 Fela Kuti, *Why Black Man Dey Suffer*, recorded 1971, African Songs UK, compact disc.

2 Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 20-21.

> fully in a multicultural society. However, without this kind of centeredness, we bring almost nothing to the multicultural table but a darker version of whiteness.[3]

Embracing one's culture is essential for human flourishing. African Christianity, however, has been operating in a borrowed space. What we have in much of Africa today is not authentic African Christianity nor political systems anchored in traditional African ideals, but rather foreign models of Christianity and government. An authentic African Christianity must engage African culture at the root level: religion. John Mbiti makes clear that, "Religion is the strongest element in traditional background and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned."[4] To ignore traditional African religions is to ignore the people themselves for this is what separates them as social beings from one another.

However, to engage African religion one must first understand it. Following Opoku, Asante and Mazama, and Sarpong among others,[5] I use religion in the singular to describe traditional African religions because while there is great diversity in religious practices or expressions among the numerous people groups on the continent, they all share enough common features to be considered as flowing from the same stream. Traditional African religion has been labeled many things—pagan, polytheistic, fetishism, ancestor worship, animism, and more—labels that demonstrate the confusion and misunderstanding that surrounds traditional African religion. Some have claimed that the African had no religion to speak of.[6] Others would go so far as to say that even the Akan concept of God—Nyame—was introduced by missionaries![7] In this article I introduce the Adinkra symbols as what I believe to be an excellent window into the heart of African religion more broadly, and Akan religious tradition specifically.

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3 Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006), 8.

4 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 7.

5 Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama, "Introduction," in Encyclopedia of African Religion (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), xxi–xxx; Peter K Sarpong, *Peoples Differ: An Approach to Inculturation in Evangelisation* (Legon, Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2013).

6 Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra, Ghana: FEP International Private Ltd, 1978), 2.

7 Opoku, 14.

Adinkra System: An Overview

The natural tendency hardwired in humans is to make sense of the unfamiliar through the lens of the familiar. This is particularly true when dealing with cultural difference. In the case of African cultures, Christians from the west often try to make sense of African symbols through their own religious lens and, in so doing, curtail a more comprehensive understanding of the African worldview. Since Adinkra symbology will be unfamiliar to most, let me challenge you, the reader, to sit with any questions and concerns that might arise within before immediately imposing personal interpretations. Strive to comprehend the system as a cultural system. Then, and only then, should a comparative analysis be undertaken.

The word "Adinkra" in the language of the Akan people of Ghana and Ivory Coast simply means farewell, but to the Akan, this word contains much more significance. Adinkra follows in the same manner as the traditional African way of welcoming people. After offering the guest something to drink, the host proceeds to ask a series of questions about the purpose of the visit even if the purpose is very evident to both parties. In the same way of a commonly understood purpose, Adinkra is a farewell ceremony by the living for the departed, who are believed to be embarking on a journey to Asamanso (the realm of the Ancestors). Traditionally, mourners bring household items such as pillows, blankets, and the like to make the departed's journey more comfortable. It is both a celebration of life and a send-off. Adinkra in its funereal context gives us a sense of the Akan idea of a life well-lived, as well as insights into what they believe about life after death. We can glean from these practices their belief about some of life's pressing questions such as, what happens after death? Is there a God? And how shall we live in light of our answers to these existential questions?

Adinkra also includes a collection of symbols, a complex set of icons that captures the wisdom and worldview of a people. These visual representations of simple and complex visions of reality compress deep thoughts in iconic forms with a hierarchy of meaning. Sometimes one concept or idea can have two different icons—one concrete and the other abstract—communicating the same idea. Collectively in meaning, ritual, and symbol, Adinkra describes an important Akan cultural system, the origin of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

The symbols used in the Adinkra system have been described differently by various writers. Jasmine Williams calls them "a system of

symbols and communication based on the spirituality of the Akan people of Ghana."[8] For Jon Daniel, "They are a comprehensive lexicon of visual icons created by the Akan people of Ghana and Gyaman people of Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa and devised to communicate proverbs."[9] The Adinkra Dictionary describes this collection as follows:

> Adinkra symbols have what is referred to as multilayered meanings. This means that they may have a variety of meanings and many different levels of interpretation. They convey deep philosophical messages about Akan social values and concepts of social behavior. The symbols reflect Akan common wisdom relating to the notion of God, quality of human relations, the spirituality of life and the inevitability of death. They tend to represent uplifting, motivating and character-building attributes of the individual.[10]

The symbols in the Adinkra system serve a variety of purposes in Akan society. First, in regard to clothing: originally Adinkra symbols were incorporated into the cloth of garments primarily worn during funerals. The symbols were carefully chosen to communicate something about the deceased—their bravery, generosity, or other positive characteristics. Today, however, these symbols have become part of a growing fashion trend and are used in clothing accessories such as bracelets, necklaces, and pendants.

Second, Adinkra symbols were used for decoration in homes, on walls, drums, and gates. This remains true today. Finally, these symbols serve as a means of communicating ancestral wisdom from one generation to the next. Like the wisdom literature in the Christian Bible, the Adinkra system serves as a dependable source of visible ancestral wisdom that can guide the (aspirational) way people should live today.

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8 Jasmine K. Williams, "The Language of Adinkra," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 19, 2021, https://amsterdamnews.com/news/2011/10/26/the-language-of-adinkra/.

9 Jon Daniel, "Four Corners—An Interview with Saki Mafundikwa," *Design Week*, 2022, https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/march-2013/four-corners-an-interview-with-saki-mafundikwa/.

10 W. Bruce Willis, *The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra* (Washington, DC: The Pyramid Complex, 1998), 1.

African Cosmology: An Overview

The interrelated nature of reality in Africa flows out of a theologically grounded African cosmology. While different cosmogonic narratives exist about the origin of the universe, all of them begin with God or the Supreme Being as Creator and Center. It is nearly impossible to construct a non-theological African cosmology. As Uchenna Ogbonnaya reminds us, "In all, the existence of God within the African reality scheme is beyond question since God is at the apex of the African conception of reality."[11] In addition to a divine origin, here are other overarching themes found in African cosmology. As previously stated, a Supreme Being created the universe and entrusted it to humans to preserve and co-create. Because there is one Creator, there is unity in creation. African communities are collectivist. Unity, cooperation, and reconciliation are emphasized in traditional African societies. This finds expression in the African idea of Ubuntu—I am because we are.

All the disparate elements in the created order exist in a harmonic tension of unity in diversity. Ambiguity is a natural part of the human experience, and one must learn to live with and embrace this tension. A key role of humans is to maintain harmony and balance within creation beginning with self. Humans are to strive for peace and harmony with God, self, others, and creation. Amadou Hâmpaté Bâ describes lack of personal integrity as "cutting oneself from oneself."[12] The Akan strive to live in harmony and balance internally and externally.

Time, as expressed in the Adinkra system, is not linear but rather circular. Past, present, and future are all connected. Ancestors from the past, those living in the present, and the future yet unborn are all connected. Death is a transitory phase, simultaneously an end and a beginning.

Adinkra Symbols and Their Meaning

Below I present several examples of symbols found in the Adinkra system. This selection is by no means comprehensive; rather, these samples

11 L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya, "The Question of the Nature of God from the African Place," *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 11, no. 1 (March 9, 2022), 116.

12 Amadou Hâmpaté Bâ, "The Living Tradition," in *General History of Africa: Methodology and African Prehistory Volume* 1, edited by Joseph Ki-Zerbo (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 174.

have been chosen to shed light on important aspects of traditional African religion. So, in the spirit of Sankofa,[13] these symbols act as cultural invitations for the viewer to assume responsibility to learn and grow by going back and pursuing whatever new vistas and directions the symbols will lead. It is important to note that many of these symbols have corresponding proverbs.

Gye Nyame ("Except God"). From a theological perspective the most important of all the Adinkra symbols is *Gye Nyame*. The meaning associated with this symbol is: "The Created Order began a long time ago. There is no one living today who *knows* how and when creation begun, and no one living now will live to see the end of creation except God" (translation mine). Only the Creator (God) was present at creation and will be there at its consummation. In a culture where time is not linear and where wisdom is associated with age, this symbol speaks to the supremacy of God in everything. God is timeless. The word translated God, Nyame, describes a singular, eternal, being who exists outside of time. Although Nyame exists outside time and is all-powerful, God is personal and personable. Nyame is also "Nana," a title for grandparents, rulers, kings, and chiefs—all of whom have capacity and responsibility as caretakers of the people. In Nyame, the personal and other, the near and the far, the grandparent and the king are all wrapped up in one person. Nyame is wholly other, yet personable.

In this cosmology, God is very much alive. God has been before the beginning of time and will be at the very end of it. He is the One who was and is and will be. No one has seen God and therefore no visual representation of God is possible. African culture reveres old age because it is believed that the longer a person lives the more they have seen, experienced, and hopefully, learned. This puts God as, far and away, the wisest of all. As such, we seek God's advice, and counsel. What God says carries weight because God has seen it all, sees it all, and will see it all.

Nyame Yeh Ohene ("Nyame is King"). In Akan society where the supreme ruler is a king—Asantehene—this is an anthropomorphic way of ascribing attributes of an earthly ruler to God. A chief and by extension a king who is the head of state, town, or village has very specific responsibilities including: 1) custodian of state

13 Sankofa as a word means "go back and retrieve."

property; 2) interceder for the physical, social, and emotional welfare of the people through ritual prayer and sacrifices; 3) defender, protector, and "war general of the people";[14] 4) judge and lawgiver. To call Nyame king is to ascribe all these qualities to him. One can say the earthly king emulates the Supreme Being (Nyame).

