THE COVENANT QUARTERLY

Spring/Summer 2024

CONTENTS

Comment
Paul H. de Neui
1

The History of Covenant Living Chaplaincy
Mary C. Miller
3

Communion: Roots and Wellsprings for Feeding, Filling, and Sending
Barbara Sartorius Bjelland
15

Collective and Individual Trauma: How Developing Intergenerational Connections Can Heal the Post-COVID Church (and Beyond!)
Kendall Smith
31

From Lament to Praise: How the "Seam" Psalms Can Teach Us to Walk the Godward Path
J. Nathan Clayton
37

Book Reviews
Scott Burnett, Bret M. Widman, Brian Hui
52

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Comment

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

In this issue of the *Quarterly*, we first present Mary Miller's historical overview of chaplaincy within the Evangelical Covenant Church, specifically as it has grown with the ministry today known as Covenant Living Communities and Services. Caring well for the seniors within the denominational family has been a concern since the inception of the Covenant Church. In "The History of Covenant Living Chaplaincy," Miller outlines the progressive stages of growth of this important part of the collective Covenant identity, which today has expanded to serve twenty communities in ten states. Unique to this ministry is the fact that current chaplains within Covenant Living Communities are now the only employees who must be Covenant and ordained. As someone well-versed in the inner workings of the Covenant, Miller, who has served as a Covenant pastor, administrator, instructor, and now chaplain, provides a motivating and challenging perspective on one of the critically needed strategic arms of ministry within the Covenant.

In the second essay, Barbara Sartorius Bjelland, bivocational Covenant minister and chaplain at Porter Hills Retirement Community, provides a theological interweaving of a Pietist view of the atonement with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In her article, "Communion: Roots and Wellsprings for Feeding, Filling, and Sending," Bjelland reminds us that this foundational perspective has birthed a liturgical tradition of worship expressed in Covenant hymnody and corporate ritual. Her essay calls us to re-prioritize communion in Covenant worship as a grounding for Christian witness to the world in participation with God's mission of reconciliation.

As the church moves into the new post-COVID period, readers will find Kendall Smith's essay, "Collective and Individual Trauma: How

Developing Intergenerational Connections Can Heal the Post-COVID Church (and Beyond!)," both timely and telling. As the church seeks to redefine itself amidst the aftermath of the global pandemic, clearly addressing issues of trauma must be a priority in the ministry of clergy, chaplains, and global personnel. Her focus on intergenerational aspects of ministry brings a refreshing angle to how the family of God must include all ages together if we are to be whole people.

In the midst of all that is happening in our world today it is not unusual for us to wonder, "Where are you, God?" In our fourth essay, "From Lament to Praise: How the 'Seam' Psalms Can Teach Us to Walk the Godward Path," J. Nathan Clayton, assistant professor of Old Testament at North Park Theological Seminary, addresses this question. As a scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures, Clayton shines light found in the hymnody of the Old Testament that enlightens and restores the sense of our relational proximity with God in pastoral and profoundly practical ways. It is our hope and prayer that these essays serve to encourage and equip all participants in God's redeeming and reconciling mission in the world wherever you are called to go and in the ways that only you can be.

The History of Covenant Living Chaplaincy

Mary C. Miller, lead chaplain of Covenant Living at the Holmstad in Batavia, Illinois

The word "chaplain" dates from the mid-fourth century and is a word with an interesting story. One freezing winter day, a teenaged Roman soldier named Martin gave half of his cloak to a beggar. That night he dreamed that it was Christ himself who was the beggar. This famed story is of St. Martin of Tours, whose coat was found and enshrined in a *capella*, or chapel. As time passed, priests called *capellini* were charged with accompanying the cloak to military battles and healing rites for select people. Thus, non-congregational clergy were often called *chapelain* in French and "chaplain" in English.[1] Chaplains have ministered in a long and diverse history ever since.

Caring with a New Faith

Chaplains of Covenant Living Communities are part of this long history. (Covenant Retirement Communities [CRC] was renamed Covenant Living Communities and Services in 2019.) Ministry to the aged was part of the origins of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Whether in northern Europe or the New Land, when people came to Christ for saving grace, they also became activated to serve the world in social concern. This calling was inseparable from their call to evangelism.

1 Earl Stover, *Up from Handymen: The U.S. Army Chaplaincy 1865–1920* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 18.

> The experience of grace softened the heart toward the other. Those who had been forgiven were ready to forgive; those who had tasted compassion became themselves compassionate. Hence there flows from the revival a mighty tide of benevolence, at first spontaneous and unstructured, later ordered and institutionalized.[2]

> Although they found no large strategy to deal with massive industrial misery, they showed considerable compassion for the enslaved, the poor and exploited, the widowed and the orphaned, the sick and the illiterate.[3]

Caring in a New Land

Like many touched by the revivals from other countries, Covenant newcomers to the United States cared for needy immigrants from their country of origin until the newcomers got on their feet. The sick, feeble, and elderly were especially vulnerable; they needed essential help. Christians also worked for temperance and abolition, suffrage and education, and the empowerment of exploited girls and women. Early Covenanters created several relief societies to serve the needs of incoming immigrants, especially near seaports.[4]

Henry Palmblad was known and beloved as a friend of the poor. He spent two years in a Chicago street ministry as a "city missionary." He and his (yet unnamed) wife helped widows made so by the cholera epidemic, orphans living on the streets, the bereft aged, and people in the poorhouse and jails, as well as females abused by men and industry. He was ready in 1885, the very year in which the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant of America (now the Evangelical Covenant Church) was born, to minister to those who were suffering in the new country. At the inaugural meeting of what became the denomination Palmblad asked for and received approval to raise funds inside and outside Covenant churches to establish a home "for orphans, helpless widows and the sick."[5] His passion drove the work. In just one year he and his small committee raised the $2,500 down payment for a three-acre property

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2 Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit* (Chicago, IL: Covenant Press, 1962), 379–80.
3 Olsson, 380–91.
4 Olsson, 380–91.
5 Zenos Hawkinson, "Consider Our Beginnings," in *Glad Hearts: The Joys of Believing and the Challenges of Belonging*, ed. James R. Hawkinson (Chicago: Covenant Press, 2003), 544.

with a house north of Chicago—far more than the original goal. It was a "monument of love," a two-story home, dedicated as the Home of Mercy, mixing the "miserables" of the orphaned, the destitute elderly, and the sick in Christian care.[6]

In those early days, the staff did anything necessary to serve the residents. One board member walked a cow from the south side to the north side of Chicago so the residents would have daily fresh milk. Theirs was a "hands on" leadership![7]

There was ample solicitation of local pastors to lead devotions and prayers, and to offer pastoral care as needed.

> God's Word, prayers and song have daily been activities in the home and, on Sundays, preaching in the afternoon, some by teachers and theology students from the school at North Park College and some preachers in Chicago or some missionaries who were on a visit to the home. Several of the Mission Church's young people's organizations in the city have, during the summertime, visited the home on Sunday afternoons and played and sung, bringing flowers and refreshments for the poor, sick, and aging.[8]

The Home of Mercy launched a flourishing tradition of elder care, including spiritual care. Before long, the need outgrew the house and in 1891 it was enlarged. By 1903 the Home of Mercy grew into two identities of specialized ministry. A medical hospital separated from the house and was renamed the Swedish American Hospital. The Home of Mercy continued to offer non-medical care to the elderly poor and orphans.[9] By 1910, the hospital had cared for 4,120 patients; fifty-three residents lived in the renamed Covenant Home.[10] The whole ministry was a "work in progress, founded on hard work, wise stewardship, dedication, and prayer."[11]

Soon local churches and conferences made commitments for their own

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6 Marilyn Anderson, trans., "Minutes of the 1903 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church" in *1903 Covenant Yearbook* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1903), 90.

7 Paul V. Peterson, Grant Erickson, and Eloise V. Nelson, *Aging in Grace: The Growth of the Covenant Retirement Communities 1886–2011* (Lombard, IL: Yorke Print Shoppe, 2011), 40.

8 Anderson, 87.

9 Anderson, 90.

10 Hawkinson, 545.

11 Peterson, Erickson, Nelson, 40.

expanding needs to serve the elderly. Between 1918 and 1929 six facilities, relying on the Home of Mercy model, were started as institutions of care for the elderly. Afterward others included Buffalo and Minneapolis, Minnesota; Tujunga and Turlock, California; Bronx, New York; Stromsburg, Nebraska; Spokane, Washington; and Surrey, British Columbia.[12]

When immigrants from Europe came to this country, the job description of chaplains in the United States was not what it is today. Chaplains in Europe were mainly located for service in "poorhouses," prisons, and the military. In the US they emphasized spiritual support and religious ministry—leading residents in regular prayer and devotional services, offering the sacraments and pastoral care.[13]

At the turn of the twentieth century, nearby parish pastors, working with administrators and nurses, used some of their ministry focus and hours to care for patients. The professional identity of the chaplain was that of a local pastor who was linked to both the larger community and wider denomination. The parish paid their salary.[14] In the Covenant, most of the nursing and elderly homes were begun by local Covenant churches, so many facilities were built for and filled with Covenanters. The ministry of a local Covenant pastor with parishioners who moved from their own home to Covenant retirement homes and nursing homes was seamless.

An interesting attempt to train nurses in pastoral care came in 1903. The Home of Mercy noticed the formidable role of the deaconess in Europe. They asked North Park College to develop a deaconess curriculum to train young women in holistic nursing and spiritual care ministry. Their education would take place in the classroom, the Home of Mercy, and Swedish Covenant Hospital clinics.[15] When the curriculum was ready in 1911, five women enrolled. When they graduated, two returned to their own churches, fulfilling the role we see as a Christian parish nurse today. The others could not find work and the effort was repealed in 1913.[16]

The era after World War I witnessed considerable change in medical services and respite care, as well as chaplaincy. Antibiotics, advanced

12 Peterson, Erickson, Nelson, 1.

13 Stover, 18–23.

14 Joel Curtis Graves, "Leadership Paradigms in Chaplaincy" (PhD diss., Boca Raton, FL, 2007), 223–25.

15 Anderson, 91.

16 Sigurd Westburg, trans., "Minutes of the 1913 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church," *1913 Covenant Yearbook* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1914).

surgeries, and new technology provided great confidence in the power of science. It also made the holistic approach of care by deaconesses and local pastors as chaplains seem old-fashioned. Generalist clergy became perceived as suspect in their ability to address spiritual wellness and understand health care's specialties. Animosity between empirical science and established religion exploded. Health care chaplains were pressured to view Christian faith as secondary to any medical context. The denominational angst that evolved into the inerrancy versus neo-orthodox conflict around Scripture became another adversarial issue. In this milieu some chaplains became bivocational, splitting their time and salary between the congregation and the "old folks' home." Chaplains now acquired their ministerial identity from both sites of their work.[17]

