Book Reviews

Scott Burnett, pastor of spiritual formation, Newport Covenant Church, Bellevue, Washington

Bret M. Widman, director of contextual and lifelong learning and associate professor of ministry, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois

Brian Hui, lead pastor, Living Stones Christian Church East Bay, Union City, California

Dennis R. Edwards, *Humility Illuminated: The Biblical Path Back to Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), 192 pp., $22.

Dennis Edwards gives us a carefully considered biblical argument for humility as the means of restoring Christian character in our day. His introductory exhortation is an incisive summons to action: "The church in the United States—and perhaps in other places throughout the world—needs to recover, respect, and reenact biblical humility" (1).

Edwards goes on to summarize his case for humility's essentiality in the introduction, and then in nine succinct chapters leads the reader into a comprehensive understanding of the subject. He brings Old and New Testament studies to bear, beginning with the relationship between God and Moses, and proceeding to the example of Jesus. By way of the New Testament Epistles, he investigates the on-the-ground impact of humility on Christian communion, our maturation as gospel-shaped congregations, and our formation as disciples.

Here is a resource designed to be readily grasped and integrated into

everyday life. The IVP Academic imprint signals the nature of its contents, but the soul of this scholarly work is pastoral. Edwards's exegesis is rigorous and, importantly, his prose is personal. He does not shy away from autobiographical illustrations. This author's voice is as vulnerable as it is penetrating.

Each chapter contains a contextualized restatement of his thesis—*humility is relational, rooted in our worship of God, and evidenced in our interconnection with one another*. I found this technique helpful as it rhythmically returned me again and again to the *why* of the book.

Throughout, Edwards shows while he tells. He writes, "Humility does not mean a lack of assertiveness or a rejection of firm truth-telling" (67)—which is precisely what he does in his writing. This is not a soft read. He is forthright in his critique of what happens in the absence of humility.

Edwards suggests the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth reveal a commonality with Blackness, as well as a de facto indictment of Whiteness. Jesus experienced existence on the earth as one who was systemically disenfranchised rather than systemically privileged. "Perhaps humility is a concept that White people, especially men, need to cultivate in light of society's inequity" (99). Biblical humility requires courage because it moves us to be vulnerable and stand up for—*and listen to*—the exposed, endangered, and marginalized.

The message of this book is vital for pastors and other congregational leaders, and its format lends itself to practical implementation. The chapter layout will play very nicely as a sermon series and is also well-suited to be used as a small group book study. Indeed, coordinating these two uses of the book together—small group curriculum and sermon series outline—will further leverage its edifying force.

Edwards insists that humility is neither an optional accessory nor an occasionally adopted attribute of Christian character. Humility is central to our transformation toward the image of Christ. Pointing us to our ultimate model, Edwards writes, "Humility is not something Jesus takes up or puts on but is intrinsic to his personhood" (38).

Humility Illuminated is an admonishment delivered at the right moment by the right person. It is a call to non-abstract, embodied discipleship. This potent book belongs in the backpack of anyone who is pursuing—and assisting others in their pursuit of—a life-changing, personal relationship with Jesus.

SCOTT BURNETT

Andrew L. Whitehead, *American Idolatry: How Christian Nationalism Betrays the Gospel and Threatens the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2023), 230 pp., $18.89.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols." —1 John 5:21

In the Old Testament, we witness God raising up prophets for the specific purpose that God's covenanted people have wandered away from devotion to Yahweh and need a course correction. Prophets were called to provide hope for the future. They needed to address the people's past, their present reality, and how they got there. This was not just an Old Testament concern. In the new covenant of the church founded on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the warning against idolatry was still present. The new church needed a diligent awareness of idolatry's potential to seep into God's unsuspecting people.

Andrew Whitehead, in his timely book, *American Idolatry: How Christian Nationalism Betrays the Gospel and Threatens the Church*, brings this awareness to the idolatry that plagues the American church. As an associate professor of sociology and director of the Association of Religion Data Archives at the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana Unversity-Purdue University Indianapolis, Whitehead is uniquely poised to point out the present status of the American church and the past that led us to this point. He rightly names three specific idols that are present, active, and thriving in the American church to various degrees: power, fear, and control.

While reading this compelling book, I couldn't help but think there are probably additional idols erected in the American church. However, whenever I would think of one, I found myself returning to Whitehead's three core idols. Money, for example, is an idol that can be used for power (by those who have money), fear (there's not enough money, thus creating a scarcity mindset), and control (using money to get what one wants). I agree that these three foundational idols are the bedrock for much of what is affecting the witness of the American church. These idols did not just reveal themselves in the past few decades. Like weeds among wheat, they have been growing for centuries in our congregations. What makes this moment in history poignant is that the idolatrous weeds have bloomed, and their noxious fruit is on full display.