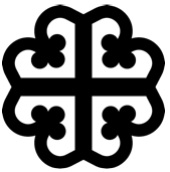
Nyame Nwu ("God will not die; therefore, I will not die"). While the emphasis here is on the immortality of the human soul, God and his Spirit in each human person is the source of that immortality. Taken together with the Gye Nyame symbol, the Akan, and by extension traditional African religion, makes an emphatic statement about the eternal nature of God. God is the sustainer of life both in this world and the next.

Nyame Biribi Wo Soro ("God, there is something in the sky, let it reach my hand"). The sky where God dwells is where provisions are. The prayer and the hope is that God the Provider who has more than enough would supply the need of the supplicant. God is the one who supplies human needs.

Nyame Nti ("Because God exist, I will not eat grass"). This symbol is an expression of confidence in a God who is able to provide for his people. In a sense it says because God lives, I will not starve.

Mmusuyidee ("A good soul is like a cat; it is allergic to filth"). Mmusuyidee combines three separate words: Mmusuo (ill luck or curse) + Yi (take away) + Adee (thing), meaning the thing that removes ill luck or curses. In a cosmological system where everything is interconnected, what happens in the spiritual realm has real consequences in the physical life of a person and in the community. It is important, therefore, to keep one's soul clean like a cat. The implication is that a cat would not go near filth and if it does, it takes any means necessary to rid itself of even a little particle of dirt.

14 "He pledges to the people during his enstoolment that he would lead them in war." *Osei Kwadwo. An Outline of Asante History*, 4th edition, vol. 1 (Kumasi, Ghana: O. Kwadwo Enterprise, 2022), 12.



Nyame Dua ("The Tree of God"). Although currently rare, this tree was traditionally planted in front of people's homes as a reminder of God's presence. "In Rattray's (an early Africanist and student of the Ashanti)[15] day almost every Ashanti compound had its *Onyame Dua*, a triple-forked branch set upright in the ground, serving as an altar; on this a bowl for offerings rested. Such altars may still be seen, but not so commonly as formerly."[16] Furthermore, they were used for purification and cleansing rites.[17]

In addition to symbols that help enhance our understanding of who God is, others are related to community life. Here are a few samples:

Owuo Akwede ("Ladder of death"). The ladder of death is not reserved for one person. Death, in other words, is inevitable for all human beings.

Obi Nnka Obi ("Bite not one another"). Do not undermine one another; instead positively cheer each other on. Support one another; strive for peace and harmony. This symbol also serves as a caution against strife and provocation.

Ese Ne Tekrema ("The teeth and the tongue"). The local proverb states, "Even the teeth and the tongue fight." Conflict is a natural part of life. Consider that similarly to teeth and tongue which are perfectly designed to work together, one can expect some level of conflict even in the most complementary of unions.

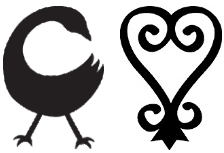
15 Clifford Owusu-Gyamfi, "What Did Captain Robert Sutherland Rattray Say about the Akan Concept of Sunsum?" *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 11, no. 1-2 (2021), 3-28.

16 Sidney George Williamson and Kwesi A. Dickson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith: A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions* (Accra, GH: Ghana Universities Press, 1965), 87.

17 Adolph H. Agbo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols* (Kumasi, Ghana, GH: Delta Design & Publications, 2011), 26.

Funtumfunefu Denkyemfunefu ("Siamese crocodile"). Siamese (conjoined) crocodiles share one stomach, yet they fight over food. This is interpreted to mean people with shared goals do best when they work together by celebrating each other's successes.

Nkyinkyim ("Twists and turns"). The road of life is full of twists and turns. This prepares people, especially the young, for the ebbs and flows of life. Because life is full of twists and turns, one must be able to adapt to changing situations or change with the times in order to survive and thrive.



Sankofa ("Go back and retrieve"). The local proverb states, "It is not taboo to return and retrieve something you left behind or forgot earlier." It is never too late to correct a mistake. In a sense, for the Akan, ignorance is not bliss; it is an opportunity to learn or make up for what you missed, either because you never bothered to learn it or were never taught.

Nea Onnim ("The one who does not know can know if they study"). The responsibility of knowing falls on the individual. The basic assumption here is everyone can learn and be informed if they so choose.

Nea Ope Se Obedi Hene ("The one who wants to be king"). Saying: "The one who wants to be king must first serve others." The leader must learn to be a servant. Service prepares future kings or rulers to lead well because leadership is ultimately about service.

Dwannini ("The ram"). Saying: "If you see a ram who bullies others with his horn, it is not because of the power of his horns, but rather because of what is in his heart." The cultural meaning of this is, "Power does not corrupt; the one wielding it does." Put differently, power is not inherently corruptible or corrupting. Those who wield it can choose to use it for good or abuse it. It is a choice that comes from the heart.

Attributes of God in Traditional African Religion

From the above sets of symbols, we can deduce the following about the attributes of God in traditional African religion: First, there is only one God. The name of the Supreme Being (Nyame and all his other titles) has no plural form in either the Twi language of the Asante people or the Bahle in the language of the Gouro people of the Ivory Coast.[18] The idea of God as one Supreme Being is well-attested across the continent. Contrary to what some have asserted, this concept is an African idea, not a Western or Middle Eastern import.[19] If there is any "foreign" influence, that influence could be traced to ancient Egypt. There are enough conceptual, linguistic, and philological similarities to suggest such a connection. One can see Nyame, for instance, as a derivative of the Egyptian God Amen. Dompere writes:

> A special day has been set aside in the name of Nyame, God Amen, for His reverence and worship. The day is Amen-Menda, shortened as Menmeneda (God's Amen Day or Nyame's Day), which is Saturday. Because he is a male in the Akan ecclesiastics and belief system, he is named Kwame (or Kwa-Amen-a).[20] This simply affirmed the linkage of Akan ancient roots of the Alkebulan of ancient Egypt or ancient Ethiopia of Kemet.[21]

The African concept of God as creator is well attested and needs no further comment. However, it is important to note that as Creator he is the source of all things. In our 2022 Sankofa trip to Ghana, we visited Bodomase, a small town in the greater Kumawu area. The talking drummer and the curator explained the origin of the town this way: Odomakoma (God's title as Creator) created human beings, communities, and nations. He also created the founder of this town, Bodomase, and his Bodom tree (Bodomase literally means under the Bodom tree). What I found fascinating is that even the founding of a village or town has to be anchored in the greater creation story. Everyone and everything has

18 Because the African approach to God is practical, these names reflect what he is and does for people rather than what he is in himself.

19 Opoku, 18.

20 I do not think adding the "a" is necessary as it has the unintended effect of changing the male name for Saturday (Kwame) to the female name for Tuesday (Kwabena).

21 Kofi Kissi Dompere, "Nyame," in *Encyclopedia of African Religion* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2009), 466.

its origin in God, including the tree.

The traditional African understanding of God is evident in nature. The Akan have a saying that "no one has to tell a child that there is a God." In other words, God's deeds are so evident that even a child who is not fully developed intellectually can deduce God's existence from what they see. In this regard traditional African religion is monotheistic. Local deities serve as intermediaries between God and people. These local deities typically have priests or priestesses who serve as their mouthpiece, much like the interpreter to the king or chief. They have no vision or prophecies of their own; they only reveal and interpret the visions and the words of the deities. These deities, it is important to note, are not God. Priests and priestesses are called by the deities, not appointed by the community.

The vast majority of the Adinkra symbols deal with human interactions, ethics, and an accepted moral code of behavior. This collectivist society emphasizes mutuality and cooperation with proverbs such as, "Treat others the way you want to be treated," "Do not bite one another," and "Work together since you share a common goal." There is also a strong emphasis on knowledge and on each individual's responsibility to fight ignorance and educate him- or herself.

Perhaps we are not prepared to say that Akan people through their practices of the Adinkra system found Jesus. But we can say with confidence that the grace of God was evident in their understanding of God. They knew God and worshiped him as the all-powerful, compassionate creator. This reality is evidenced by their worldview and how Akan society was designed. Our role then as ministers and missionaries is to work with indigenous people to identify God's gracious hand already at work within the culture. If we approach cross-culture ministry and mission in this manner, then in the words of Pope Paul IV, we will have an authentic African Christianity, one that reflects an African culture transformed for the glory of God in Christ. This way the African, and by extension, all peoples of the world would come to the table of nations as their authentic selves and thereby fulfill the vision of Christ (Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 1:15-20). A decolonized African Christian faith could usher in an era of true mutuality and global transformation of the church. This could approximate the vision of God and would confound the principalities and powers of our polarized world today so rife with division and strife.

An imposed, translated, or even adapted non-inculturated Christianity discarded everything African. Desirous to cater to colonial powers, African Christians often bought into someone else's idea of who they were. In

the process, the beliefs and practices of their ancestors were, sometimes voluntarily but often not, disdained and discarded. This continues today. Having bought into a lie, Africans are now discovering that they, like David, have donned an armor like Saul's that fits rather badly. This poorly fitting armor has led to a no-shame culture among politicians and fleecing the flock among some church leaders. These are behaviors that would have been frowned upon in an earlier collectivist society. As the fourteenth-century historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldun brilliantly put it, "Those who are conquered always want to imitate the conqueror in his main characteristics and clothing, his craft, and in all his distinctive traits and customs."[22] Africa seems to have imitated primarily the worst parts of western culture. We have traded a God who is very near for a God who seems removed from the lived experiences of men and women. The once powerful God who filled both the spiritual and physical realms whose deities inspired fear and awe, is now replaced by a God we interact with mainly in our churches. The rituals that reminded us daily of God are now gone or nearly so. Africans now find themselves floating to and fro, tossed in borrowed spaces.