In what is now known as Covenant Living Communities, local retirement communities began to hire their own chaplains, mostly from the retired local Covenant clergy population. Chaplains were required to have Covenant credentialing and were expected to participate in their local church as well as the wider denomination. The role was always part-time and was often filled by retired pastors and missionary residents who needed to augment their finances (of whom there were many). This was especially true of those who had ministered during the Depression, who had received low pay or no pension and needed additional resources. The economy created, and then tested, the spoken policy that "No Covenanter will be denied residency because of finances." If there were more than one such residential chaplain, they became more of a friendship of colleagues than professionals engaged in best practices. Often this mix of needs left chaplains working into their seventies or eighties. Their professional tasks were like those of retired pastors who did the important work of parish visitation, often without job description or supervision.[18]

The middle of the twentieth century exposed US citizens to differing faiths. Discoveries of diversity came with the influx of immigrants from non-European countries. American Protestant soldiers of European descent had fought alongside Pentecostals, Jews, Roman Catholics, and nonbelievers in World War II. Military chaplains increased their caregiving services to reflect this new ecumenical and interfaith awareness, as did those working in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and retirement homes. Non-Covenanters began trickling into the Covenant Living Communities. A Christianity too narrow in its understanding of residents would

17 Stover, 20–25.

18 Author interview with retired president of Covenant Retirement Communities (1986-1997) Paul V. Peterson, January 2014.

be unable to serve and reflect the new picture of the inviting kingdom of God. Ethnically parochial chaplains who exclusively served Scandinavian Covenant residents needed continuing education in order to serve the whole community.[19] It was during this time, 1942, that Swedish Covenant Hospital hired its first full-time chaplain.[20]

Caring in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

The Cold War following World War II produced values of a spiritual "war." Children lived with bomb shelters, propaganda, the Berlin Wall, and James Bond 007 movies. During this time, democracy was contrasted euphorically against communism. Victorious nationalistic rhetoric became embedded in the language of the faith. The nation felt the tensions between frugality and greed, selfishness and compassion, local community and nation.[21] The period also saw a non-scriptural bifurcation of which activities were to be prioritized in building the kingdom of God. Should preaching what it means to accept Christ be the church's priority? Or should service, with its goal of establishing justice in the world, be the priority? Believers came to believe they and their own church needed to choose one or the other—evangelism or service to humanity. The denomination wrestled with the opinions about this issue in 1948, 1956, and 1962, when the Annual Meeting voted that churches join neither the National Association of Evangelicals nor the National Council of Churches of Christ.

Chaplains during this period needed to be able to articulate and lead such religious discourse.[22] A structural redesign of Covenant polity was approved by the 1957 Annual Meeting. Its new flow chart placed the hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, and homes for the elderly under the responsibility of the Covenant Board of Benevolence.[23] Noting the increase of US government regulations on nursing homes, each Covenant entity was designated as a not-for-profit. Government rules and regulations increased steadily, aging and expanding facilities required expensive maintenance, and local retirement communities felt the bur-

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19 Stover, 23–30.

20 Olsson, 612.

21 Graves, 223.

22 Karl A. Olsson, *Family of Faith* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1975), 109, 188.
NB: The decisions by the 1943, 1956, and 1964 Annual Meetings marked the commitment of the Covenant Church to the Covenant Affirmation known as "Freedom in Christ," understanding that a diversity of opinion exists on a spiritual matter, yet the priority is to focus on the essential unity in Christ.

23 Peterson, Erickson, Nelson, 13.

den of fundraising for their facility and benevolent care. During this time many retirement homes, working with their conference superintendents, transferred their campuses to the management of the Covenant's Board of Benevolence, which provided a general umbrella for financial management, operational best practices, and oversight and direction, to help facilities move toward a strong future.[24] Like all major campus staff, chaplains now needed to satisfy requests not just from the local community, but also from the central office.

Several successful business leaders on the Covenant Board of Benevolence developed a new model for retirement living. Called a continuing care community, it promoted an independent lifestyle and, when a resident needed it, a nursing home. Led by the devotion and generosity of Edward and Anna Anderson, the first such facility opened as Covenant Palms in Miami, Florida, in 1951. It became the basic model of expansion for the next sixty years, with Paul Brandel casting the vision and first-time administrator Nils Axelson implementing it. Their philosophy was to have a Covenant Living Community built in close proximity to a Covenant congregation, thereby reinforcing the spiritual life of both parishioners and residents. These campuses with multiple levels of care (independent, skilled nursing and, eventually, assisted living) held the respect of and gained notice by the national industry. Covenant historian Karl Olsson described the era as a "philosophical mutation in the self-image of the denomination."[25] The robust post-war economy and Americanization changed the identity of second- and third-generation Covenanters. They desired to be established as Christian leaders and US citizens. The new prototype confirmed those hopes. Milton Engebretson, then-president of the denomination, often said, "Look at this beautiful retirement community! The only trouble is that it kind of ruins the anticipation of heaven!" The number of retirement communities grew, as did their complexity. So did the job description of the chaplain.

Many exceptional retired pastors worked part-time as chaplain to a campus. Each facility still hired its own chaplain from the credentialed ministers of the denomination, but now they sometimes did so in conversation with the Covenant conference superintendent. "Deals" were made for pastors with long-term health restrictions or pastors who needed a stabilizing work environment. Some of the resulting chaplains min-

24 Peterson, Erickson, Nelson, 21.
25 Olsson, *By One Spirit*, 600–12.

istered to the retirement communities very well, while some did not.[26] Ultimately, the idea of chaplaincy being a "dumping ground" flew in the face of the long-valued priority of the position.

In the wake of the revolutionary 1960s, chaplains needed extra experience in reconciliation, counseling, and self-knowledge. Recognizing this need, four Christian denominations joined their continuing education in pastoral care to form the Association of Pastoral Care in 1967.[27] As pastoral counseling blossomed, this organization standardized clinical pastoral education (CPE), insisting on credentialing its own successful students. North Park Theological Seminary joined with many other seminaries in accepting their authority, mandating all their pastoral students acquire at least four hours in a clinical practicum. It became an essential qualification for chaplaincy of a Covenant Living Community.

The world became smaller with space exploration and a new affordability in travel. Subsequently, interfaith knowledge grew into increased awareness of the many world religions. Retirement itself became an entire last third of a long life. These years evidenced different stages, each with its own needs for spiritual care. The early years of healthy retirement began to mean travel and volunteerism, the middle years meant friendship as well as caregiving and care-receiving, and the latter years concerned passing on a legacy to the next generation. The field of psychology expanded, enabling the research of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who raised awareness of the needs of the dying; challenging the status quo in thanatology.[28] All these issues meant chaplains were expected to empower residents to live their faith in a rapidly changing world with increased life span.

Covenant Living Communities continued to thrive, not just stabilizing but expanding, so the Covenant Board of Benevolence restructured its responsibilities in 1986. All fourteen of the centers at that time became incorporated and governed from a new board under the auspices of the Covenant Board of Benevolence. Its first president, Paul V. Peterson, led organizational and financial stability by standardizing human resources and operational policies, and monitoring and reporting rules and regulations. The first financial officer, Jim Drevets, happily designed the first spreadsheets for comprehensive budgets, consolidation of debt, and

26 Author interview with retired president of Covenant Retirement Communities (1986–1997) Paul V. Peterson, January 2014.

27 The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, www.acpe.edu.

28 Paul Ballard, "The Chaplain's Dilemma," in *Chaplaincy: The Church's Sector Ministries*, Giles Legood, ed. (London: Cassell, 1999), 187–92. Thanatology: the scientific study of death and the losses brought about as a result.

refinancing. Bragging rights were well earned when Covenant Living became the first national organization to have all centers accredited as "Continuing Care Retirement Communities" by the American Association of Homes for the Aging.[29]

At the end of the twentieth century full-time chaplains were being hired by the local campus but did so from a national qualification list and job description.[30] All were required to have graduated from seminary with a Master of Divinity, completed four units of CPE, and hold membership and ordination in the Covenant.

Prodded by women leaders in the Covenant (notably Adeline Bjorkman of the Covenant Executive Board), Fran Decker became the first female Covenant Living chaplain in 1992 at Bethany Retirement Center in Minnesota.[31] Communities with more than four hundred residents normally have two full-time chaplains, most often one male and one female. Greg Asimakoupoulos at Mercer Island, Washington, and Kay Sorvik of Westminister, Colorado, served as solo chaplains.[32] The first of several African American chaplains was George Goodman, hired in 1997 in Cromwell, Connecticut.[33] It still takes discipline by leadership to bring much-needed racial diversity to the campuses.

Caring in a New Millennium

There has always been a deep respect and nostalgia for Palmblad's early legacy of the Christian call to serve the needy poor. Ministry across financial and racial class lines has frustrated discussion, strategy, and attempts over the last three decades. A significant step came in Irvington, Oregon, in 2002–2009, when Covenant Living built a mixed pay scale apartment building. It provided affordable housing for the elderly, complete with a church facility on the ground floor.[34] Meant as a potential prototype

29 Peterson, Erickson, Nelson, 34.

30 A collaborative work to revise a standardized job description for chaplains is currently in process as of this writing.

31 Author interview with Fran Decker, April 2015. Having retired last year after twenty-two years, Decker continues to minister as a volunteer at Bethany Resident and Rehabilitation Center as chaplain emeritus.

32 Author interview with then-president of Covenant Retirement Communities (2002–2015), Rick Fisk, January 2014.

33 Covenant Village of Cromwell, minutes of the Management Advisory Committee, 1996–1997.

34 The author preached at this church in February 2003. The full diversity of families, elderly, homeless people off the street, middle-class professors, etc., exemplified the kingdom of God. The congregation was the first Covenant multiracial church plant, a vision of Henry Greenidge.

built on a complex financial model, the design proved fiscally unfeasible when the state government drastically reduced HUD reimbursement fees. Another disappointment came in the early 2000s when Covenant Living established a planning committee with Oakdale Covenant Church, a thriving African American congregation in Chicago, to build an affordable urban housing model. The strategy almost became a reality until a necessary city building partner could not be found. Another project of senior rental in Lenexa, Kansas, may offer insights for future models of service to diverse economic residents. The increase of new multicultural and urban Covenant churches speaks to the need for different models.

Although all Covenant Living residents and staff must be compatible with Covenant identification and faith affirmations, chaplains are now the only employees who must be Covenant and ordained. Also, a chaplain must sense a call to serve the elderly. Preachers accustomed to being the organizational center of a parish may not make the best Covenant Living chaplains. Chaplains are embedded in the Covenant Living work and community. What was once an independent professional has been replaced by an interdisciplinary team member, intentionally involved in resident activities, nursing care, volunteer management, ethical case studies, staff support, and facility assessment. "Chaplains do far more than care for the ill and dying. Their work is essential in decision-making, team-building, Christian activities, and leadership in the whole resident community."[35]

Ministry in the twenty-first century has postmodern challenges. Many chaplaincy positions throughout the industry have been eliminated in for-profit elder care. The economic downturn of 2008 highlighted the fact that chaplains are not "revenue producing," poetically described as being placed "between the Scylla of cost-efficiency and technological advance and the Charybdis of the desire to offer holistic personalized care."[36] The nonprofit sector still values the holistic contribution of the ministerial role. "For as long as I can remember, the chaplain on a campus has been a priority for corporate leadership."[37] Salary, benefits, and resources are invested in the position. Vice President Steve Anderson had chaplaincy management in his portfolio in 2005–2006. Subsequently, President

35 Author interview with then-president of Covenant Ministries of Benevolence (2002–2017), David Dwight, April 2015.

36 Stephen Pattinson, *Emerging Values in Health Care: The Challenge for Professionalism* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010), eBook Academic Collection, 187–93. Accessed January 29, 2015.