Naming idols is an act of love for the church, and Whitehead's love for the church is evident. Rightly identifying idols is a prophetic responsibility. The life of the prophet does not end well in our sacred text. Prophets become a threat by naming idols. However, not naming idols becomes a threat as well. Whitehead contends that the cocktail of these three idols has led to violence, and that more violence is inevitable if the cocktail is not named and addressed. His warnings sent a chill down my spine.

This book is crucial for pastors serving in the American church. Pastors and leaders must wrestle with the fact that idols exist in our midst and may be at the root of declining numbers, especially in our young. Rather than examine the idols in our culture, Whitehead's book is meant to be used as a mirror to reflect the idols within. I wish this book had been written when I was serving congregations, before my present ministry in academia. It would have been useful as our leadership teams attempted to figure out strategic plans and vision statements for the future. Pausing to look with honesty at the past that led us to our present would have helped us to start with repentance, lament, and a deep reflection of what lay lurking within. *Lord, have mercy.*

BRET M. WIDMAN

Jay Caspian Kang, *The Loneliest Americans* (New York: Crown, 2021), 272 pp., $18.

What is an Asian American? Jay Caspian Kang asks, Does anyone even care?

In truth, there are two Asian Americas. There is the upwardly mobile one, usually represented by East Asians. This Asian America covets "the spoils of whiteness." The conservative side labors up the meritocratic ladder symbolized by SATs and elite college admissions, while the progressive side traffics in antiracism to justify itself among the White elite. Then there is another Asian America—the poor working class—which includes Chinatown cooks and Burmese refugees. This is the forgotten Asian America. Asian Americans have the widest economic range of any racial group.

This wasn't always the case. Before the 1965 Hart-Cellar Immigration

Act, to be Asian American was an emerging political identity. The term was coined by Berkeley activists Yuji Ichioka, whose family had been interned, and his girlfriend, Emma Gee. "The new term was directly political," says Kang, "an appeal for solidarity among people of Asian descent and a recognition that they shared the same struggle." Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino farm laborers who had been interned, excluded, and isolated identified more with the Black struggle when forced to choose in a White-Black America. Hart-Cellar not only reversed Chinese Exclusion; it opened the floodgates to millions of new Asians who weren't particularly political or interested in race. Their mind was on America's vision of freedom, democracy, and capitalism. If you were to visit UC Berkeley's Asian American library today, you would not find working-class radicals, but a room full of Asian engineering students just looking for a quiet place to study.

The Asian American coalition fractured early. Korean Americans, for example, thought of themselves as Korean or American, but not "Asian," especially not in solidarity with their imperialist Japanese oppressors. And today, we still see class dissonance within Asian America: During the pandemic, after working-class Asian elders and masseuses were assaulted or murdered, those who ended up taking the mic weren't other working-class Asians, but the elite who ended up venting about microaggressions, bamboo ceilings, and Hollywood representation. Even then, America didn't seem to care, says Kang, not even the multicultural elite, who squirmed awkwardly when they saw that some assailants were Black. This is why Kang calls Asian Americans "the loneliest Americans": we don't fit into the White-Black binary, being neither White nor oppressed "people of color," and while we obsess about our identity and place in America's racial landscape, it turns out no one else really cares.

Kang speaks into an ongoing debate within the antiracist community. He takes aim at what Jonathan Tran, in his book, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*, calls an "identarian" approach to antiracism, pushing instead for greater class awareness, centering the poor working class. But Kang's real inspiration is Noel Ignatiev, author of *How the Irish Became White*. Ignatiev, also Kang's mentor, famously tells the story of how the Irish sided with their White bosses rather than their fellow Black workers. Might the upper half of Asian America be trying to do the same?

Whether or not you agree with Kang, his book is a vital contribution to the antiracist conversation. He highlights how elitist the conversation has become, even as he self-loathingly reflects on his own privilege. For

Christians, he shines the light back on the truly poor and oppressed. He begins by recounting the radical roots of "Asian America," how Hart-Cellar changed everything, then moves on to tell the complicated story of Koreans and Blacks, SAT prep schools in Flushing, anti-Asian hate, MRAZNs (Men's Rights Asians), and Bruce Springsteen. In the end, he calls upwardly mobile Asians, including himself, to drop their neuroses about C-suite representation and microaggressions and move toward a more compelling vision of solidarity with the forgotten Asian America: refugees, the undocumented, and the working class.

BRIAN HUI