Moving Forward

How then shall we engage traditional African religions in a way that fosters a movement of indigenous African Christianity? Perhaps a good place to start is the requisite disposition necessary for such an engagement. Tierno Bokar's advice to a young researcher aptly applies here:

> If you wish to know who I am,
> If you wish me to teach you what I know,
> Cease for the while to be what you are
> And forget what you know.[23]

This will require great deal of humility on the part of anyone attempting such a task, but it is only humility that makes learning new ideas from foreign people possible. Additionally, one must be patient. It takes time to gain trust, without which no genuine transformation is possible. Such a person should also have a deep love for people as people, not just

22 Adam Hochschild and Barbara Kingsolver, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston, MA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 304.

23 Amadou Hampaté Bâ, "The Living Tradition," *In General History of Africa, Vol. 1: Methodology and African Prehistory* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 203.

as souls to be won for Christ. Such a disposition encourages us to think, pray, and care for whole persons—mind, body, and spirit. To this, we must add a strong commitment to justice. Such a posture, in a very real sense, narrows the gap between Sunday and the rest of life. Any who would be engaged in such a posture must believe in the power of God through Christ to effect change in the lives of people, both in the physical and spiritual realms. As Cyril Okorocha puts it, "To the African, power is the essence of true religion."[24] This explains to a great extent the popularity of Pentecostalism in Africa today. Finally, the minister must be creative as they rely on God for insight.

An engagement with the greater likelihood of fostering an authentic African Christianity would take the following characteristics of traditional African religion seriously: "communalism, holism, reciprocity, generosity, and mutuality and interdependence."[25] To this I add what I have called here the interrelated nature of reality and its implication for ministry. A genuine inculturation of the gospel will take seriously the idea of the interrelated nature of reality since in the traditional African worldview everything, including time, is interconnected. There is no strict separation between the sacred and the secular. This is not just an African tradition; it is also profoundly biblical and has enormous implications for ministry. Had the gospel been properly inculturated in the African culture, practices such as ancestral veneration could have been redeemed and fostered for the greater glory of God in Christ. An appreciation of the integrated nature of reality also encourages reverence for the elderly in a manner that is simultaneously biblical and African. So when we disparage and malign such a practice, we sever the connection that naturally exists in the culture between belief and practice.

In conclusion, I will advance that the Christianity inherited and practiced in much of Africa today is not authentically African. This is not the usual argument that "Christianity is a white man's religion," because such a claim flies in the face of historical evidence. Africans have played a critical role in how we think about our faith. Rather, my argument is that the Christianity in much of Africa today is not authentically African. And this poorly incarnated gospel has robbed Africans of the power of the gospel. A truly incarnated—inculturated—gospel engages a culture at its core, which for Africa is its religion, and transforms it from within. A

24 A. O. Balcomb, "'A Hundred Miles Wide, but Only a Few Inches Deep!'? Sounding the Depth of Christian Faith in Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 140 (2011): 23.

25 Balcomb, 24.

truly inculturated gospel will seek to understand the theological categories of traditional African religion and the spirit that animates them. This failure has left Christianity anemic in both the public square and in the spiritual realm. As we were reminded by the head of Uganda's traditional healers' association in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article both Christians and Muslims "also believe in traditional religion."[26] Inculturation in an already evangelized context is going to be a difficult but rewarding. It is my hope that together we will be able to usher in a new form of Christianity in Africa that is authentically African and truly biblical. May the Lord help us in our efforts to be true to the gospel and who he has made us to be.

26 Francis X Rocca, Nicholas Bariyo, and Gbenga Akingbule, "The Competition for Believers in Africa Is Transforming Christianity and Islam," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 2023, https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-competition-for-believers-in-africas-religion-market-66e5255d.

Up from the Ashes: The Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant (SEMC) in Global Dialogue

Paul H. de Neui, professor of missiology and intercultural studies, North Park Theological Seminary

After the devastating conflagration of 1871, Chicago had a great need to resurrect itself. The upcoming 400th anniversary of Colombus's landfall in the Americas in 1692 appeared, at that time, to be exactly the kind of international event that could pull Chicago up from the ashes and place her clearly in front of the world's stage. However, starting in the early 1880s several other US cities put themselves forward as potential hosts, including New York, St. Louis, and Washington DC. The stakes were high, and tempers rose as competition over location grew increasingly heated. Yet no voices were louder than those from Chicago, prompting *New York Sun* reporter Charles A. Dana to complain that the city's politicians were "full of hot air" forever branding Chicago as "The Windy City," a title having nothing to do with the weather.[1] Midwestern "windbags" were not alone, however. So vociferous were the arguments that the government finally had to step in to finalize the decision.

> By 1890, it was clear that the U.S. Congress would have to decide where the fair would be held and that the principal contenders, by virtue of their superior financial resources, would be Chicago and New York. New York's financial titans, including J. P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and William Waldorf Astor, pledged $15 million to underwrite the fair

1 Skydeck Chicago, "Why Is Chicago Called 'The Windy City'?" 2018. https://theskydeck.com/why-is-chicago-called-the-windy-city/#:~:text=The%20Cincinnati%20Enquirer%20used%20the,and%20the%20rest%20is%20history.

> if Congress awarded it to New York City. Not to be outdone, Chicago's leading capitalists and exposition sponsors, including Charles T. Yerkes, Marshall Field, Philip Armour, Gustavus Swift, and Cyrus McCormick, responded in kind. Furthermore, Chicago's promoters presented evidence of significant financial support from the city and state as well as over $5 million in stock subscriptions from people from every walk of life. What finally led Congress to vote in Chicago's favor was banker Lyman Gage's ability to raise several million additional dollars in a 24-hour period to best New York's final offer.[2]

Chicago would be the home of The World Columbian Exposition of 1893. It did not matter that delays caused by haggling and planning meant missing the actual quadricentennial date by one year. With robust fervor and plenty of political maneuvering, Chicago rebuilt itself up from the ashes, removing numerous homes and businesses at a site seven miles south of downtown over the newly expanded shores of Lake Michigan. On this prime location arose an impressive display of highly gilded Neo-Renaissance style (albeit temporary lath and plaster) buildings together called the "The White City." This event, variously called the World's Fair or the Columbian Exposition, would literally become a featured star in the Chicago flag, a city banner more familiar to most Illinoisians than that of their state.

The area was easily accessed by a new rail line, and people came by the thousands to be dazzled by the numerous sites and exhibits from forty-six countries, including G. W. G. Ferris Jr.'s great wheel of thirty-six cars hoisting passengers over 260 feet skyward and for many, the shocking experience of electric lights outshining the stars at night. Katherine Lee Bates referenced her July visit to the fair in the now-famous lyrics, "O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years; thine alabaster

2 Robert W. Rydell, "World's Colombian Exposition," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, 2005, http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1386.html.

years; thine alabaster cities gleam undimmed by human tears!"[3] Between May 1 and October 30, more than twenty-seven million visitors came —over one-third of the country's population.

Not to be outdone by previous events such as Paris's Exposition Universelle of 1889 with its famous Eiffel Tower, Chicago made every effort to proclaim the triumphant theme of its own transformation as well as the global impact of the Gilded Age. Prosperity would surely radiate out from this resurrected urban miracle across the country and then around the globe. To further catapult the universal impact of this event into a promising future, the word "world" was liberally applied adjectivally at every opportunity. In addition to constructing world-class architecture, installing world-renown landscaping, and displaying world-famous exhibitions, marvels, and innovations from every corner of the globe, the promoters desired to create a permanent literary collection of the global principles of the World Exposition. An organization called the World's Congress Auxiliary was established with high-minded objectives:

> To make the Exposition complete and the celebration adequate, the wonderful achievements of the next age, science, literature, education, government, jurisprudence, morals, charity, religion, and other departments of human activity, should also be conspicuously displayed as the most effective means of increasing fraternity, progress, prosperity, and peace of mankind.[4]

The World Congress Auxiliary divided their task into nineteen major thematic departments, inviting scores of the most prominent national and international leaders in the arts, business, education, the sciences,

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3 As inspiring as the patriotic hymn "America the Beautiful" has become, it is certainly not without controversy, as was the fair itself. Tears were not absent during the numerous tragedies such as kidnappings, murders, and accidents that occurred during the fair. See Erik Larson's *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003). Extended closing ceremonies were cancelled when Mayor Harrison was shot and killed in his bed by a disgruntled city employee shortly after giving the closing address ("1893: Mayor Carter Harrison," Homicide in Chicago 1870-1930, Northwestern University School of Law, 2012, https://homicide.northwestern.edu/crimes/carter/#:~:text=The%20mayor%20was%20shot%20in,mental%20examinations%20Prendergast%20was%20executed).

4 World's Congress Auxiliary Pre-Publications, Programs and Circulars Collection, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library, accessed Sept. 2, 2023 (I understood this was not being added anymore, it does not show up in earlier electronic references I have footnoted), https://www.chipublib.org/fa-worlds-congress-auxiliary-pre-publications-programs-and-circulars-collection/.

and theology to organize over two hundred individual congresses to be held concurrently with the fair from May 15 to October 28, 1893. Most of these august assemblies would be held in one of the few buildings constructed for the fair actually intended for posterity, the Permanent Memorial Art Palace, later renamed the Art Institute of Chicago. The grand hall could seat several thousand people. Together these various congresses would include thousands of addresses, meetings, and symposia on nearly every possible topic from every known field of study in that day. The addresses were published into several volumes, providing a historical record collectively recording the achievements and aspirations of a forward-thinking Western humanity on the cusp of the twentieth century.