37 Author interview with the retired office manager of Covenant Retirement Communities (1980–2015) Kathleen Jenkins, October 2013.

Rick Fisk, himself an ordained minister, led the nineteen members of the chaplaincy in yearly gatherings of information, fellowship, and shared practices. He contacted both the Department of Ordered Ministry and the applicant when an opening arose for a new chaplain.

In 2015 Terri Cunliffe, president of Covenant Living, called on John Satterberg, retiring chaplain at Golden Valley, Minnesota, to become the manager of chaplain services for eight hours a week. He worked to compile a list of viable candidates and to answer questions from candidates and Covenant leadership. He led meetings of the corps of chaplains at the annual Covenant Midwinter Conference for ministers, biannual Covenant Living training at Summit (both of which are attended by President Cunliffe), guiding the search committees of local Covenant Living communities, and orienting new chaplains to their job. "When I came into office there were two or three candidates who were interested in Covenant Living chaplaincy. Now there are over sixty," Fisk told me.[38] Between 2015 and 2020 the number of chaplains grew from twenty-two to thirty-four with Covenant Living sites growing from fourteen to nineteen.

Satterberg defined the new manager position, which has since been augmented. Cameron Wu-Cardona of Covenant Living at Mount Miguel, California, is the current manager of chaplain services, a twenty-hours-a-week position.

With the demographics of retiring baby boomers upon us, chaplaincy must grow to meet new questions and ever-changing needs. How can chaplains articulate the need for faith in an increasingly secular environment? How can Christian spirituality be served in both ecumenical and interfaith contexts? How do chaplains maintain a non-anxious atmosphere when mediating family and staff conflicts? What part does practical theology play in an interdisciplinary approach to specialized ministries? These and many more dilemmas face current chaplains.

"Spiritual formation, and its active life, is not just one of the forces for an older person's fulfilled life. It is *the* driving force (sic)."[39] Its challenges and satisfaction extend through an entire lifetime; they "are new every morning." Some congregations ignore the giftedness, experience, and continued Christian transformation of retirees. They do so at their own peril and disrespect for the body of Christ. It is the fortune of its

38 Author interview with then-president of Covenant Retirement Communities (2002–2015), Rick Fisk, January 2014.

39 Author interview with director of Center for Spirituality and Aging: A Program of California Lutheran Homes, Nancy Gordon, January 2015.

residents and staff that the Covenant and Covenant Living take a different course. With the impending "silver tsunami" of boomers in their last half of life, chaplains to the elderly may be the ministers who lead the rediscovery of the importance of the elderly in society, as well as in the kingdom of God.

Communion: Roots and Wellsprings for Feeding, Filling, and Sending

Barbara Sartorius Bjelland, artist, chaplain at Porter Hills Retirement Community, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Introduction

The sacrament of holy communion, which has been at the heart of Christian worship and mission for nearly 2,000 years, was also foundational to the formation of our denomination. The Lord's Supper embodies unity, renewed hope, and mission as we are fed, filled, and sent forth. This message of unity, hope, and mission is needed as much in the present age as it was in the past. In many places, however, our corporate worship is truncated and "flattened," and misses its potential to show us God's kingdom. This flattening of worship will be further discussed near the end of this paper. When practiced in community with the church across space and time, the Lord's Supper overflows with an "inexhaustible wellspring of assurance,"[1] which can speak new life into a flattened world. As we celebrate Christ in the broken bread and drink the cup of the new covenant, we "proclaim his death until he comes"—the mysteries of incarnation and atonement (1 Cor 11:26). This essay will consider a slice of Evangelical Covenant Church denominational history focused on sacramental theology with suggestions for our own celebration of communion. May we live into these sacramental roots and wellsprings in order that all may be fed in unity, filled in hope, and sent out in mission to serve the world God so loves.

1 The phrase "inexhaustible wellspring of assurance" is used by C.O. Rosenius in his 1846 essay entitled "Communion," as quoted in Mark Safstrom, ed., *The Swedish Pietists: A Reader: Excerpts from the Writings of Carl Olaf Rosenius and Paul Peter Waldenström* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 137.

Waldenström on Atonement

Paul Peter Waldenström (1838–1917) was a Swedish theologian who became one of the founders, and later, president, of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden. He emphasized God as a loving Father rather than a God of wrath. Waldenström followed Carl Olof Rosenius as the editor of *Pietisten (The Pietist)* magazine. The dominant view of the atonement in the preaching of the Lutheran Church of the time was based on Anselm's teaching of a juridical view, though Luther had embraced a classical/ Christus Victor view.[2] Covenant leader Donald Frisk notes that during the Reformation period, there was a shift from God's offended honor to his "righteousness with its demand that the sinner be punished"; this introduced a division between the interests of the Son acting in love and the Father acting in justice.[3] After an intensive study of Scripture in the original languages, Waldenström articulated a different biblical view of the atonement from the prevailing Lutheran view that harkened back to Luther's preferred classical/Christus Victor understanding. This Christus Victor understanding sees Christ as a victorious warrior who ransoms humanity and all of creation from the power of sin, death, and the devil (Mark 10:45; 1 Cor 7:23; 1 Pet 1:18-19). Because of the atonement, we can be united with Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and become part of a new, glorified humanity. This classical understanding was articulated by such theologians as Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 202) who wrote, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."[4]

Gregory of Nazianzus emphasized that Christ redeemed us as whole people:

> If only half of Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it

2 Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A.G. Herbert (SPKC Publishing, 1931; republished by Crossreach Publications 2016), vi.

3 Donald C. Frisk, *Covenant Affirmations: This We Believe* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1981; Covenant Publications, 2003), 98.

4 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, preface, in Alexander Roberts and Sir James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), vol. 1, 526; Christian Classics Ethereal Library, https://ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/against_heresies_v/anf01.ix.vii.i.html, accessed February 7, 2024.

> must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and *so be saved as a whole*.[5]

In 1872, *The Pietist* published Waldenström's famous sermon for the twentieth Sunday after Trinity, in which he emphasized that God is a loving Father, rather than a God of wrath. This new emphasis meant that salvation occurs through a personal trust and relationship with Christ, *rather than intellectual assent*. His teaching differed from his predecessor in that Rosenius never spoke of God being reconciled, but only of people being reconciled to God. The atonement did not change God from being wrathful to loving; rather, it changed humanity. In this, Waldenström also differed with the terminology of the Augsburg Confession (1530) on which the Swedish state church was founded.[6] Waldenström's teaching created controversy that contributed to the formation of the Covenant Church.[7]

Waldenström on the Lord's Supper

The celebration of the Lord's Supper was central to Waldenström's theology. In his teaching on the Supper, he incorporated three atonement metaphors. As well as the juridical and Christus Victor views, Waldenström incorporated elements of the exemplary theory, also termed the subjective or moral influence theory. This view was expounded by medieval church teacher Abelard (1079–1142) and nineteenth-century American Congregational minister Horace Bushnell (1802–1876). In this understanding of the atonement, Christ's suffering on the cross has the main purpose of showing us God's love. This leads to the human response of repentance, faith, and love, an attractive picture of our love responding to the love of the One who first loved us (1 John 4:19). However, an exclusive emphasis on the moral influence theory neglects the need for Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, and the Holy Spirit to transform us and empower us to be Christ's ambassadors.

Waldenström incorporated elements of these three theories when he

5 Gregory of Nazianzus, Epistle 101, *To Cledonius the Priest against Apollinarius*, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), vol. 7, 440 (emphasis added); Christian Classics Ethereal Library, https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207/npnf207.iv.ii.iii.html, accessed February 8, 2024.

6 Safstrom, 17.

7 James K. Bruckner, Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, and Paul Koptak, eds., *Living Faith: Reflections on Covenant Affirmations by the Faculty of North Park Theological Seminary* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2010), 25.

wrote about communion. He taught that Christ's blood circulates through the believers who are grafted into him as they receive him by faith.[8] However, Waldenström distinguished his thought from the exemplary understanding by stating it is not faith that saves us. In *The Blood of Jesus*, Waldenström reminds us that though reason tells us the communion elements are just bread and wine, Paul says there is more to it. Waldenström affirmed Luther's understanding that Christ is "in, with and under the wine,"[9] and generally agreed with Luther's view of the atonement. Waldenström paraphrased Paul's words in 1 Cor 11:27, 29, that in communion, we are partaking of Christ's own life and body. The effect is the remission of sins,[10] to sanctify and cleanse,[11] to make us "partakers of his life,"[12] and to unite believers into one body.[13]

Waldenström shared Rosenius's concern that people would not come to the Lord's Table because they feared they were too sinful. He said the Lord's body and blood are for Christ's disciples who are weak and tempted, for those who feel lacking in faith, but not for the "blatantly ungodly."[14] He noted that the Word and prayer and devotion may at times taste like "dry wood" (quoting Luther),[15] but that coming to the table can still make believers alive, strong, holy, and loving.[16] Here Waldenström indicates that Word and sacrament are both vital; Christ reveals himself to us in a unique and necessary way in the Lord's Supper.

Waldenström also agreed with the early church fathers that the Lord's Supper is linked to the incarnation, Christ's birth by a woman, and his assumption of a human body.[17] He emphasized that the new covenant in Christ's blood "truly cleanses from sins." The bread and wine are not

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8 Frisk, 102.
9 P.P. Waldenström, *The Blood of Jesus. What Is Its Significance? Meditations on All the New Testament Passages in Which the Expression Occurs*, trans. J.G. Princell (Chicago: J. Martinson, 1888), 22. Frisk Collection of Covenant Literature, North Park College, https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_swecc/id/26544/rec/2.
10 Waldenström, 11.
11 Waldenström, 29.
12 Waldenström, 10.
13 Waldenström, 11.
14 Safstrom, 141.
15 Safstrom, 142.
16 Safstrom, 143.
17 Safstrom, 139.

merely symbols; they are an "in-between meal," looking back to the past and forward to the future when Christ will return.[18] Waldenström wrote that "everything in heaven and earth testifies to this mercy," in reference to the blood of Jesus that speaks mercifully from heaven.[19] In this, he implied the participation of all creation in God's redemption. Frisk notes that Waldenström's teaching on the atonement includes other key features of the classical/Christus Victor view, such that Christ was victorious over sin, death, and the devil.[20]

Waldenström believed himself called by God to bring about revival in the state Lutheran church. He created controversy in 1876 when he served communion at a gathering outside of a Lutheran church service, holding a "believers" communion in a mission house. This contributed to the birth of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden in 1878 as a Swedish free church. Swedish immigrants to America founded the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant in 1885, which was the first official name of what today we call the Evangelical Covenant Church.

