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Comment

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

In this issue we proudly present the texts of inaugural lectures given by three faculty members who were recently named to endowed chair positions at North Park Theological Seminary. Hauna Ondrey, dean of faculty, appointed to the Wilma E. Peterson chair in church history, presented "Purposeful Narrative? Covenant History Past, Present, and Future." This reading will challenge every reader to consider how you and your ministry participate in the story of the Covenant movement and how that story will be told moving forward. Assistant Professor Michelle S. Dodson, appointed to the Milton B. Engebretson chair of evangelism and ministry, presented a synthesis of her doctoral research in her lecture titled "Racial Discourse, Social Engagement, and Misalignment: Assessing the Impact of Multiracial Churches." Her sociological input evaluating local ministries raises fruitful questions all of us in ministry need to consider in our local contexts. Max Lee, appointed as Paul W. Brandel Professor of Biblical Studies, challenged the audience and will challenge readers with his lecture titled "Be Loud and Brace for Impact: Anti-Asian Violence, the Model Minority Myth, and the Martyrs of Revelation 7:9–14." His personal insight as a theologian, biblical scholar, minister of the gospel, and Asian American follower of Christ combine in a discipling work of testimony worthy of reflection. We are grateful to God for each of these significant appointments to the faculty profile of North Park Theological Seminary, recognizing how each person has been and will continue to be an enriching blessing and resource to the Evangelical Covenant Church and beyond.

In addition, we include the text of two sermons of historical importance. Both were given at ordination services of the Evangelical Covenant Church as part of the Annual Meeting. In this issue we remember our

brother Thomas Kelly, who served as Covenant global personnel along with his wife, Janice, in Mexico for many years and passed away in July 2024. His sermon at the 2004 ordination service is presented here in its entirety. And thanks go to Howard Burgoyne, superintendent of the East Coast Conference, for sharing the manuscript of his inspiring sermon given at the ordination service in 2024, also included in this issue.

Finally, we include an article addressing a topic of vital importance to all Covenant pastors who regularly present the Word of God to their flock in preaching. Christopher J. Wall, NPTS alumnus and associate pastor of youth and congregational life at Beacon Covenant Church in Attleboro, Massachusetts, presents "Toward a Pietist Homiletic." Wall's work reminds us of our heritage as a Pietist movement and helps us frame how the Word is passed in our churches today.

We trust that the book reviews included in this issue will challenge you to read and expand ministry in the area where God has called you to serve. Many thanks go to Scott Burnett, book review editor, as well as to the Covenant Publications editorial and production team. The Covenant's mission priority of Serve Clergy has again graciously provided the financial backing for the publication and distribution of this volume of *The Covenant Quarterly*. Your comments, feedback, and submissions are always welcome.

PAUL H. DE NEUI

Purposeful Narrative? Covenant History Past, Present, and Future

Hauna Ondrey, Wilma E. Peterson Chair in Church History and dean of faculty, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois

It is an honor to be installed in the newly created Wilma E. Peterson Chair in Church History. It is especially poignant and fitting that this endowed position for history is made possible by a woman whose lifetime of service and generosity exemplifies the quiet faithfulness that makes up so much of history, especially the history of the church. The decision of North Park's senior leadership to allocate an endowed position to history, with a dedicated emphasis on denominational history, is also highly significant at a time when universities and seminaries are cutting history positions and curricula, and denominations are muting historical roots—even as historical amnesia is especially prevalent and historical understanding especially needed.

While this role is new, the decision to formalize North Park's commitment to the history of our denomination honors the critical contributions of Covenant historians who have worked faithfully across the entirety of our school's history: David Nyvall, Eric Hawkinson, Karl Olsson, Glenn Anderson, and my predecessor, Philip J. Anderson. We are indebted to the careful, purposeful work of these historians to root us in collective memory. Their work in turn has depended on our archivists, both non-professional—John Peterson, E. Gustav Johnson, Eric Hawkinson, Milton Freedholm, and Sigurd Westberg—and professional—Timothy J. Johnson, Ellen Engseth, Steven Elde, Anne Jenner, Anna-Kajsa Anderson, and Andy Meyer. Each dedicated archivist has built on the work of the previous, with the support of the Covenant History Commission, as we will see in the pages to follow.