Among the hundreds of assemblies at the World's Columbian Exposition, one was self-acclaimed as the best attended and best publicized, namely, the World's Congress of Religions. This was later renamed "The World's Parliament of Religions." Bringing together some four hundred men and women representing forty-one denominations and religious traditions, this historic event was labeled a world's first. It lasted for seventeen days in September of 1893. Of all the congresses, the Parliament of Religions was by far the most popular with the public and the press. Audiences of four thousand or more attended each of the daily sessions.[5]

Conjointly during plenary sessions, several denominations and religious entities held their own small congresses. Among those listed in the records were the African Methodist Episcopal Congress, Seventh Day Baptist Congress, Catholic Congress, two from the Congress on the Society of Friends, Jewish Congress, three Lutheran congresses, Presbyterian and Cumberland Presbyterian congresses, Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant, Unitarian Congress, United Brethren Congress, Universalist Congress, Inter-Denominational Congress, Congress of Missions, Sunday Rest Congress, and others.[6]

Rev. Dr. John Henry Barrows, who oversaw the final publication of all the presentations, summarized that "to win the approval of all broad-minded men" the World's Parliament of Religion would pursue ten

5 "1893 Chicago" Parliament of the World's Religions, 2023, https://parliamentofreligions.org/parliament/1893-chicago/.

6 John Henry Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), 815–16.

major objectives. Using the language of his nineteenth-century context, these were:

1. To bring together in conference, for the first time in history, the leading representatives of the great Historic Religions of the world.
2. To show to men, in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various Religions hold and teach in common.
3. To promote and deepen the spirit of human brotherhood among religious men of diverse faiths, through friendly conference and mutual good understanding, while not seeking to foster the temper of indifferentism, and not striving to achieve any formal and outward unity.
4. To set forth, by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each Religion, and by the various chief branches of Christendom.
5. To indicate the impregnable foundations of Theism, and the reasons for man's faith in Immortality, and thus to unite and strengthen the forces which are adverse to a materialistic philosophy of the universe.
6. To secure from leading scholars, representing the Brahman, Buddhist, Confucian, Parsee, Mohammedan, Jewish and other Faiths, and from representatives of the various Churches of Christendom, full and accurate statements of the spiritual and other effects of the Religions which they hold upon the Literature, Art, Commerce, Government, Domestic and Social life of the peoples among whom these Faiths have prevailed.
7. To inquire what light each Religion has afforded, or may afford, to the other Religions of the world.
8. To set forth, for permanent record to be published to the world, an accurate and authoritative account of the present condition and outlook of Religion among the leading nations of the earth.
9. To discover, from competent men, what light Religion has to throw on the great problems of the present age, especially the important questions connected with Temperance, Labor, Education, Wealth and Poverty.
10. To bring the nations of the earth into a more friendly fellowship, in the hope of securing permanent international peace.[7]

7 Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 18.

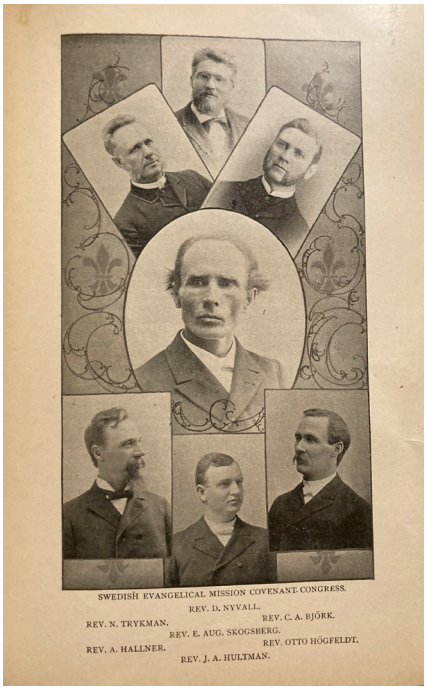
The Covenant Goes to the Fair

It was a remarkable year for the fledgling, eight-year-old denomination known at the time as the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant. After years of emotional discussion, the contentious decision was finally made to move the Covenant's seminary and school program from Minneapolis to the growing metropolis of Chicago. Indications were that Chicago would be the new center. Some vocal leaders in the Covenant were caught up in the attraction of The White City and some opposed.

The history of the 1893 World's Fair, its devils and deceptions, its pompous platitudes and broken promises, and its innovations and impact on the development of Chicago, has been a source of fascination for this author since I first learned of it. When I discovered an original two-volume set containing all the presentations of the 1893 Parliament of World Religions, I bought it. Thumbing through these essays from a previous era, I found most of the nearly two hundred papers vitriolic in nature. Imagine my surprise when amid these papers I ran across a short essay with photographs entitled "Presentation of the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant in America." The Covenant Church was present with these leaders of other religions in 1893! How did this group of Swedish immigrants end up presenting on the venerable platform of the World's Parliament of Religions with leaders of so many other faith traditions? With the help of North Park University's archivist, Andy Meyer, we are able to read the words of David Nyvall himself:

> At the time when the school was ready to be moved to Chicago, the Mission Friend Publishing Company dominated everything in sight with the Covenant including the University Land Association through whose real estate services the school was located in North Park. Our first dependence on the company was a large benefit. It was in the year 1893 when the World's Fair and the Parliament of World's Religion were held in Chicago. [Andrew] Hallner, was the editor of the "Missions Vännen," who at the time was one of the very few Swedish Mission Friends speaking English with ease, a man of large visions and generous implications, saw to it that the Covenant was properly represented at the denominational program of Christian churches. Through his services the small and probably the youngest of all denominations had a voice in the Parliament of Religions, to tell briefly yet distinctly

its aim and its faith, and this Covenant declaration became a part of the minutes of the Parliament and a historical fact for all who ever care to know. It was a great opportunity, and a grand welcome to Chicago, thanks to our powerful friends.[8]



For a fledgling group this was indeed a great honor and opportunity. Contrary to other mainline Christian denominations whose absence ranged from gracious to bombastic, at the Swedish Mission Covenant's annual meeting in June of 1893, the delegates "voted to participate in the World's Congress of Religions in connection with the Colombian Exposition of Progress."[9] It was understood that leaders fluent in English would present.

The Covenant evidently followed the trend of many other groups and celebrated their own "Covenant Congress," held at an unknown location on Monday, September 25. Several papers and formal addresses were given in Swedish by President C.A. Björk, as well as Nils Frykman and Otto Högfeldt. David Nyvall presented a ten-page paper in Swedish titled "The Characterization of the Swedish Mission Covenants in Sweden and America." The original Swedish version of this paper appeared in the October 4, 1893, issue of *Missions Vännen*. Eighty years later an English translation by Eric Hawkinson appeared in the 1973 issue of the *Covenant Quarterly*.

The next day, Tuesday, September 26, 1893, a celebration of Covenanters was held at the site of what would soon become the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant College campus on Chicago's north side.

8 David Nyvall, *The Swedish Covenanters: A History* (Chicago: Covenant Book Concern, 1930), 81.

9 Leland H. Carlson, *A History of North Park College: Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary 1891–1941* (Chicago: North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1941), 84.

Leland Carlson described the scene fifty years later:

> On the afternoon of September 26, a large crowd was gathered in North Park for the festive occasion. The people were surprised to see that part of the building [of Old Main] had already progressed to the second story. Many of them climbed up the scaffoldings to enjoy the beautiful view and to survey the new subdivision. The service began with the singing of the hymn "Nearer My God to Thee." Then a box was filled with a Bible, two song books—*Sions Harpan* and *Cymbalen*, the latest catalogue of the school, the Covenant's yearbook, copies of several Swedish and American newspapers, samples of the latest coins, and pictures of Björk, Nyvall, and Skogsbergh. Also several essays presenting historical and statistical summaries of the Covenant were included. Thereupon the box was placed within the cornerstone and the latter was put into its proper position and sealed.[10]

On Wednesday, September 27, a much-abbreviated version of the address given at the Covenant Congress two days earlier was presented in English at the Parliament of World's Religions. Following the Parliament's fourth objective, "to set forth, by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each Religion, and by the various chief branches of Christendom," the following brief presentation introduced perhaps for the first time to a wider American audience, the essence of the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant. As mentioned by Nyvall in the quotation above, this report appears in the published minutes of the Parliament and is printed here in its entirety for the first time in the *Covenant Quarterly*.

PRESENTATION OF THE SWEDISH EVANGELICAL MISSION COVENANT IN AMERICA

This Congress was held on September 27 [1893], and papers were read on the history and present condition of this body. The history of the Free Religious movement from its rise in north Sweden to its appearance in America and growth in the United States is full of interest to the lovers of spiritual religion. Its first leader, Rosenius, who by his preaching and

10 Carlson, 84.

through the influence of his magazine *Pietisten*, was the means of starting a profound and lasting revival of religion in many parts of Sweden. He did not withdraw from the state church nor did he encourage others to withdraw, though he set in motion the impulses which brought about separation. Upon his death in 1868, his work was taken up by Prof. P. Waldenström, Ph.D., D.D., an eminent clergyman. Under him, *Pietisten* became a greater power than before. Rosenius had marvelous insight into the human heart and knew how to touch and move men. Waldenström's strength lay in his insight into the Word of God and his power of literary expression. The work culminated in a great revival, which in the seventies spread all over Sweden. Doctrinal differences, and especially the question as to who should partake of the Lord's Supper, whether believers in heart or also those formally members of the state church, led to the formation of free societies and the establishment of a new missionary society called the Swedish Mission Covenant, and E.J. Ekman, D.D., was chosen as its President. Waldenström's position towards the movement has been friendly, though he has not identified himself entirely with it. The Covenant has engaged in widespread mission activity both at home and among the heathen.

The Free Mission movement in America is an offshoot of the original Swedish Covenant, its members being either directly connected with the home body or influenced by its literature and ideas. In 1868, in Chicago, the Mission Church was established and incorporated with a charter permitting the ordination of ministers. Other churches springing up in various towns united with this church to form the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Mission Synod in 1873. Another Synod, the Swedish Evangelical Ansgarii Synod, was organized in 1874. The two bodies united in 1885 into the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant in America.