In defining the new "mission group," the founders placed the Lutheran catechism lower than Scripture. However, in contrast with Calvinist Reformers, they maintained the Lutheran understanding of Christ's "real presence" in the sacrament of communion. Waldenström directed Christ-followers to "the organic unity of the incarnation, the death on the cross, and the resurrection in the work of atonement and also highlighted the necessity of subjective involvement in the atonement which has its basis in an objective historical act."[21]

It is evident that all three views of the atonement noted above are at the heart of our denomination's formation, were illumined by the preached Word, and were received in the Lord's Supper. It is also clear that Waldenström believed in a balanced combination of the human response of faith and God's saving action through the bread and cup. His view of God working through the physical elements can be considered "sacramental." The writer to the Hebrews says that Christ "suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood" (Heb 13:12). In effect, Waldenström "went outside the gate" by sharing communion—Christ's own body and blood—in the meeting house, outside of an officially sanctioned Lutheran state church. He went "outside the gate" to combat the false teaching that held that intellectual assent was

18 Safstrom, 139–40.
19 Waldenström, 30.
20 Frisk, 102.
21 Frisk, 104.

all that was needed to be saved.

This episode from Covenant history calls us to consider how we share communion in our churches today and how communion can proclaim the riches of Christ's incarnation and atonement. How do we speak into flattened and truncated theologies that prevent us from sharing the good news where it needs to be heard? How do we hold to the teaching of the church across space and time, and still contextualize our celebration for our contemporary situation and the future to which God is calling us? Do we see communion in a missional way? Is it a means to lift up Christ "outside the gate" so that he may draw all people to himself? To explore these questions, I now consider the concepts of sacrament and revelation.

Communion as Sacrament

Waldenström expressed a rich and full understanding of incarnation and atonement in his understanding of communion. This reminds us that communion is more than a sign—it is a sacrament. In other words, Christ is present with us in a concentrated way in communion. The Holy Trinity is actively involved, bestowing grace as we worship. Different definitions of sacrament can help us better understand how God can feed, fill, and send us out with the Lord's Supper.

Many Word-centered Protestants resonate with Augustine's (354–430) definition of a sacrament, as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace." The precise meaning of Augustine's phrase is disputed. Many evangelicals are comfortable with the emphasis on the invisible, which they take to mean an inward response of faith. Contemporary Reformed theologian Leonard Vander Zee emphasizes both the inward and the outward aspects of communion as a means of God's grace in Christ which confers that which it promises, and "involves a response of faith and commitment in and through Jesus Christ."[22] Vander Zee explains that the sacraments are given by God to proclaim and seal "divine forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, justification, and sanctification." Sacraments disclose God as my Redeemer, as well as the Redeemer of the whole world.[23]

Here I offer a definition of a sacrament in line with both Augustine's and Vander Zee's understandings, which elevates the physical aspect of

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22 Leonard Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2004), 23, 155.

23 Michael Horton, *In the Face of God* (Dallas: Word, 1996), 119, as quoted in Vander Zee, 23.

the means of grace: a sacrament may be defined as "a physical means God uses to accomplish his eternal purpose of the redemption of humanity in Christ, working through God's Word revealed in Scripture in a mysterious combination with the faith of the recipient." As a Protestant, I acknowledge only two sacraments: baptism and communion. However, God also works powerfully through "sacramentals."[24]

Some Protestants may fear that such a high view of the sacraments is superstitious or idolatrous. I would counter that sacraments are not effective because humans magically manipulate the spiritual realm, but they are more than mere symbols; they bear Christ's presence.[25] For Protestants, baptism and communion are the sacraments God uses in salvation, in combination with the faith of the recipient. A helpful way to phrase this is that the Word, and the sacraments of communion and baptism, are the "densest" way we encounter Christ.[26] In communion, we ascend with Christ to the heavenly realms where we receive a renewed vision of God's already-but-not-yet kingdom (Eph 2:5–7; Col 3:1–4).

This understanding leads to an embodied faith—faith in the God who became incarnated as a human in Mary's womb, faith in the God who calls us to embody the object of our faith in body, mind, and soul. This renewed vision is needed in this day and age, where a vision of reality based on God's revelation, and even a vision of any reality existing outside of the human mind, is increasingly called into question. Such a vision is needed to revitalize the worship, witness, and mission of the church in an age where words are met with suspicion and seen only as a means to power for the speaker or writer. Such a vision is needed to capture the hearts and imaginations of the Western church, and to provide pathways for not-yet believers to know Christ, the source of all beauty, goodness, and truth. The sacrament of communion touches the whole person through sensory experiences that speak to memory and imagination, metaphor, and story, inviting individuals and communities

24 There is much to learn from our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers in Christ. I agree with the Catholic teaching that "sacramentals" can prepare a person to receive God's grace and to cooperate with it.

25 John D. Rempel, *Recapturing an Enchanted World: Ritual and Sacrament in the Free Church Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2020), 6.

26 Rempel, 22.

to join God's metanarrative of salvation.[27]

As we receive the bread and the cup into our bodies through sight, smell, touch, and taste, we can explain to our congregations that we are receiving God's love into our very selves, rather than earning it. We can teach and experience such truths through the sacrament, linking them to the preached Word. When we have our "sacramental lenses" on, much of what we preach (whether it is a Bible story or a topical theme) can be illumined and embodied in communion.

Christ Revealed

We need to be guided and empowered by God in order to live as citizens in God's kingdom. Christ "moved into the neighborhood" (Jn 1:14, MSG) and sent his Spirit to reveal God to us. Here I will share a bit of my personal story to illustrate how revelation is central to a Christian worldview in our increasingly secular age. This story also illustrates how Christ was revealed in Word, sacrament, and community in one church that intentionally explored communion.

In 2004 I served as the children's minister at an Evangelical Covenant Church. Parents asked for a family class on communion for children who had previously received the sacrament without formal explanation or intention when the plate of bread and tray of juice was passed once a month. I had read that the broken bread at Emmaus was the first communion with the risen Lord, and that Christ is revealed in Word *and* sacrament (Lk 24:35). I realized that though communion is mysterious, it is a tangible way to encounter God. I saw that Jesus had something to reveal to my community and to me each time we partook of the supper.

The Communion Class: Incarnation, Atonement, and Multivalent Meanings

The second year I taught the class, I received a Vital Worship grant from the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship to lead a year-long group project on communion. The grant project included meeting with a team of parents, pastors, and Sunday school teachers, and getting their input on the class, a book I was writing for the class, and a closing worship

27 For more on how we are formed through our sensory experiences, see James McCullough, *Sense and Spirituality: The Arts and Spiritual Formation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).

service around communion. During the team meetings, one parent commented that she realized for the first time that worship was more than music. A pastor shared that many people think they are supposed to feel sorrowful and repentant when they receive communion, or else it is not effective. The closing worship service included a sermon on the Emmaus story and interviews with the children who participated in the class. Many children received communion for the first time with their families. Discerning together had helped us shape the class, the book, and the closing worship service. This intentional time of planning in community revitalized our worship for years to come. Planning in community can also help congregations address other relevant issues today, something I will comment on at the end of this essay.

Fed in Unity, Filled with Renewed Hope, and Sent Forth in Mission: The Emmaus Table and Communion

The Emmaus story offers a critical vantage point from which to consider how the Lord's Supper works and why we need it (Lk 24:13–35). I will consider three components that we see in this story: feeding in unity, filling in hope, and sending in mission. The context of the story resonates with today's world where there is much division, many are losing hope, and injustice abounds. The story begins when Christ meets two downcast disciples on the road, on the evening of that first Easter, and joins them on their journey. Cleopas is named and many scholars believe the other disciple was Cleopas's wife, Mary. The pair didn't believe the women's account of the resurrection and had lost hope.

Cleopas and the other disciple were *fed* by the risen Christ as he opened Scripture to them. When Christ offered them the broken bread, he was revealed and they recognized him. They said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us...?" They immediately went back to Jerusalem and gathered in unity with the other disciples. Christ appeared and stood among them all.

Together, the larger group of disciples were *filled in hope* with Christ's peace and the Holy Spirit who was imparted with Christ's own breath (Lk 24:36–42; Jn 20:19–23). A week later, Christ invited Thomas to touch his wounds. Thomas saw that God's Messiah had suffered and risen—overcoming sin, death, and evil as the Victorious One (Jn 20:24–29). In this *filling* the disciples had their hope renewed.

Christ then *sent them in mission* to all nations just before he ascended (Mat 28:18–20; Lk 24:27–53; Acts 1:6–11). When the Holy Spirit fanned the flame at Pentecost, the disciples began their mission to make

disciples of all nations. The sacraments were central as they baptized and broke bread together (Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–37). Let us now look more deeply at how these three categories are embodied in communion worship.

Fed in Unity: Passover Liberation for the Entire Cosmos

We feed on Christ together at the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is a pathway for union and communion with the Triune God, one another, and all of creation. Communion has its basis in the Last Supper, which is rooted in the Passover. In the Passover, the story of God's great deliverance is told every year and still experienced, as if the people present are the ones rescued from bondage. In communion we celebrate God's already-but-not-yet deliverance from sin, death, and evil of all kinds. God designed the act of communion itself to create unity in the body of Christ.

Just as the fall in Genesis had cosmic implications for the powers of good and evil, God's deliverance and redemption in Christ has cosmic implications for all creation (Col 1:20). In the creation narratives in Gen 1 and 2, God commissions humans to develop the potentials inherent in the creation (Gen 1:28) while serving and protecting it as good stewards of all created things (Gen 2:15). Bread and wine embody the goodness of God's creation and culture, the work of human hands. As a consequence of the fall, all creation groans and waits until Jesus returns and makes all things new (Rom 8:19–23). Many communion liturgies follow the Passover model in thanking God for the bread and the fruit of the vine, good gifts of the earth that God made. These liturgies recognize God as Creator and Sustainer of all. This type of communion liturgy proclaims the metanarrative of creation, fall, and redemption, and new creation, through the Christ who is Lord over the cosmos and all powers and principalities. This vision reminds us that we live and work in the power of the Holy Spirit, undertaking battles in the spiritual realm. As Michelle Sanchez writes, reconciliation is "individual, interpersonal, systemic, cosmic."[28]

Fed in Unity at God's Kingdom Table

In the Passover seder meal, people sit or recline. They celebrate that they are free to recline and remember how the Hebrew slaves in Egypt had to stand to serve their masters. Our Lord gave us the gift of com-

28 Michelle Sanchez, *Color Courageous Discipleship: Follow Jesus, Dismantle Racism, and Build Beloved Community* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2022), 156.

munion as a foretaste of God's kingdom table where all have a seat of honor around our great and humble host (Isa 25:6–9; Lk 22:14–30). Just as sharing a meal together in fellowship, Christ desires to unify us through the act of communion. We may sit at an actual table, kneel at an altar, stand in line or in a circle, or pass a plate of communion elements. All of these actions are significant; they shape and form us as we wait for one another, serve, and share with one another. As we plan communion worship, let us be attentive to how these actions shape and form us, and to how our practices can embody God's desire for our congregations. For example, do people in wheelchairs sit in the front or the back of the congregation? Who serves whom? How are children involved? What images of Christ and with what skin color is Christ represented in the sanctuary and other parts of the church building?