Purposeful Narrative

In 2004 the Evangelical Covenant Church adopted the Fivefold Test (more recently expanded to the Sixfold Test to include practicing solidarity). The goal of the test was to move past viewing demographic diversity as a matter of numbers only (i.e., the first "p" of population) and to ensure true diversity in the very fabric of the denomination through attention to participation, power, pace-setting, and purposeful narrative. Purposeful narrative asks, "How do the stories of new backgrounds become incorporated into our overarching history? How do all of these streams flow together into one story moving forward?"[1] This continues to be a crucial question for a denomination founded by Swedish immigrants that now boasts 36 percent of its current congregations as "ethnic" or "multiethnic." Yet in the two decades that have passed since 2004, the call to purposeful narrative has been frequently invoked but rarely enacted.

My primary goal in this article is to contextualize the call to purposeful narrative within Covenant history and to concretize the corollary commitments that are prerequisite to its actualization. Taking as settled the admittedly disputed point that historiography matters, I want to focus on *how* historiography happens, the larger infrastructure that enables history to be written at all. I will do this through snapshots of the intersection of denominational identity and historiography at key anniversaries—the fiftieth anniversary in 1935 and the centennial in 1985—ending by looking ahead to the Covenant's 150th anniversary (2035), raising the urgent question: will we be able to tell *any* narrative of the preceding half century—and will Covenanters in 2085 be able to tell the story of the church we are creating today?

Narrating and Preserving *Covenant Memories*: The Fiftieth Anniversary (1935)

Anniversaries—especially big anniversaries like quarter-centuries and half-centuries—tend to generate historical reflection. They cause groups to take stock of the paths of change and continuity that have led to their current identity at the milestone and to consider which aspects of that past they want to carry into the future. This was true of the Covenant as it gathered to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 1935, a time of monumental transition in the life of the young denomination. The Covenant was in 1935 comprised of 430 congregations (totaling 44,153

[1] Available at https://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Six-Fold-Test.pdf, accessed September 9, 2024.

members), 70 percent of which still had "Swedish" or "Scandinavian" in their church name.[2]

Since the First World War, the Covenant's original ethnic boundary had begun to erode. Fewer and fewer Swedes emigrated, at times more making the reverse journey back to Sweden. Wartime restrictions on non-English languages pushed second-generation pastors with greater English language facility into more prominent positions of leadership. Most pressingly, denominational leadership noted with alarm the number of young people leaving Covenant congregations, which were ill-equipped to meet the needs of an English-speaking, more culturally American second generation.

Two years prior to the fiftieth anniversary celebration, T.W. Anderson had been elected as the first American-born Covenant president. Fully bilingual in Swedish and English, Anderson was well-suited to lead the denomination in the transition it faced as the founding generation gave way to second generation leaders, and English increasingly eclipsed Swedish as the denomination's lingua franca. At the 1935 celebratory Annual Meeting—only the sixth conducted fully in English—the Covenant would vote to remove "Swedish" from its denominational name, moving from "Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant in America" to "Evangelical Mission Covenant of America."

Many historical publications were produced in preparation for that anniversary celebration, most notably *Covenant Memories*.[3] This massive undertaking, which the Board of Publications described as "a laborious task for our editors and a costly undertaking for the Board," compiled contributions from no fewer than twenty-four authors. Hjalmar Sundquist provided an overview of denominational history ("The Mission Covenanters: An Outline of History"), divided equally between the "Swedish Background," "The American Background," and "Fifty Years of Service." This was followed by histories of every Covenant institution (North Park, Covenant Hospital, and Home of Mercy), regional conference (then thirteen), and ministry, both domestic (youth work, publications, etc.) and international (then Alaska, China, Congo)—each contributed by an appointed historian from these ministries and each

[2] Note that Alaskan congregations and church members are not included in these statistics, as Alaska was then classified as a mission field rather than a district conference.

[3] *Covenant Memories: Golden Jubilee, Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant, 1885–1935* (Chicago: Covenant Book Concern, 1935). Available digitally through the Frisk Collection of Covenant Literature, https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_swecc/id/19677/rec/6.

offering a distinct piece of Covenant history.