The Covenant body in Sweden numbers about 800 churches, with a membership of about 130,000. It has missions in China, Persia, Russia, and Siberia, and in the Congo, under about fifty missionaries. It is more difficult to give statistics of the American movement, as many churches work in its line without formally uniting with it. There is no exaggeration in saying that it comprehends a membership of from forty to fifty thousand, including about 350 churches, of which 116 have formally joined the Covenant, with about 250 ministers and ten missionaries in Alaska and five in China. The college and seminary had last year 150 students, and five professors and instructors. The hospital, called the Swedish Home of Mercy, located at Bowmanville (Chicago), Ill., accommodates fifty patients.

The basis of the movement is the Church idea, that a Christian church is a free union of persons united by the same spiritual life on the foundation of a common faith in Christ and brotherly love and confidence, and that this union ought to be held open to everyone believing in Jesus Christ and leading a true Christian life, without consideration of different creeds as far as these do not deny the Word of God and the authority of Holy Scriptures. Each such church is self-governing and owes no authority above its own in all local matters. Through the Covenant each church is bound closely together with all the other churches. This Covenant is not a church organization in the ordinary sense, but a mission society having churches as its members. These churches have consolidated because of the missionary spirit which led them to missionary enterprises too large for any single church to undertake.

This union for missionary purposes led, however, to a more intimate consolidation because of that new responsibility which this union gave each church, not only in regard to the common missions, but also in regard to the very character of every other church. To the annual general assembly each church, large or small, is free to send two delegates. And as the churches themselves, through the delegates, are the true members of the assembly, they are responsible for the decisions made. Only the general assembly has [the] power to admit new churches into the Covenant. And should a certain church fall so grossly in errors of doctrine or life as to forfeit its right to be further called a Christian church, the assembly has the power to sever such a church from the union. Accordingly, each church stands to the Covenant in the very same position as each individual to the church. Both stand there of free choice, both have their free vote, and both are, after the vote is cast, bound to the decision of the majority.

There is no common fixed creed or special doctrine which binds the church together, yet they are harmonious in faith and preaching, being in sympathy with evangelical orthodoxy and holding to the New Testament as the standard of life and thought. Where differences of theology coexist with a pure Christian life and faith in Jesus Christ, these are permitted to exist as unavoidable in our imperfect knowledge of truth. Neither is there a common ritual or discipline, not even for baptism, the Lord's Supper, marriage, etc. Each preacher and each church is free to adopt their own order. The harmony in the midst of this diversity is largely owing to the lively and intimate intercourse of churches and preachers. Hospitality is especially insisted on, and the mission conferences held by each church once or twice a year are attended by all the preachers in the district. Thus the churches know

all the preachers and the preachers are at home in all the churches. Great emphasis is laid in preaching on the word-for-word exegesis of a Bible text, on the ground that the pulpit finds its only justification for existence in expounding the very words of the Word of God.[11]

Covenant Returns to the Fair

Fast-forward one hundred and thirty years to 2023. Covenanter Kaleb Nyquist is a member of the Board of Directors of what has been renamed the Parliament of World's Religions (PoWR). Plans were made for a week-long celebration of this significant anniversary of the original event to be held at McCormick Place in Chicago. At Nyquist's invitation to North Park Theological Seminary, a group of us were encouraged to submit a topic for a panel workshop. Because I have taught a course on Religions and Cultures at the seminary for the last seventeen years, I suggested that we invite our friends from the Jewish and Buddhist communities, as well as recent students from my class to be part of this presentation. Together, on August 16, 2023, one hundred and thirty years after the first Parliament, we hosted a breakout workshop entitled "The Power of Interfaith Teaching in Seminary Education." Our panel consisted of Rabbi Andrea London of Temple Beth Emet in Evanston, Illinois, a longtime friend of North Park Seminary; my colleague and co-instructor Obed Manwatkar, originally from Nagpur, India; current seminary students Tori Mack and Barry Zhang, and myself. I was encouraged to see my good friend and Theravada Buddhist monk, Dr. Boonchu of Wat Dhammaram, Chicago, in the audience along with a couple of dozen other attendees.

According to the summary comments of the Parliament, over seven thousand participants coming from over ninety-five countries attended the week-long event, viewing hundreds of exhibits representing over two hundred and ten different traditions. The conference theme was "A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights." Part of this movement centers around the formation, support, and implementation of a new Global Ethic.[12] In the words of the Rev. High Priestess Phyllis Curott, 2023 PoWR Program Chair:

11 Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 1514–17.

12 For a complete manuscript of PoWR's Global Ethic statement see https://parliamentofreligions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Global-Ethic-PDF-2020-Update.pdf.

> Today we are all standing at a pivotal moment where history seeks to repeat itself. It is a moment of urgency—an existential global scourge has returned….It is a stark reality that transcends borders, cultures, and faiths. A reality that demands our collective action and moral courage. As people of faith and spirit, we have a singular responsibility. Here is the truth we must all confront and change. Despots are misappropriating religions to justify the unjustifiable. Tyrants proclaim themselves saviors posturing with religious symbols and exploiting language to affirm their power. And tragically, there are religious leaders who stand beside them and religious communities who cheer them.[13]

The task to reach beyond the narrow confines of those in agreement stands before us all. The call to participation and action will require building bridges beyond our familiar sects. In our small way, North Park Theological Seminary was privileged to carry on a tradition begun several years ago by the visionary founding leaders of our denomination for the glory of God and our neighbor's good.

13 Stephen Avino, "A Message from Our Executive Director," email message, August 25, 2023.

The Parliament of the World's Religions and the Work of Creation Care: A Pragmatic Apologetic for Interfaith Engagement in Covenant Perspective

Kaleb Daniel Nyquist, strategy, impact and learning database manager at the Center for Tech and Civic Life; trustee, Global Ethic and Climate Action at the Parliament of the World's Religions

At the Covenant Congress that was part of the extended festivities of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, a young David Nyvall spoke about the project of interreligious engagement in a manner seemingly contrary to the spirit of the unprecedented gathering of religious representatives from across the globe:

> ...we feel it is a precious responsibility of love to stand in a brotherly relationship to all who are included in the Lord's prayer. But in no way do we understand the Savior's prayer as a union of the whole world on the broad foundation of general brotherly love and the insight of common interests. Least of all do we think that the unity about which the Savior prayed was an alliance between the religions and faith of people of all times. Such an alliance can be bought only for the price of Christianity itself and is a great misfortune, a fearful transgression, a new Judas act toward the Savior. In relationship to every effort toward unity at the price of Christ and the gospel, between Christ's enemies and friends, between the world and the congregations, we are thus willing to be looked upon as intolerant and narrow-minded.[1]

1 David Nyvall, "Characterization of the Swedish Mission Covenants in Sweden and America" (1893). Translated by Eric Hawkinson (1973). Republished in Glenn P. Anderson, ed., *Covenant Roots: Sources and Affirmations*, 2nd edition (Chicago, IL: Covenant Publications, 1999), 140-41.

If we read Nyvall's words at face value, it appears that he is attempting to navigate the tension between God's inclusive embrace of the whole world and the exclusive claims of the Christian gospel. This of course is a tension that has befuddled Christians for millennia, and Nyvall is not exceptional in his attempt to navigate it. Although we consider Nyvall to be not a prophet but rather a historically situated figure formative for many of our own institutions as Evangelical Covenanters, it behooves us to enter the same tension he experienced: how do we stand in brotherly relationship to all in a manner that exemplifies rather than sells out the Christian faith?

In this essay, I advance a pragmatic apologetic for interfaith engagement from my dual perspective as a lifelong Evangelical Covenanter and as a present trustee of the modern Parliament of the World's Religions nonprofit organization. A pragmatic apologetic can be understood as (1) respecting that interfaith engagement is sometimes viewed with suspicion and as a potentially transgressive activity and thus in need of an "apologia" or defense, and (2) appealing to the mission-minded Evangelical Covenant Church's practical spirit that allows for holy vocation to be found within a range of human activities, including but not limited to soup kitchens, hospitals, music festivals, and interfaith dialogue.

For the sake of contrast, a different philosophical foundation for interfaith engagement would be the metaphysical argument that would (1) be premised on the idea that many if not all the world's diverse religions point towards the same divine reality, and (2) appeal to a sense of duty that the world's religions federate into a single global community, just as God is ultimately one. The metaphysical argument—although interesting and seemingly harmonious—would paradoxically be more likely to divide Evangelical Covenanters than to unite us. This is because as we affirm "the reality of freedom in Christ" we are knitted together in a denominational community that diverges in the matters of biblical interpretation and theological doctrine upon which any metaphysical argument would have to rest. Neither does the metaphysical argument resonate with my own hands-on experience of interfaith engagement, making me at best a faulty second-hand narrator of such a rationale for interfaith engagement. Therefore, I bracket aside metaphysical argumentation for the sake of bringing focus to the pragmatic apologetic

that undergirds this particular essay.[2] The pragmatic apologetic I seek to explore instead is rooted in the Evangelical Covenant Church's resolve to practice "creation care" as a form of biblical witness.[3] Because the work of creation care that we as Christians in general and Covenanters in particular subscribe to is something we believe to be commanded to all humans regardless of their religious identity, in addition to the urgency of the global ecological and political crises that increasingly entangle us together, the need for collaboration across religious divides becomes achingly obvious.

The structure of this essay is as follows. I first explore the impetus for interfaith engagement as it arises from a practice of creation care, expanding the definition of stewardship to include not just concern for tangible life and nature but also stewardship of our intangible covenants. I highlight the United States Constitution and the Paris Agreement as covenantal documents that support institutions that are relevant for the work of creation care at a global level and worthy of our attention as stewards of God's creation. I then explore the landmark document of the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, "Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration" (or simply "the Global Ethic") as a quasi-covenant that, while not truly covenantal, creates the space for cooperation across religious divides and accordingly helps us steward the covenants we have made to each other as humans. I conclude by suggesting that Christian participation in the Parliament of the World's Religions has the creative potential to bring the transformative power of gospel to institutions in need of revitalization to address the immense ecological challenges facing our planet.