Sandra Van Opstal explores how the fourfold structure for the Sunday liturgy (gathering, word, table, sending) can be seen as a meal hosted for friends with hospitality that can be intentionally adapted for different styles and traditions.[29] Our king Jesus calls us to build friendships and to confront systematic injustice of all kinds. Celebrating the *agape* meal can do both; both are vital.[30] Paul's indictment of the Corinthians' love feast was because they showed partiality and favored the wealthy (1 Cor 11:17–22). David Swanson writes on this passage, saying God calls us to "servanthood at table."[31] Dominique Gilliard explores the idea of a Christian revolution, saying "a proper understanding of our call to steward privilege empowers us to bear witness to God's love in innovative, surprising, and sacrificial ways that allow us to expand the kingdom, love our neighbor, and produce fruit in keeping with repentance."[32] Let us remember that an intentional celebration of communion embodies Scripture's subversive call, as God's kingdom brings about a new social order where all are reconciled to God and one another, and invited to a table with seats of equal status.

29 Sandra Maria Van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 125. *The Covenant Book of Worship* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2003), 44, includes this fourfold pattern of worship. Covenant pastor David Swanson explores this fourfold liturgy in chapter 6 of *Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 98–113.

30 Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 117.

31 Swanson, 71.

32 Dominique DuBois Gilliard, *Subversive Witness: Scripture's Call to Leverage Privilege* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), xxvii.

Filled in Hope: Eschatological Joy

When Christ was revealed to the two disciples through the broken bread at the Emmaus table, their hope was renewed. First-century Christians were close to this story and thought the Lord might suddenly return when they broke bread together (Lk 24:35; Acts 2:42).[33] Even when Christ didn't return face to face, the believers were strengthened in their waiting because they had encountered the risen Christ in the bread and cup. After the meal, money and gifts of food placed on the communion table were distributed to the needy. Following this tradition, many Covenant churches take a deacons' offering on communion Sundays. Through sharing God's love in word and deed, the early church multiplied, and newcomers joined the kingdom banquet. John P. Burgess describes the early understanding of communion as "a moment of glimpsing the kingdom here and now…one…glimpsed all of life as transfigured by God's light."[34] In other words, communion is a space for eschatological joy as well as for the repentance that precedes it.

We have joy when we partake in communion because we are unified and because we ascend with Christ to the heavenly realms. We have joy as we step out of time and anticipate the reconciliation of all things to Christ. Communion is a foretaste of the "marriage supper of the Lamb" where all creation will join in worship (Rev 19:9; 5:13).[35] We have joy in communion because Christ reveals his beautiful face to us, and we begin to reflect his glory (1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 3:18). As Max Thurien of the Taizé community writes,

> The Church today needs to remember this cosmic, ecological, positive and optimistic vision of the Eucharist and to celebrate in a liturgy expressing the joy of heaven on earth and our expectation of the Feast in the Kingdom of Heaven.[36]

Communion embodies the suffering love of God—a mysterious coop-

33 Rempel, 61.

34 John P. Burgess, *Encounters with Orthodoxy: How Protestant Churches Can Reform Themselves Again* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 127.

35 For the story of communion in the Old Testament, New Testament, and today told with intergenerational levels, see Barbara Bjelland, *Supper with the Savior, Communion in the Bible and Today* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2004). The self-published "Leader's Guide" includes tips for incorporating people with varied intellectual and physical abilities, available at www.BarbaraBjelland.com.

36 Max Thurien, *The Mystery of the Eucharist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 21.

eration of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May our communion celebrations employ actions and language that make room for God's wonderful and mysterious work. I recently led a communion service in a retirement community saying these words: "This is the body of Christ, the bread of heaven." Without planning this, I was given the sense that we were together ascending with Christ to the heavenly realms. As communion leaders, we can remind our congregations that we celebrate with the church around the world, and with the saints and angels in heaven.

Sent in Mission

After Christ revealed his face at Emmaus, the two disciples returned to Jerusalem. They were soon sent out with the larger group of disciples by the Spirit at Pentecost and began to fulfill the Great Commission. As Christ is revealed, wellsprings of salvation overflow. As we participate in God's kingdom work, we continually need to encounter the risen King Jesus in communion. Christ is Lord of the church, and though we work to build the kingdom of God's justice and love, it is God who brings the growth. This perspective can keep the church from both a "hollow triumphalism and a shallow despair."[37] The church does not need to be triumphant by being perfect or powerful in worldly terms. On the other hand, this also means that the church need not despair in the face of its failures and unmet expectations. It is Jesus who is Lord and who will make all things right.

The New Gnosticism and a Truncated Gospel

The sacrament of communion speaks life into the tension between triumph and despair. The Eucharist also speaks to the tension between an overly individualistic gospel and the gospel of social liberation. As Al Tizon writes, a sole emphasis on my salvation in the life to come ignores the social dimensions of the gospel. He describes this as a "justice-less gospel" which loses "the power and fullness of genuine, life-changing commitment to Christ and his purposes."[38] On the other extreme, a sole emphasis on social liberation "keeps desperately lost people from experiencing a personal relationship with God…and dealing with personal sin."[39] Tizon describes this as a "no-conversion theology,"[40] which

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37 Wright, 113.

38 Al Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 74.

39 Tizon, 74.

40 Tizon, 75.

teaches no personal transformation or special empowerment by the Holy Spirit is needed to follow Christ. Tizon says these are both "truncated" understandings of the gospel of Jesus Christ.[41] This thinking is echoed by Fleming Rutledge in her recent book on Epiphany and the glory of Christ. She writes that the understanding of God's justice/righteousness as a gracious gift "is the ultimate good news for everyone,"[42] whereas the gospel message is withheld by both an overly individual and an overly corporate view of sin.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "truncated" as without a top or end section.[43] The word "truncated" implies lack of roots and lack of vison from above. A truncated gospel is related to what theologians[44] deem a type of Gnosticism, which can be found in many churches today, including in evangelical churches. As N.T. Wright puts it, this Gnosticism "[thinks] of the present world as evil and the only solution being to escape it and to go to heaven instead."[45] Wright calls us to realize our individual salvation leads to participation in God's already-but-not-yet kingdom here on earth.

This new Gnosticism cuts both ways as it flattens the gospel either to what we do here and now (gospel of social liberation), or to what we do when we die (individualistic gospel). A Gnostic faith has a truncated understanding of Christ's embodied incarnation and atonement in order to reconcile all things to himself (Col 1:20). Sanchez writes that "discipleship has always had *embodied*, geographic dimensions."[46] A Gnostic system is *disembodied*, as it divides the whole human person which God wonderfully knit together with body, mind, and spirit. The sacrament of communion is a microcosm of an alternate universe to that of Gnosticism. This sacrament tells us that individuals and communities have an end, a *telos*, rather than seeing persons as disembodied individuals. God desires our telos to be union and communion with the Triune God and

41 Tizon, 74.

42 Fleming Rutledge, *Epiphany: The Season of Glory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), 136.

43 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "Truncate."

44 Here I am referring to a new Gnosticism noted in Fleming Rutledge's *Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2015) and Tish Harrison Warren's *Liturgy of the Ordinary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), as well as in Al Tizon's *Whole and Reconciled*, and N.T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

45 Wright, 197.

46 Sanchez, 189 (emphasis added).

all of God's creation. This type of communion tells us that what we do with our bodies matters, and how we care for the bodies of others matters, and how we care for creation matters. This sacrament tells us that the "physical stuff" that God made is broken, but it remains "very good" (Gen 1:31). Our end is not to escape the world with Gnostic enlightenment or the intellectual assent that Waldenström countered. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, instruments of praise.

We are formed by our practices and liturgies. Let us be intentional in linking the incarnation and the reconciling work of Christ—the atonement—with our celebration of the Lord's Supper. We can do this in our sermons, our communion liturgies, and in faith formation for all ages. In addition to the stories and suggestions noted earlier, here are more questions to prayerfully consider in community: How is the worship service planned, prepared, and celebrated? Who is included? How often is the Lord's Supper practiced? Do we serve one another, or are we served by the pastor? Do we stay in our seats or come forward? Do we kneel at the altar rail, or stand in a circle? What kind of bread is used, from which farmer and baker, and from which culture? What type of vessels are used for serving? How is the Holy Spirit called upon to bless the bread, the cup, and the people?

Prayers, music, Scripture, and sermons can all point to, and intertwine with, the Eucharist. Do we use historic liturgy, or do we write our own? Do we consider the local, regional, or global context of our church? Through the use of celebratory balloons on the altar table or barbed wire around the cross to remind us that Christ suffered outside the gate (Heb 13:12), different congregations have used the setting to enhance particular themes. As the service concludes, how are we sent out? How do we communicate that communion leads to mission as we go, bearing Jesus Christ within us, to share with the world? A favorite practice of mine is to invite the congregation to receive the benediction with open hands to embody hearts open to Christ as Lord.

What kind of creative or service projects can be incorporated with communion? For example, one church made a communion table together using broken tile pieces. They reflected on how Christ was broken for us that we may be healed in community. One church invited the surrounding community to help them clean up a local park and watershed, all tied to caring for creation. New people came to Christ and joined the church after feeling welcomed in this way. People were invited to journal on their experiences of communion and to share their experiences.

Conclusion

May we keep a multilayered feast at God's kingdom table central to our worship and be purposeful in how we celebrate. May we look to the revealed Christ to feed us in unity, fill us in hope, and send us in mission. May we be strengthened with the eschatological joy set before us, to go outside the gates of injustice, a new Gnosticism, and a truncated gospel. When Christ is revealed in his beauty, brokenness, and glory, we will be empowered to go outside the gates and raise the cross again in the world that God so loves.

I end with a quote by George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community in Scotland:

> I simply argue that the cross be raised again, at the centre of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles but on a cross between two thieves; on a town garbage heap; at a crossroad of politics so cosmopolitan that they had to write His title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek…and at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died, and that is what He died about. And that is where Christ's own ought to be, and that is what church people ought to be about.[47]

47 George MacCleod, *Only One Way Left* (Glasgow: Iona Community, 1956), 38. Accessed Feb 7, 2024, Internet Archive, urn:oclc:record: 1150936427.

From Lament to Praise: How the "Seam" Psalms Can Teach Us to Walk the Godward Path

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According to the Apostle Paul, all of Scripture is "God-breathed" and has been given to us as tools for "teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness," for the purpose of equipping the "servant of God" for "every good work" (2 Tim 3:16).[1] Furthermore, our Lord has provided the church with gifted leaders, including pastoral shepherds and teachers, to equip believers for faithful ministry (Eph 4:11–16). As Thomas Oden has noted, shepherding is a "pivotal analogy" for pastoral leadership in the church. While some in our day may be suspicious of this "premodern image," Oden argued that the Good Shepherd teaching of John 10:1–18 retains "contemporaneity," as it contains such key themes as the intimacy of the shepherd's knowledge of the flock, or the shepherd's feeding and leading of the flock.[2] The shepherding image, then, remains relevant, "[i]t is as much needed amid the concrete canyons of modern urban centers as it is in the rural scenes in which its intriguing images were spawned."[3]

An ongoing question for pastor-shepherds to address is: are the people of God being fed a regular, balanced, and life-giving diet of the Word

1 Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the NRSV. In the original context of this passage in 2 Timothy, Paul's reference to "Scripture" (Greek: *graphē*) has to do with the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. For current Christian readers, this "Scripture" now properly includes both Old and New Testaments. As William Barclay (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], 199), noted, "[i]f what [Paul] claims for scripture is true of the Old Testament, how much truer it is of the still more precious words of the New."

2 Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 51.

3 Oden, 59.

of God? The challenge of diminishing biblical literacy in our culture remains. According to a recent study, while Bible users increased in the United States in 2021, only "one in six adults reads the Bible most days during the week."[4] Furthermore, for most Christians, it is obvious that the New Testament—with its focus on the ministry of Jesus Christ and on the early Christian church—should be a staple of the teaching and preaching of the church. In contrast, what can be less clear is the necessity of regular engagement with the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, or with the "First Testament," as John Goldingay calls it.[5]

My general goal here is to encourage church leaders to include Old Testament texts and themes as a regular part of their teaching and preaching ministries. As Goldingay notes further, there are certainly "tough aspects" to the Old Testament (at least for our contemporary sensibilities) that "the church might want to avoid," but importantly, "the Old Testament is *not basically hard or demanding news to swallow, but good news that has not been heard*."[6]

One Old Testament book that offers fairly direct and approachable content is the Psalter. For example, the Reformer John Calvin in his commentary on the Psalms encouraged the exegete-pastor to attend the "school of the Psalms."[7] In this essay, we will focus on the structure of the book of Psalms. If pastor-shepherds are to lead the flock towards "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13), then they are to guide the flock on the Godward path (Prov 1:1–7; Matt 7:24–27). My claim is that an analysis of the structure of the Psalms provides one ministry perspective through which those who may perceive God as remote, inaccessible, or distant can be shepherded on the path that leads to a transformative experience of God's proximal presence. As Gundersen notes, "The Psalter seems to tell a story—moving from lament to praise, from affliction to celebration."[8] To sketch out this approach, I will first highlight some recent scholarship that emphasizes reading the Psalms as

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4 Barna Group, "State of the Bible 2021: Five Key Findings," May 19, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/sotb-2021.

5 John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume 1: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15.

6 Goldingay, 23 (emphasis added).

7 Robert Martin-Achard, *Approche des Psaumes*, *CahT* 60 (Neuchatel/Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1969), 13 (my translation).

8 David "Gunner" Gundersen, "A Story in the Psalms? Narrative Structure at the 'Seams' of the Psalter's Five Books," in *Reading the Psalms Theologically*, ed. David M. Howard Jr. and Andrew J. Schmutzer (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023), 95.

a purposefully shaped book. Then, I will offer some brief observations on the major groups of "seam" psalms, the hinge psalms for the five books of the Psalter: Pss 1–2, 41–42/43, 72–73, 89–90, and 106–107.

The Shape of the Psalms: The Five Books and Their Seams

Engagement with the canonical shape of the Psalms, as reflected in the Masoretic Text, occurred even in earlier generations of the church.[9] Since the early 1980s, however, much recent scholarship of the Psalms has decidedly focused on elucidating the significance of the final form of the Psalter.[10] In this approach, not only are individual psalms analyzed for their discrete rhetorical content and message, but also, such issues as the location of certain psalms within the whole Psalter and its five books, the links between various psalms, and the function of smaller collections of psalms are brought to the fore.[11]

The division of the Psalter into five books is foundational to these discussions: Book I (Pss 1–41), Book II (Pss 42–72), Book III (Pss 73–89), Book IV (Pss 90–106), and Book V (Pss 107–150). Most modern translations include these five book titles. The recognition of the five books comes from the biblical text itself: each book concludes with a doxology (see Pss 41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48; 145:21). The language of these doxologies is linked by common motifs.[12] Furthermore, the doxology in Ps 145:21 can be seen as the conclusion to Book V, while all of Pss 146–150 can then be read as the explosive, praise-centered conclusion of the whole Psalter.[13]

The psalms located at the "editorial seams" of these five books take on particular significance when thinking of the narrative structure of the

9 Note Steffen Jenkins, "The Antiquity of Psalter Shape Efforts," *TynBul* 71 (2020): 161-80.

10 A foundational study here was Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985).

11 Two recent essays that synthesize this major movement in the study of the Psalms are: Kyle C. Dunham, "Viewing the Psalms through the Lens of Theology: Recent Trends in the Twenty-First Century," *JETS* 2023 (66): 455–72; David M. Howard Jr. and Michael K. Snearly, "Reading the Psalter as a Unified Book: Recent Trends," in *Reading the Psalms Theologically*, 1–35. While this approach dominates, some scholars disagree and argue that the focus in the study of the Psalms should remain the individual psalms. On this view, see for instance John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3: Psalms 90–150*, *BCOTWP* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 11.

12 For example, compare "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen" (Ps 41:13), with "Blessed be the lord forever! Amen and Amen" (Ps 89:52).

13 Following Gundersen, "A Story in the Psalms," 94–95.

Psalter. These six sets of psalms (more or less) are usually defined as seam psalms: (1) Pss 1–2, (2) Pss 41 and 42–43 at the transition from Book I to Book II, (3) Pss 71–72 and 73 at the shift from Book II to Book III, (4) Pss 88–89 and 90 at the intersection of Books III and IV, (5) Pss 106–107 at the interface of Books IV and V, and (6) Pss 146–150 at the end of the Psalter. As David Howard and Michael Snearly demonstrate, scholars have taken the analysis of the significance of these five books in the Psalms in two major directions that center "around the role of 'David.'"[14]

In the first approach, only Ps 1, with its Torah-wisdom emphasis, is viewed as the introduction to the Psalms. Here, the first major unit is viewed as Books I-III (Pss 1–89), ending with pointed failure of the Davidic covenant in Ps 89. Thus, with these "wisdom/democratizing approaches," "[t]he rest of the Psalter attempts to deal with this 'failure,' focusing on Yahweh's (not David's) eternal kingship and the importance of Torah obedience."[15] In the second approach, defined as "royal/messianic," many scholars have "pushed back against the idea of a 'failed' Davidic covenant and have emphasized instead the persistence of the figure of 'David' through to the very end of the book, including a vision for a future 'David' (or 'Messiah')."[16] Here, both Ps 1 (with its wisdom focus) and Ps 2 (with its royal, messianic focus) are viewed as the introductory psalms to the Psalter. We proceed based on the assumptions of this second approach. Our goal is to highlight some key observations related to the first five groups of seam psalms noted above.

The Gateway to the Psalms: Psalms 1 and 2

The Godward path from lament to praise begins with the "gateway" Pss 1 and 2.[17] Davidic psalms are central to Book I (after Pss 1–2, only

14 Howard and Snearly, "Reading the Psalter," 5.

15 Howard and Snearly, 4 (and note further pp. 5–10 of their essay for their overview of this approach). One example of this democratizing perspective is Erich Zenger, "The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms 107–145," *JSOT* 80 (1998): 77–102.

16 Howard and Snearly, "Reading the Psalter," 6 (and note further pp. 11–21 of their essay for their discussion of recent works that follow this perspective). An example of a work developing this royal, messianic approach is Peter C. W. Ho, *The Design of the Psalter: A Macrostructural Analysis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019).

17 Note Patrick D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, *JSOTSS* 159 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 83–92. See also Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter*, *HBM* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012).

Pss 10 and 33 are anonymous).[18] David's voice of lament dominates over hymnic praise.[19] Psalms 1 and 2 have many links.[20] Here, I highlight three: (1) both psalms are anonymous; (2) as an inclusio, Ps 1 begins with a "blessed" (ashere) statement (Ps 1:1a) and Ps 2 ends with a "blessed" statement (Ps 2:12b); (3) in Ps 1:2, the blessed person "meditates" (Hebrew verb is *hagah*) on Yahweh's law, while in Ps 2:1, the nations "plot" (this translates the same Hebrew verb, *hagah*) against Yahweh.

Psalm 1 plainly highlights the contrasted ways of the righteous and the wicked (*tsadiqim* and *reshaim* in 1:6). First, in vv. 1–2, the source of the truly blessed person is not found in the devolving path of increasing sin that leads away from the presence of God (v. 1). In a sense, Ps 1:1 reveals to us what a lack of pastoral shepherding can lead to: sheep who wander and who fall into trouble. In stark contrast, true and lasting blessing is found in a full-fledged and daily engagement with God's instructive, revealed Word (his *torah*, in v. 2). Second, two images from the natural world are employed to illustrate these contrasting ways. The godly one is compared to a regularly watered tree that provides fruit in season (v. 3). Thus, the godly one is blessed, and can be a blessing to others, insomuch as she is nurtured by God's living Word. In contrast, the wicked one is compared to rootless chaff that is blown away (v. 4). Third, Ps 1 concludes in vv. 5–6 with a description of final outcomes (that include eschatological overtones, in my view): the righteous will endure in the proximal presence of Yahweh, while the wicked will be condemned to final distance from God.

Psalm 2 is a royal psalm. In vv. 1–3, earthly leaders express their desire to revolt against Yahweh and his "anointed" (*masiakh* in v. 2). In vv. 4–9, Yahweh responds by further affirming the role of his "king" (*melekh* in v. 6) and his "son" (*ben* in v. 7) in judging these rebellious nations. In vv.

18 Psalms 9 (a Davidic psalm) and 10 together make up one acrostic poem in the Hebrew text, so they are very closely linked. Also, in my view, the Hebrew phrase *ledavid* ("of David") in the titles of the Davidic psalms indicates that King David was the human author. For a recent defense of this traditional view of the Davidic authorship of the *ledavid* psalms, see Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel, *How to Read and Understand the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Crossway, 2023), 33–46, 499–518.

19 deClaissé-Walford notes: 59 percent of Book I's psalms are laments and 20 percent are hymns. See Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, *NICOT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 27.

20 For succinct analyses of the fuller links between Psalms 1 and 2, see for instance Gundersen, "A Story in the Psalms," 81–84, and Ho, *The Design of the Psalter*, 65–70.