Autobiographical Note

I do not write from a place of pure objectivity but rather from deep participation. I currently am in the middle of a three-year term as a board member of the Parliament of the World's Religions. My journey to this role began in 2016, a time where I held a number of simultaneous

2 Although I would hope that any fellow Evangelical Covenanter who makes a well-reasoned metaphysical argument would encounter hospitable ears and a spirit of open-mindedness within us, rather than falling victim to the autoimmune disease of exiling whomever among us points us towards the greatness and incomprehensibility of God by troubling our human-created religious boundaries—an autoimmune disease that from my perspective is a phenomenon found within each of the world's religions.

3 See "2007 Resolution on Creation Care," Evangelical Covenant Church, covchurch.org/resolutions/2007-creation-care/.

vocational calls: I was the part-time director of student ministries at Ravenswood Evangelical Covenant Church, a member of the steering committee for an organization called Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, a master of divinity and master of public policy student at the University of Chicago, and (through an agreement with the University of Chicago's multi-faith Divinity School to be able to take courses within my own tradition) a visiting student at North Park Theological Seminary. During this time, certain faculty members at North Park Theological Seminary were in an e-mail thread about who in their network could take up the invitation to serve as an informal representative of the Evangelical Covenant Church on the Parliament of the World's Religions' newly formed Climate Action Task Force. I was recommended for the role and although I was initially hesitant given my other commitments, I found various ways to use this opportunity to fulfill work study requirements for my master's program between 2017 and 2018. In 2019 I aged out of Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, graduated from the University of Chicago, and left my staff role at Ravenswood Evangelical Covenant Church to move to Washington DC. In 2020 I was invited to join the Parliament's Global Ethic Committee; in 2021 I served as a temporary staff person to coordinate the virtual convening of the Parliament and in 2022 was brought on as a trustee.

From Creation Care to Interfaith Collaboration

Within contemporary Christianity, "creation care" is the fulfillment of the biblical command from our Creator to have dominion over all living things [4] and fulfill our created purpose to till and keep the garden.[5] With respect to the church's public witness towards a secular world, creation care is how Christians anchor their faith when forming political coalitions with the institutions of the environmental movement birthed in the late twentieth century.

However, regarding the church's inner life, "creation care" may be better understood as an act of worship reflecting goodness and praise back to the Creator God. An underappreciated aspect of Genesis 1 that may humble our anthropocentric interpretations of the text is that, unlike most other parts of creation, each of which God spoke into existence and saw "that it was good,"[6] humankind is not considered good in and of itself. Instead, after creating humankind, God "saw *everything* that he

4 Genesis 1:26-28.
5 Genesis 2:15.
6 Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21; 2:24.

had made, and indeed, it was *very good*."[7] In other words, separate from the rest of creation, Genesis 1 does not argue for the inherent goodness of humankind; instead, only in right relationship to the wholeness of creation and our inherent purpose to care for it does humankind become the final puzzle piece that makes God's creation very good. As the lyrics of "All Creatures of Our God and King" remind us, "And *all of you* with tender heart, forgiving others, take your *part*. . . . Let *all things* their Creator bless, and *worship him* in humbleness."

Crucially, the biblical case for creation care predates any form of religious identity. In the terms of biblical narrative, Adam and Eve were not Jewish nor Christian nor even "religious" in any institutionalized way. They may have been "spiritual" in the sense that they were intimate with their Creator, but in Eden there was no sacred text nor ordained clergy nor traditional ritual that would be characteristic of what we today identify as religion. Therefore, whereas other commandments found throughout the Bible can be assumed to apply to God's covenanted people, the mandate to care for creation is one that Christians can reasonably expect of all other humans—and, lest we be charged of the sin of hypocrisy, all other humans can reasonably expect of Christians![8]

Let us supplement this biblical exegesis with some etymology and a dash of common sense. The words "creation" and "environment" are often used interchangeably, but whereas creation alludes to a creator, environment implies that someone or something is being impacted by—and impacting—its surroundings. Our English word "environment" comes from the Old French *environ* to refer to that which surrounds or encircles us. Included in our surroundings is not just plants, wildlife, water, and air but also other human beings. While it is probable that these human beings share a similar culture and language as us, it is not guaranteed that they have the same religion or worship the same god, if any. And yet not only are they part of our surroundings, but we too are also a part of theirs; how we care for or pollute our environment is how we care for and pollute theirs—and vice versa. Regardless of whether we have chosen to live in war or in harmony or indifference, our environmental destinies are intertwined. Therefore, for Christians, the imperative of creation care becomes the impetus for an interfaith encounter. The

7 Genesis 1:31, emphasis added.

8 Note that not every religion has a creation cosmology that assumes a creator deity. Therefore "creation care" alone cannot be an axis for broad interfaith engagement, and thus it is better to appeal to environmentalism as a common albeit imprecise term.

question now becomes: how might this interfaith encounter become constructive?

Extending the Practice of Stewardship

Stewardship is the central practice within creation care. Through the analogy of the work of a steward who has been entrusted with the responsibility to care for the owner's possessions, the word "stewardship" emphasizes that God's creation does not belong to us humans. The concept of stewardship comes to us from the New Testament where it often is used to translate the Greek word *oikonomos* ("household manager") in parables and epistles.[9] Some Christians who may not recognize the importance of creation care still do recognize the importance of a stewardship ethic in the contexts of financial giving and the cultivation of our individual talents for mission.

The terminology of stewardship has also found currency within secular environmentalism[10] and while the definition has changed with the context, the principles behind stewardship arguably remain one of the most important ideological contributions of Christianity to modern environmentalism and one of the more effective means by which Christians have proclaimed the gospel through our relationship to creation.

Stewardship is an abstract concept that has been applied to many different contexts. Through the following thought experiment, we can construct another ladder of abstraction that I believe will be worth the climb. Imagine a large garden, perhaps the Chicago Botanic Garden if you are familiar, or another similar garden closer to home. Now imagine the head steward of this large garden. The only means by which this steward is capable of stewarding such a garden is through the use of tools such as trowels, pruners, rakes, sprinklers, tarps, and tractors. Each of these tools has an acquisition cost, a learning curve, and even a character of their own (you may notice that the head steward has even nicknamed the tractors: the fastest tractor is "Earnhardt," the most powerful tractor is "Schwarzenegger," etc.).

It is not difficult to imagine these tools as something to be cared for in their own right—if not for their own sake, then for the sake of caring

9 See in particular Luke 12:42-44; 16:1-13; 1 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Peter 4:10-11. Note that *oikonomos* shares the same etymological root as our modern "ecology" and "economy," both of which can be understood as abstractions of the household concept, and the former of course reinforcing the connection between stewardship and the vocation of creation care.

10 Jennifer Welchman, "A Defense of Environmental Stewardship," *Environmental Values* 21, no. 3 (August 2012): 297-316.

for the garden itself. This means keeping tools out of the rain so that they do not rust or rot, repairing tools when they break, sharpening and lubricating tools when needed, and teaching younger stewards the best ways to handle these tools so they are not damaged through unnecessary wear and tear.

If the first step up this ladder of abstraction is that the practice of stewardship can apply not only to the care of local parcels of God's creation but also to the tools that care for a particular parcel, the second step up the ladder of abstraction is what happens when we consider regional and global environments as objects of stewardship. From water-stressed river basins to anthropogenic climate change, we are becoming increasingly aware of the consequences of collective carelessness towards environments that are demarcated at a scale beyond our immediate individual experience. However, the challenges facing these regional and global environments are not of the sort that can be addressed with trowels, pruners, rakes, sprinklers, tarps, tractors, and other physical tools. We must instead rely on the intangible institutions that govern human behavior.

Such institutions range from political negotiations (i.e., who gets to pollute, and how much?) to legal enforcement (i.e., how to stop those who pollute beyond an approved limit); from cultural norms (i.e., the construction of stigma around pollution) to business and scientific innovation (i.e., discovering new means of guaranteeing a comparable goal with less polluting side effects). These institutions are the means by which the vocation of creation care "scales up," but these institutions are far from spontaneous: societies can be politically gridlocked, legal systems can lose the balance between lawlessness and oppression, cultural norms may be nonexistent or disregarded, and innovation can be stifled or underfunded. In the same way that stewardship is applied both to the garden and the tools alike, so too can stewardship be applied to the more-than-local environment and the institutions that regulate human interaction with it.

But how do we care for and steward these institutions? It would be categorically absurd to claim that we should keep them out of the rain, mend their cracks, or lubricate their joints. Nor is it immediately obvious that the goal should be to make these institutions stronger, bigger, more powerful, or better financed; many of today's environmental (and other) crises are the result of self-referential and amoral institutions that through their unchecked growth have become unaccountable to the greater good.

I argue that one of the most meaningful ways by which we can

positively steward the institutions that govern our shared environment is through caring for the covenants that undergird these institutions. More succinctly, stewardship of covenants made between humans can itself be an act of creation care.