10–12, the psalm concludes with both a rhetorical call for earthly leaders to serve Yahweh (v. 11) and his son (v. 12), and with a general affirmation of the blessed nature of all who remain in proximity with—who take refuge in—Yahweh's son (v. 13). A Christian reading rightly affirms the interplay between the imperfect fulfillment of the kingly promises of Ps 2 with the human Davidic kings and the perfect outworking of these claims through the messianic son of Yahweh. The repeated failures seen in the human leadership of King David (2 Sam 11–12, for instance) and his descendants (for example, Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21) should naturally move our interpretive lens to the divine, sinless work of Christ the King.[21]

Thus, a ministry perspective rooted in the structure of the Psalms begins with a wisdom emphasis on the godly person needing to daily be rooted in, and nurtured by, the life-giving Word of God. But also, this pattern ought to emphasize active dependence on Yahweh's messianic king. This should include a deep-seated acknowledgment that standing in the eschatological "congregation of the righteous" (Ps 1:5) comes only with living today in the refuge of Yahweh's royal son (Ps 2:12). Thus, "just as [Yahweh's *torah* in Ps 1] brings happiness to the righteous, so a divine decree ensures the final victory of Yahweh's anointed one [in Ps 2]."[22]

From Book I to II: Lament in Psalms 41 and 42–43

Most scholars agree that praise and lament are the two major genres of psalms—or as Brueggemann describes them, psalms of orientation and disorientation.[23] As noted above, disoriented Davidic lament is a dominating tone in Book I. This emphasis essentially continues into Book II, where David's voice is also joined for the first time by the

21 Theologically, then, Christ can be understood as the "second David," who perfectly embodies the kingly expectations of the Davidic covenant promises of 2 Sam 7. On this hermeneutic of interpreting the Psalms as Christian believers, note the helpful discussion in Waltke and Zaspel, *How to Read*, 23–32.

22 Jean-Luc Vesco, *Le Psautier de David traduit et commenté I, LD* (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 66 (my translation). As Gundersen ("A Story in the Psalms," 83) also notes, "Psalm 1 anticipates eschatological judgment and vindication" and "Psalm 2 then sets a trajectory that is at once royal, messianic, global, and eschatological."

23 See Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary, Augsburg Old Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 25–50 (for his discussion of psalms of orientation), 51–122 (for his discussion of psalms of disorientation). And see Brueggemann, 123–167, for his discussion of psalms of "new orientation." For a practical overview of the literary genres of the biblical psalms, see Rolf A. Jacobson and Karl N. Jacobson, *Invitation to the Psalms: A Reader's Guide for Discovery and Engagement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013).

Levitical perspective.[24] This parallels the historical movement of ancient Israel's united monarchy, where David eventually enlisted non-Aaronite Levites to help prepare for the temple in Jerusalem, and this included song and music (see 1 Chr 16 and 25). Specifically, Book I concludes with an individual lament of David in Ps 41 and Book II opens with a Levitical psalm of lament in Ps 42 (and Ps 43, an anonymous psalm closely linked to Ps 42).

Psalm 41 is framed with the term "blessed" (*ashere*) in vv. 1 and 13, and thus links back to the "blessed" introductory frame we highlighted in Ps 1:1 and Ps 2:12. At the end of Book I, the voice of David is not the oriented kingly voice of praise, but a clearly disoriented voice of human suffering. Indeed, in Ps 41, David is sick and yearns for God's restoration (vv. 1–3). Here, the "blessed" ones are those who consider the "*dal*" (the poor, the weak). David further calls out to God for healing and for deliverance from the taunts of his opponents who seem to rejoice in his sickness (vv. 4–10). As Charry remarks, Ps 41 "teaches us that even if our dearest companions forsake us, God knows the truth of our innermost self and forever holds us fast."[25] Psalm 41 concludes with the expression of a renewed faith in God in vv. 11–12 (and Book I's doxological conclusion in verse 13).

Psalm 42 opens Book II in lament and is structured around this repeated refrain (in vv. 5 and 11): "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." This refrain also concludes anonymous Ps 43, in v. 5, so that Pss 42 and 43 are very closely linked.[26] In between each of these three refrains, the longing for God's presence is paramount in the midst of challenging circumstances, as expressed in various images: "Thirst and Tears (42:2–6); Cascades and Abysses

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24 Psalms 42–50 are mainly Levitical. Note the titles: "Of the sons of Korah" for Psalms 42, 44–49, and "of Asaph" for Psalm 50. See further my essay, J. Nathan Clayton, "Perceptions of Divine Presence in the Levitical Psalms of Book II: The Paradox of Distance and Proximity," in Howard and Snearly, *Reading the Psalms*, 271–82. Also note my broader discussion of the ministry of the Levites in J. Nathan Clayton, *Symbol, Service, and Song: The Levites of 1 Chronicles 10–29 in Rhetorical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 1–38.

25 Ellen T. Charry, *Psalms 1–50: Signs and Songs of Israel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015), 41.

26 Note, for example, the helpful discussion of the links between these two psalms in Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 668–70, who reads them as a single unit.

(42:7–12) … My Fortress and the Holy Hill (43:1–5)."[27]

At least two issues stand out for us. First, Ps 41 affirms a faith that is not triumphalist but is cognizant of human suffering. Here, integrity (*tom* in Ps 41:12a) is closely linked with the worshiper's faithfulness in serving those on the margins (the *dal* [poor, needy] of Ps 41:1), despite the reality of sickness. In Ps 41, it is this integrity that enables the renewed experience of the blessing of God's presence (Ps 41:12b). Second, the journey from a soul that is downcast and in turmoil to a soul that is renewed in praise of God and in confidence of one's salvation is found only in active hope in God (note the verb *yachal* in the refrain of Pss 42:5, 11; 43:5). Thus, our ministry pattern for the Godward path develops. The calls to be nurtured by God's word (Ps 1) and empowered by God's king (Ps 2) are now supplemented by appeals to serve others, even the least among us, out of our own weakness (Ps 41), and to root our journey through human suffering and turmoil with a Yahweh-centered hope (Pss 42-43).

From Book II to III: Kingship and Wisdom in Psalms 72 and 73

The shift from Books II to III represents a significant transition in the Psalter. While the literary voice of David is at the forefront of Pss 1–72, in Pss 73–89 (Book III), we encounter just one psalm of David, Ps 86, "A prayer of David." The rest of the psalms of Book III are Levitical. Also, Ps 72, at the end of Book II, is only one of two psalms with the title "of Solomon" (the other is Ps 127). After the extended doxology in Ps 72:18–19 (marking the end of Book II), the final verse of the psalm states: "The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended" (Ps 72:20). Of course, in the final form of the Psalter, further psalms of David occur (especially in Book V). It is possible that the colophon at Ps 72:20 indicates that during the open canonical period of the Old Testament, an initial collection of psalms, used in Levitical worship at the Jerusalem temple, could have included much of the psalms that we find in Books I and II of the final canonical version of the Psalms in the Masoretic Text. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is possible that this collection could have come together after David's reign or after his son Solomon's reign, during the united monarchy of the tenth century BC.[28] Some see

27 See Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, *ECC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 351.

28 Note the seminal discussion of this issue, and related compositional issues, in Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 139–228. For a helpful discussion of the canonization of Old Testament texts, see for instance Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 101–17.

David as the human author writing a blessing to his son Solomon; others regard the human author as Solomon. As Wilson notes, "[r]egardless, the clear intent of the heading is to associate Solomon in some fashion with the vision of the enduring kinship articulated in the psalm."[29]

Thus, Ps 72 is clearly a royal psalm. In it, the psalmist appeals for Yahweh to enable the king to lead justly (vv. 1–4). The text also envisions a kingly reign that enables the people to properly fear Yahweh (vv. 5–7). In vv. 8–11, this psalm further calls out for human rulers beyond Israel to accept the worldwide dominion of this Davidic king. In Ps 72:12–14, we see that the reign of this Davidic king is marked by effective and just care for the "poor" and the "needy" (*evyon* and *dal*, see Ps 72:13). Before the concluding passages that we noted above (vv. 18–20), the main section of Ps 72 concludes in vv. 15–17 with a prayer that the king would be blessed (vv. 15–17a) so that, ultimately, all people and all nations may be blessed (v. 17b). As such, in my view, Ps 72 links back to Ps 2 and extends the tensive interplay between human Davidic kings and the divine Davidic Messiah. As Broyles observes, in Ps 72 we find the portrait of both king and Messiah, with emphases on compassionate justice and vigorous royal protection.[30]

In turn, Ps 73, a Levitical wisdom psalm, opens Book III and expands on the wisdom foundation provided in Ps 1. In the opening section, the Asaphite Levitical psalmist knows (at least intellectually) that God is good to the righteous (v. 1). However, in the first main section of the text (vv. 2–12), the psalmist expresses his jealousy with regard to the wicked who seem to be prospering without God—in dissonance with the perspective on the wicked established in Ps 1. Being in God's presence (as mediated by the temple experience) is what enables the psalmist to renew his perspective (vv. 13–28) and reaffirm that being "near God" as true "refuge" represents the ultimate good (v. 28), in contrast to the judgment reserved for those "far from" God (v. 27). As Kraus summarizes, "The final truth that God overturns everything is revealed."[31]

For our purposes, I emphasize two issues. First, Ps 72 reminds us that

29 Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, 985. Note that in the Hebrew title of Ps 72:1, *lishelomoh* ("of Solomon"), "*li*" represents the spelling here of the inseparable preposition lamed (ל). This preposition has the basic meaning "of," but can also be translated "for." See the introductory discussion of this type of preposition in Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 48.

30 Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, *NIBCOT* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 298.

31 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 92.

the Godward path should be marked by an embrace of the model of the Davidic king who seeks the good of others, even the marginalized (and this expands on themes we observed in Pss 2 and 42), and who invites all peoples to experience his blessing. Second, Ps 73 draws our attention to the significance of a ministry shepherd who regularly encourages the pursuit of God's wisdom and the renewal of God's presence, so as to endure through a temporary world where evil often seems to have the upper hand.

From Book III to IV: Divine Presence in Psalms 89 and 90

In Book III, we move away from the royal voice of David that was central to Books I-II. As noted above, the human literary voice in Book III is mainly Levitical and often dark in tone. The themes of the uncertainty of ancient Israel's divided monarchy (from the later tenth to the early sixth centuries BC) and, especially, the divine judgment of exile from the land (in the early sixth century BC) feed many of the psalms of Book III. For example, in Ps 74, the Asaphite psalmist is anguished over God's judgment (seemingly experienced in the exile) as foes have ravaged the temple (v. 4) and set it on fire (v. 7). It is only reflection on God's past mighty acts (vv. 12–23) that enables a measure of reorienting perspective for the psalmist. Psalm 88, in turn, represents the darkest moment of Book III, if not of the whole Psalter—so much so that Brueggemann views it "an embarrassment to conventional faith. It is the cry of a believer…who desperately seeks contact with Yahweh, but who is unable to evoke a response from God."[32] Indeed, Ps 88 does not offer a renewal of perspective, as many psalms of lament do. It concludes with divine wrath and darkness (vv. 16–18).