Divine Covenants and Human Covenants

Before continuing, let us first acknowledge that the word "covenant" itself is a loaded term! Most obviously for readers of this journal, the term evokes our identity as Covenanters, a name rooted in our history as Mission Friends but also reflective of how we are bound together in institutions ranging from youth camps, printed publications, healthcare, retirement homes, pension plans, financial endowments, multi-generational families, layers of bureaucracy, appointed leaders who may simultaneously inspire us and bewilder us, and much more. The word "covenant" also evokes one of the wildest biblical innovations relative to rest of the Ancient Near East: the idea that God himself would covenant with humans, instead of the tradition where humans would covenant with each other with their gods as witnesses and guarantors of these covenants. Similar to how stewardship can apply to local and global environments alike, so too do covenants have meaning at levels ranging from treaties between powerful nations to the intimate institution of marriage between two individuals—and the brutal stings of war and divorce alike often contain within their venom the same pain experienced with a shattering of the underlying covenant. Finally, muddying the waters is a relatively recent and popular folk usage: "covenant" as a kind of promise or pledge with some extra spiritual willpower backing it.

Any definition will necessarily bracket off some of the historical richness of the term, but for the purposes of this essay the following (although admittedly wonky) definition will suffice to encompass a variety of meanings: a covenant is a commitment device that works through modifying the way in which the covenanting parties are situated in their world, and the corresponding incentive structure is accordingly modified in such a way that parties to the covenant are bound together towards a common and more desirable goal. In other words, what distinguishes a covenant from an ordinary promise is not that the covenant is spoken in a heightened spiritual valence, but rather that the person making the covenant allows for himself or herself to have "skin in the game," to increase their own vulnerability to the possibility that they won't keep the covenant.

Consider the Noahic covenant as an example. Covenanting to never

again decimate nearly every living thing through flooding, God places a rainbow in the sky as the sign of that covenant. The emphasis here is not on the colors but rather the shape of the sign: a bow pointed upward to the heavens, implying an arrow of divine proportions directed straight at God and threatening to launch if God were somehow to break this promise.[11]

We may also consider the covenant with Abram, where through the representation of a smoking fire pot and flaming torch God passes through the slaughtered animal pieces that have been laid out by Abram, effectively saying, "May I suffer the same fate as these animals if I violate the terms of this covenant."[12] This is the same ritual and implication we see in the human-to-human covenant we read through the prophet Jeremiah: "And those who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make like the calf when they cut it in two and passed between its parts."[13]

Much can be said—more than space here allows—about the creative innovations that arise within the Bible as the practice of covenant-making is translated from being something done between humans, to being something done between God and humans, back to being something done between humans in light of the divine covenants, and so forth. Yet, whether the covenants are with divine or human partners, it is still proper to claim that covenants can be an object of human stewardship insofar as they do not belong to us but yet we are responsible for their maintenance. Care for these intangible covenants happens in the following ways:

1. **Obedience**—simply put, the easiest way to damage if not outright destroy a covenant is to be disobedient to the terms of the covenant. Even after the consequences for disobedience are suffered (for example, exile into Babylon) the requisite trust has been lost.
2. **Embodiment**—from the practice of circumcision as a sign of the covenant with Abraham, to the Eucharistic sacrament of physically ingesting the new covenant in Christ's body and blood, the Bible emphasizes that covenants are not merely words and ideas but rather something that we embrace with our whole bodies.
3. **Remembrance**—the specific language of remembering a covenant is used throughout the Hebrew Bible in reference to

11 Genesis 9:8-17.
12 Genesis 15.
13 Jeremiah 34:18.

God remembering the covenants that he has made.[14] Humans can also strengthen covenants by keeping them front of mind[15] and in their heart.[16]

4. **Transmission**—covenants often are an intergenerational inheritance, which places on older generations the responsibility of teaching these covenants to younger generations.[17]
5. **Adaptation**—as covenants are passed down through the generations, new generations may find it necessary to adapt or modify them. This may simply be because circumstances have changed, or because the original version of the covenant was found to be inadequate or disobeyed. Jeremiah testifies to such an adaptation from God's perspective: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors."[18]

Contemporary Covenants for Creation Care

In light of today's ecological crisis, we can identify a number of contemporary covenants that have been made between humans and which demand the attention of Christian stewardship as an act of creation care. For this section, we focus on two particular covenants: the covenant underlying the United States Constitution and the covenant forming within the gaps of the Paris Agreement.

As the United States is one of the leading polluters globally, our collective decision-making will be a significant factor determining whether or not humankind steers the planet away from ecological catastrophe. This is true not simply because of the vast scope of economic activity within the borders of the United States but also because of the United States' influence among—and power over—other polluting nation-states. The United States Constitution is the primary mechanism for such collective decision-making, not simply laying out rules and procedures of federal elections, but also limiting the powers of different branches of the federal government vis-à-vis each other, the states, and citizens. With regard to ecological concerns, the United States Constitution as currently amended tends towards restricting the power of those who wish

14 Barat Ellman, *Memory and Covenant: The Role of Israel's and God's Memory in Sustaining the Deuteronomic and Priestly Covenants* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013).
15 Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18.
16 Deuteronomy 6:6.
17 Deuteronomy 6:7; 11:19; Psalm 78:5-8.
18 Jeremiah 31:31b-32a.

to regulate pollution rather than the power of the polluters themselves; unlike the state constitutions of Montana, Illinois, Hawai'i, Massachusetts, Montana, New York, and Pennsylvania, there is no federally recognized constitutional right to a healthy environment.

Federalism (derived from *foedus*, Latin for "covenant") is part of the covenantal tradition, with the United States Constitution being among the clearest examples of this legacy. The critical moment in this history began with the various covenants formed by the Puritan settlers to establish and govern their communities while an ocean away from the accountability of the British crown. These religious covenants that established congregations became the model for secular covenants that established the political communities that would later join into their own covenant with each other to establish the United States in the revolutionary era.[19]

This discussion is not meant to imply that the United States Constitution is somehow above criticism or even to be considered as inherently good.[20] Nor is it meant to conflate the words of the United States Constitution with the underlying American covenant, which is embodied by voters standing in line at polling places, elected officials coming together to congress, protestors marching in the streets, and volunteers showing up to serve at soup kitchens and blood banks. The claim is simply that the covenantal political system in the United States is itself an object of stewardship as part of the Christian vocation to creation care.

To make the point more bluntly: to avert the worse-case scenarios of climate change and other ecological catastrophes will require major transitions in the United States' approach to energy, agriculture, water, land management, biodiversity, and more. These transitions correspond to significant changes in power and status that need to be constitutionally negotiated, and where the United States Constitution is found lacking the capacity to negotiate these changes, an even stronger American covenant is needed to guide the government and citizens alike through the process of amending the Constitution in a manner that results in broad ratification.

Assuming the best-case scenario for the United States regarding its ecological footprint and constitutional system, such changes alone will

19 Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

20 Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

not be enough to solve the planetary challenges that if not addressed will soon result in humankind's failure to obey God's command to establish dominion over creation. This is because the United States is not the only polluter, but rather shares a planet with the more populous countries of China and India and many smaller countries that pollute more on a per capita basis.

The Paris Agreement is the most prominent mechanism for facilitating international cooperation towards climate change. Adopted by 196 parties at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21), the Paris Agreement consists of ambitious "nationally determined contributions" or non-binding national plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These voluntary plans are subject to a series of reviews, including a "global stocktake" every five years to inventory progress made towards the goals of the Paris Agreement. The theory of change is that this process of measurement and transparency will lead to greater accountability within the international community and within national governments towards their citizens.

When the Paris Agreement was ceremoniously signed on Earth Day 2016, a number of children and youth were in attendance to witness, including 16-year-old Tanzanian youth representative Getrude Clement who addressed the assembly and the young granddaughter of John Kerry, then-Secretary of State for the United States, whom Kerry held in his left arm while he signed the Paris Agreement on behalf of his country.[21] As part of his closing remarks, then-United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon remarked:

> With their signatures today, governments have made a covenant with the future. The children who were with us this morning reminded us of our responsibility to them and to future generations….I will look to civil society and the world's young people to hold Governments to account for the promises they made today. This covenant with the future is a covenant with you. Hold them to it.[22]

Ban correctly indicates that witnesses are a key ingredient of a covenant.

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21 Photographs of this event are available to view at un.org/sustainabledevelopment/parisagreement22april/. Accessed September 17, 2023.

22 Ban Ki-Moon, "Secretary-General's Closing Remarks at Signature Ceremony for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change [As delivered]," April 22, 2016. Available to view at un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2016-04-22/secretary-generals-closing-remarks-signature-ceremony-paris. Accessed September 17, 2023.

In the Ancient Near East, the gods of the covenanting parties would be invoked as witnesses responsible for the enforcement of the covenant; similarly, the covenant of marriage traditionally has at least one or two witnesses. In the covenant that corresponds with the Paris Agreement, Ban suggests that the next generation has been promoted from their typical role as inheritors of the covenant to the more powerful role of witnesses.

In the years since the signing of the Paris Agreement, youth worldwide have stepped up to the role of witness. The best known example of this is the work of Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who at age 15 began skipping school with the sign *Skolstrejk för klimatet* ("School Strike for Climate") to underscore the absurdity of going through the motions of traditional education when the security of her own future on the planet was not being guaranteed by her teachers' generation, and has since inspired a series of "Fridays for Future" climate strikes across the globe with pre-pandemic participation numbers in the millions.

As part of a pastoral study fellowship with the Louisville Institute, I spent a week-plus in Massachusetts in the fall of 2019, attending services at two Evangelical Covenant churches on the weekends and visiting sites of religiously imbued environmentalism during the weekdays. One of these sites was a gathering of the youth-led Sunrise Movement meeting in the upstairs of Boston's Old South Church. Although the gathering was ostensibly secular, I was struck by how much it resembled the structure of a religious service: there was music and singing, time to welcome old friends and visitors, an extended reflection on an important text (instead of an exegesis of holy scripture, it was a PowerPoint focused on a couple lines of the Green New Deal), and breakout groups for extended discussion. This was covenantal activity pushing the United States to fulfill and exceed its obligations to the Paris Agreement for the sake of the planet, in the same city where the congregational covenants of the Puritans had helped to establish the constitutional order that created the United States and allowed for such an assembly to take place without fear of government intrusion. There may have been a yearning for a spiritual basis for their gathering, but if so, that was secondary to their yearning for a safe planet to grow up on.

The Global Ethic

Let's recap the argument so far. First, the work of creation care mandates an interreligious encounter due both to the sharing of our environment and the sharing of our humanity with people of other religions. Second, the practice of stewardship within creation care extends

not only to the direct care of the natural world but also towards the tangible and intangible tools that are used to care for the natural world, including the covenants that support the institutions that regulate our collective environmental decision-making. Third, particularly at the level of regional and global environment crises such as climate change, these covenants include those associated with the United States Constitution and the Paris Agreement.

Let's push the third point a little bit further to emphasize the importance of interfaith work. Because of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion, the United States is a pluralistic society with a diverse range of religions, denominations, sects, and spiritualities among the citizenry. Similarly, even if these countries themselves are not internally pluralistic, the signatories to the nearly universal Paris Agreement includes countries that together represent virtually all of the world's religions among their citizens. Whether we are considering the United States or the entire world, it follows that stewardship of the corresponding covenants is inherently a multi-faith endeavor.

It is important at this juncture to distinguish between interreligious encounters at the local versus the global level. Local encounters may look like attending services at the neighborhood mosque, partaking in langar at the nearby gurdwara, sitting down to tea or coffee with a Buddhist colleague, or joining an interfaith project to protect others experiencing homelessness. These are all important encounters, particularly when we consider the health of our local congregations. However, these local encounters do not coordinate human activity at the regional or global scale necessary for the sake of stewarding the aforementioned covenants. If we consider the foregoing to be a "vertical" problem between the local and global, there also is a "horizontal" problem when assembling religious leaders who are recognizable at the global level. First, there is the problem of official representation. In a purely numerical sense the Bishop of Rome may represent the most Christians worldwide, but most non-Roman Catholic Christians would resist having the Pope serve as their official representative. Similarly, the Dalai Lama may be the most visible representative of Buddhism despite only formally leading a

fraction of Buddhists worldwide.[23] Furthermore, other religions such as the Bahá'í faith and modern paganism do not have centralized leadership structures that could produce the sort of officers who could function as institutional peers to leaders like the Pope or the Dalai Lama. Other religious communities still are suspicious of any project of cooperation that occurs at the global level—here we can think of many in our own Christian family, such as the Amish, as examples.

I assert that the Parliament of the World's Religion's answer to these problems is the Global Ethic Project (note that I am speaking from my own insight as a trustee of the Parliament, not repeating an official position of the Parliament). As part of the 1993 convening of the Parliament of the World's Religions, German theologian and Catholic priest Hans Küng spearheaded the drafting of a document to establish a statement of moral directives found within all religious traditions and secular ethical systems. Initiated during a time of post-Cold War optimism about the future of globalization, it likely was assumed that such a minimalist ethic[24] would facilitate interreligious and therefore international solidarity and cooperation. The resulting document, *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration*, detailed four such directives: nonviolence and respect for life, a just economic order, a life of truthfulness, and equality between men and women. This document was ratified in the summer of 1993 by a vote of the Parliament's trustees and endorsed by more than 200 leaders from more than forty different faiths and spiritualities. Although today the optimism regarding globalization has significantly soured, the Global Ethic document remains a guide to the Parliament's cooperative endeavors, helping to address the aforementioned "vertical" problem of interfaith cooperation by identifying suitable activities of global scope. It also helps address the "horizontal" problem by providing a boundary definition for determining who and what can be included in the Parliament's official programming: whomever is working towards any of the Global Ethic's directives is welcome to the dialogue, whether they lead a whole denomination or simply are an active member of a small nonprofit organization.

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23 Incidentally, due to the desire of the Roman Catholic Church to protect its Chinese interests, it is quite difficult to get the Pope and the Dalai Lama to meet together despite their high mutual regard. See Josephine McKenna, "Dalai Lama Says Pope Francis Is Unwilling to Meet: 'It Could Cause Problems,'" *Religion News Service*, December 11, 2014. Available to view at religionnews.com/2014/12/11/dalai-lama-says-pope-francis-unwilling-meet-cause-problems/.

24 Michael Walzer, "Moral Minimalism," in *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 1-19.

I consider the Global Ethic to be a "quasi-covenant." It is like a covenant in that it corresponds to a written text (i.e., Küng's *Towards a Global Ethic*) that supports an institution (i.e., the Parliament of the World's Religions) towards achieving a higher moral vision. Like the covenants spoken of earlier, the Global Ethic can be obeyed, embodied, remembered, transmitted, and adapted. One such adaptation includes the so-called "fifth directive" for sustainability and care for the earth, adopted at the 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions in Toronto.

However, the Global Ethic is not quite a true covenant. Covenants function by providing a means for parties to the covenant to make a commitment to each other by actively changing something about how they are situated in their world, whereas the Global Ethic merely requires that signatories recognize a piece of their preexisting moralities within the document. Raising the Global Ethic to the level of a covenant would be an exercise in lowering the bar to a common moral denominator: each religion has a rich maximalist ethical tradition that provides not just moral precepts, but the resources and practices and virtues required for their realization. Rather, the Global Ethic is better understood as a much smaller slice of each moral tradition that just so happens to be held in common.

What then is the value of the Global Ethic, particularly with regard to the questions laid out in this essay? In the same way buildings with ambitious architecture require scaffolding to be built, I believe the Global Ethic functions as a blueprints for a "scaffold of trust" for adherents of different faiths to come together in order to make and reinforce covenants in support of important causes. Christians called to the work of creation care will find that each of the directives (i.e., not only the fifth directive for sustainability) point us towards zones of interreligious cooperation from which we can better steward the covenants that underlie the United States Constitution and the Paris Agreement. And the Parliament of the World's Religions convenings, whether in 1993 or 2023 or in the future, is precisely what that scaffolding of trust looks like when assembled.

Conclusion

Even though they are among the best tools available to us, neither the United States Constitution nor the Paris Agreement is sufficient for addressing the ecological crisis that manifests our present failure as humankind to care for God's creation. Something new and unprecedented is needed for us to properly address climate change and other such catastrophes. The hope that inspires my participation in the Parliament

of the World's Religions is that from this assemblage of faiths something creative can emerge which is proportional to the task of incubating the human covenants needed to properly care for creation.

What might this look like? Perhaps it is something akin to the participation of the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, where a small group of primarily non-English speaking Christians entered the public square and found the legitimacy to begin building institutions that would serve the greater good. Perhaps it is a new impulse of the Holy Spirit challenging the boundaries of what we properly consider to be "religion" that we use to divide ourselves into different faiths, creating the sort of spiritual community yearned for by some of the young participants in the Sunrise Movement that is both centered on a power that we recognize as Christ but not recognizable to us as a familiar form of Christianity. Or perhaps it is something as simple as ongoing interreligious learning and a healthy dose of competitiveness where each religion works to reduce their carbon footprints the fastest. Truly, I do not claim to know; I act in faith but only see through a glass darkly. Returning to the Nyvall's 1893 quote cited at the beginning of this essay, we see within Nyvall's extended remarks a confidence in the gospel to work through all people of all religions in unprecedented ways:

> God does not work independently of people, but in them and through them. We have a complete faith in the precedence and superiority of the gospel of Christ in comparison to all other words and thoughts. Therefore we see with joy that all people and religions are voluntarily meeting with the gospel in a manner not seen until now.[25]

In 1929, a more mature Nyvall would remark that compared to the non-narrative creedal formulations of faith (such as "the mere statement of monotheism which Mohammedans and Jews accept as willingly as any Christian") the New Testament is found to be "bubbling over with life."[26] If the language of the Global Ethic had been available to Nyvall, I would like to think he would celebrate it as an opportunity for people of all faiths to find how their own moral principles intersect with those found in the gospel, and through this intersection have an encounter

25 Nyvall, "Characterization of the Swedish Mission Covenants in Sweden and America," 141.

26 David Nyvall, "Covenant Ideals," edited by Karl A. Olsson (1954). Republished in Anderson, *Covenant Roots*, 152.

with a living Christ that brings a new vitality to their own beliefs. The younger Nyvall, speaking in 1893, concludes:

> And in the Christian longing for mutual fellowship we see one of the most hopeful signs that the time is ripe for a creative act of God through which an absolutely new age of peace and glory will appear and God's Church will be gathered from all camps and battlefields, from struggles and darkness and blunders, and will triumphantly pass over into the kingdom of God.[27]

Here is where I begin to most clearly recognize my own motivations for the interfaith endeavor within the annals of Evangelical Covenant history that are my spiritual heritage. If it has not already been made clear, I will admit to being pessimistic towards the fate of the planet. The work of safeguarding creation is a battlefield that seems as if it has already been lost, largely due to the blunders of humanity in succumbing to greed, selfishness, and convenient untruths. The Church has been no exception in this regard[28] and itself stands in need of forgiveness and restoration. It is in such despair that I reach out to those places where God may be working in ways that through the lens of my own upbringing I do not recognize as "God," using the compass of common moral principles to determine who is a potential ally in the struggle, seeing how far the boundaries of the kingdom of God can truly extend. And it is through this reaching out that God looks to reach back and usher in something new and unprecedented. That through these yearnings God may act to restore creation by witnessing to a novel covenant emerging between a diverse and divided humanity encountering the gospel afresh, bringing us closer together in our original created purpose: to tend to the garden of God's creation.

27 Nyvall, "Characterization of the Swedish Mission Covenants in Sweden and America," 141.

28 For an illuminating read on the entanglement of the American Church and the oil industry, see Darren Dochuk, *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

Book Reviews

Barbara Ann Ettinger, executive associate superintendent of the East Coast Conference, Cromwell, CT

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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

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