This brings us to Ps 89, the concluding text of Book III. A first, the psalm seems to primarily focus on a renewed confidence in God's work through the covenant promises made to David (vv. 1–4), with a lengthy celebration of God's work in creation (vv. 5–18) and of the goodness of the Davidic king (vv. 19–38). Further, however, a strong disjunctive clause introduced by the phrase "but now" (*veatah*) in v. 38 leads to an acute lament over God's apparent rejection of his covenant promises with the Davidic king. Note the language of Ps 89:38–39: "But now (*veatah*) you have cast off and rejected, you are full of wrath against your anointed (*masiakh*). You have renounced the covenant of your servant, you have defiled his crown in the dust." Psalm 89 concludes with an appeal for God to reveal himself in blessing for his people, as he is perceived as

32 Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 78.

utterly distant (vv. 46-51; with v. 52 as the doxology concluding all of Book III). Book III ends, then, with a disoriented tone. The worshiper is uncertain about God's ultimate faithfulness. Ancient Israel's experience of the exile (or the impending exile) would be a relevant initial context for this dark tone of lament. If the Jerusalem temple is destroyed and there is no longer a Davidic king on the throne, how can God still be present and in control?

As a response, Book IV opens with Ps 90, a poem that emphasizes the eternal goodness of God, in contrast to the fleeting nature of humanity's existence. As Tucker and Grant argue, Book III is dominated by "imagery of exile" and its "associated theological crises," and it is "Psalm 90 and Book 4…that respond to the crisis of faith voiced [in Book 3]."[33] Psalm 90 is the only psalm attributed to Moses: "a prayer of Moses the man of God."[34] In this way, readers are taken back to God's redemptive work well before the time of David, to the covenantal promises made through Moses (see Ex 19, for example). Even as God can be perceived as distant (as in much of Book III), Ps 90:1 notes that God has always been the "dwelling place" (*maon*) of his people. Thus, the psalmist further reminds us that human life is short (vv. 3–6), that God's judgment on our lives is just (vv. 7–11), and that, consequently, we are called to depend on God's wisdom to live out faithfully the limited time that he grants us on earth (vv. 12–17).

These two psalms, at the seam of Books III and IV, teach us to walk the Godward path in a number of ways. I will note three here that pastoral shepherds might reflect on further for their patterns of ministry. First, disorientation is a part of this Godward path. Second, if received rightly, divine judgment for the righteous can serve as a refinement in our calling to walk God's way of wisdom faithfully. Third, our understanding of how to experience the presence of God can be limited and in need of expansion, as it was for the ancient Israelites suffering through exile.

From Book IV to V: Divine Redemption in Psalms 106 and 107

Many scholars argue that Book IV represents a response to the Israelites' exile with an emphasis on the enduring kingship of God. As Tucker and Grant have noted further, "[a]lthough Book 3 closes with a

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33 W. Dennis Tucker Jr. and Jamie A. Grant, *Psalms, Volume 2*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 333.

34 Tucker and Grant, 28, note that "[s]ome have referred to Book 4 as a 'Moses Book' because of the considerable attention given to Moses, as well as the exodus and wilderness traditions."

lament over the fallen Davidic monarchy, Book 4 offers a *daring word of hope* declaring that Yahweh remains Israel's true king, thus ensuring that hope remains."[35] In Book IV, indeed, we encounter six enthronement psalms (Pss 93; 95–99). In these poems, divine kinship is emphasized, as seen with the refrain "the Lord reigns" (*yhvh malakh*), as in Pss 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; or 99:1. Psalm 95, for example, opens with a call to sing out joyfully in praise (vv. 1–2). What is the specific reason given in this psalm? Verse 3 provides an answer squarely centered on the unique kingship of God: Yahweh is a "great God" (*el gadol*), a "great King" (*melekh gadol*) "above all gods" (*al kol elohim*).

Furthermore, Book IV concludes with two longer historical psalms, Pss 105 and 106. Both of these psalms review key moments in Israel's history and her covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Psalm 105 is especially focused on God's faithfulness to Israel, with key moments from the Pentateuch employed as examples, such as the deliverance from Egypt and Moses's divinely ordained leadership in the wilderness (Ps 105:23–42). Psalm 106 also recounts Israel's history but does so with a different emphasis. The psalmist, indeed, reflects on the miraculous delivery from Egypt through Israel's arrival in the land "by giving considerable attention to the obstinate and rebellious spirit of God's people as they made their way to the promised land."[36] Psalm 106:13–14 illustrates this point well: "But soon they forgot his works, they did not wait for his counsel. But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the wilderness." Thus, while Ps 105 accentuates God's faithfulness, Book IV concludes with the theme of the *people's* unfaithfulness pervading Ps 106.

The conclusion of Ps 106 stands out. In vv. 40–43, as a consequence of Israel's generational faithlessness, God "gave them into the hand of the nations" (v. 41). As Estes notes here, "[t]hrough it all the Lord was more than patient and gracious to his people, but their habitual rebellion kept bringing them lower and lower. Eventually their downward trajectory led to the tragedy of captivity."[37] At the end of Ps 106, the tragedy of exile from the land dominates the psalmist's perspective. Still, God hears the cry of the people in captivity, remembers his covenant, and expresses his lovingkindness (*khesed*) abundantly in Ps 106:44–46. Note, then, the significance of Ps 106:47 (the final verse in the poem before the doxology

35 Tucker and Grant, *Psalms*, 28 (emphasis added). Also note the overall discussion of the editorial purpose of the Psalter in Tucker and Grant, 24–29.

36 Tucker and Grant, 28 (emphasis added).

37 Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73-150*, *NAC* 13 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2019), 306.

of Ps 106:48 that concludes all of Book IV): "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather (the verb is *qavats*) us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise."

In turn, at the opening of Book V, Ps 107 provides a response to this call in Ps 106 for God to gather his people from exile. The language of Ps 107:2–3 is noteworthy: "Let the *redeemed* of the Lord say so, those he *redeemed* from trouble and *gathered* (the verb is also *qavats*) in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south." In the perspective of Ps 106, then, the psalmist is *yearning* for God's ingathering, which highlights the desire to be in God's presence. At the opening of Ps 107, this yearning has been fulfilled, as the psalmist calls for praise on the basis of God *having* brought back his people. In this way, the theme of the "restoration from exile" anchors Ps 107 (ultimately, as a fulfillment of the divine promise of regathering given in Deut 30:1–10).[38]

After this initial call to praise in vv. 1–3, the psalm presents in vv. 4–32 a detailed reflection further describing the experience of deliverance from exile. As Estes observes, four metaphors are employed, such that "[v]iewing the same event through four different lenses is a process of meditation that leads the worshipers to appreciation and praise for the Lord."[39] Thus, in Ps 107, the experience of being delivered by God from exile is compared to being freed from the desolation of the desert (vv. 4–9), to being liberated from prison (vv. 10–16), to being relieved from the oppression of desperation (vv. 17–22), and to being delivered from the raging sea (vv. 23–32). Psalm 107 concludes with a call to praise in vv. 33–42, and in v. 43 with a call to *wisdom* rooted in the steadfast character of God: "Let those who are wise (*khakham*) give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love (*khesed*) of the Lord." VanGemeren highlights the significance of v. 43 when he writes that "[t]he conclusion to this psalm transforms the hymn of thanksgiving and praise to a wisdom psalm. The righteous will become wise by studying the acts of the Lord in the affairs of man."[40]

In these ways, the editorial seam found at Pss 106 and 107 provides further development for our reflection on a ministry pattern rooted in the basic structure of the Psalter. First, we note that readers are more clearly

38 See Estes, 311.
39 Estes, 311.
40 Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *Volume 5: Psalms – Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gabelein, vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 688.

presented with the aspect of God's unique power in redemption. The movement in the Psalms is toward a full-fledged recognition of God's supreme kingship. Second, we see that presence with God is viewed as the ultimate blessing. Justly exiled because of persistent covenantal disobedience, at this juncture in the Psalter the people of God can still experience the blessed proximity of God *through* his judgment and eventual renewal. Finally, we note the consistent theme of calling worshipers to walk God's way of *wisdom*, as a means of moving forward on the path from lament to praise—and as a way of moving from the experience of God as distant to the experience of God's proximity.

Conclusion: The Journey to Yahweh-Centered Praise

In the Psalms, the Godward journey ends in exuberant praise, even, in Ps 150, with a call to eschatologically infused instrumental praise, as Teram argues.[41] Overall, Pss 146–150 represent the end point of the worshiper's journey from lament to praise. Gundersen nicely captures the relationship between the seam psalms (and their brief doxological conclusions) and this final praise-centered destination, when he writes:

> The doxological rivers in Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106, and 145 flow into the dancing ocean of 146–150. The promise-prayers asking that "the whole earth be filled with his glory" (72:19) and that "all flesh bless his holy name" (145:21) are fulfilled in the universal symphony of every-creature praise in 146–150.[42]

My goal in this essay has been to sketch out the idea that the structure of the Psalter, as anchored in key seam psalms, may provide one ministry pattern through which those who feel they are far from God can be shepherded on the path to greater proximity with God. In these reflections, I have emphasized five sets of "seam" texts and their interwoven themes: (1) the foundational themes of wisdom and, ultimately, messianic kinship, in Pss 1 and 2; (2) the interplay of lament and service to others in relationship to the worshiper's integrity in Pss 41 and 42–43; (3) the relationship between kinship and wisdom in Pss 72 and 73; (4) the varying perspectives on God's presence in Pss 89 and 90; and (5) the developing understanding of divine redemption in Pss 106 and 107.

Ultimately, we should note that a healthy ministry perspective on this Godward path will recognize that it is *cyclical* on this side of the

41 See Jonathan Teram, "'There Are No Words': Instrumental Music and the missio Dei," *The Covenant Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 12–13.

42 Gundersen, "A Story in the Psalms," 94.

eschatological consummation that the redeemed will experience in the new heaven and in the new earth (see Isa 66:22–23). In this fallen world, as we anticipate in hope "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay" (Rom 8:21), we ought to remember that we will often move back and forth on this path from lament to praise. But the pastor-shepherd's call remains: to keep encouraging the people of God to faithfully journey forward, as empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Godward path we have observed in the structure of the Psalter represents one pattern through which we can encourage this journey of faith. As Ho argues regarding the contributions of the Psalter's Davidic psalms, they "identify, first, the establishment of a human monarch who later fails. This is then followed by the establishment of *an ideal messianic Davidic king, who ushers in the paradisical shalom for the people of God*."[43] In the end, then, we ultimately depend on the work of the divine, Davidic king to bring us home.

43 Ho, *The Design of the Psalter*, 264 (emphasis added).

Book Reviews

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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