The monumental *Covenant Memories* volume represents the work not only of the twenty-four authors (and laborious work of their editors!) but also the result of broader community efforts to collect the materials necessary to write the compiled accounts as well as later historical projects this made possible. The Middle East Conference, for example, had a four-person committee gathering historical records. In that process, the conference secretary "also compiled brief historical sketches of not less than 23 of our churches from the material furnished by the statistics collected. That document is of great historical value for the conference as well as for the churches and future historians."[4]

In addition to this multiauthor history, anniversary editions were issued by the youth annual *Our Covenant*[5] as well as *Phoebe*, the publication of the Covenant Women's Auxiliary.[6] Congregational anniversary histories proliferated in the decade surrounding the denomination's fiftieth anniversary—with fifty-eight available digitally in the non-exhaustive Covenant Archives collection.[7] A more extensive history of North Park College was also prepared for the school's fiftieth anniversary, which followed soon after in 1941.[8]

President T.W. Anderson framed the historical changes and continuities described in the pages of *Covenant Memories* in his opening essay, "Covenant Principles."[9] Anderson begins by noting the significant changes that had taken place in the half century of the Covenant's history, pointing especially to the shift to English following from the reduced flow of immigration and a new focus on youth. This, he writes, "is inevitable and not necessarily regrettable. Living movements are not static but adapt themselves to new conditions."[10]

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4 E.A. Swenson, "Middle East Conference Report," *Covenant Yearbook*, 1935, 129.

5 *Our Covenant,* 1935, available digitally through the Frisk Collection of *Our Covenant* at https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_ourcov/id/136/rec/1.

6 Coinciding with the twentieth anniversary. Available digitally through the Frisk Collection of *Phoebe*, https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_phoebe/id/535/rec/1.

7 See https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_histcc/search/searchterm/1930s/field/decade/mode/all/conn/and/order/nosort/ad/asc/cosuppress/0.

8 Leland H. Carlson, *A History of North Park College: Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary, 1891–1941* (Chicago, 1941), available through the Frisk Collection of Covenant Literature, https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_swecc/id/2475/rec/1.

9 T.W. Anderson, "Covenant Principles," pp. 7–15 in *Covenant Memories*.

10 Anderson, "Covenant Principles," 7.

But then he points to the Covenant's fundamental principles, which remained unchanged. These he names as "the supremacy of the Bible," "the necessity of spiritual life," "belief in the unity of all true Christians," "the independence of the local church," and "the urgency of the missionary task." In the final section on Covenant home mission, Anderson indicates a shift in Covenant home mission enabled by the collapse of the language barrier, and he celebrates the new mission field this opens to the Covenant, its domestic work no longer limited to Swedish language speakers. He exclaims,

> With the language barriers eliminated, there are open doors on every hand. Free from sectarian bias, believing in the church as a spiritual home for all Christians, the Covenant is particularly qualified for this frontier work. Emphasizing the central truths of the historic Christian faith, as we earnestly desire to do, we are convinced that God has a commission for us at our very doors. The greatest opportunities in the half century of our brief history are challenging us.[11]

In the earlier language debates, many who resisted the transition to English were concerned that the Covenant would lose its purpose if it was no longer a Swedish immigrant denomination serving the Swedish immigrant community. Notice then what Anderson does in leading the Covenant through this critical transition: he grounds the Covenant in its founding identity as a mission organization and celebrates the expanded mission field opened by the Covenant's new capacity to worship, serve, and evangelize in English. Notice too that he frames the particular purpose of the Covenant as a faith community not in its ethnic identity but precisely in terms of its founding "Covenant principles": its nonconfessionalism and believers' church ecclesiology. *This*, he says, is the essential identity of the Covenant that it will take from its past into the next fifty years. The shift from Swedish to English, far from threatening the Covenant instead would open the greatest opportunity the Covenant had yet known.

In his presidential report, T.W. Anderson encouraged every Covenant home to acquire, read, and appreciate the history painstakingly collected in the pages of *Covenant Memories,* which in the foreword he dedicated to the Covenant youth. He said of the volume, "We are not ancestor worshippers, but we do recognize gratefully our debt to the trail blazers of

[11] Anderson, "Covenant Principles," 15.

fifty years. We want to study the past in order that we may better understand the present and, by the grace of God, plan wisely for the future."[12]

In addition to the historical work invested in preparation for the milestone celebration, at this fifty-year anniversary the denomination made deliberate provisions for the collection and care of archival records to enable ongoing historiography as it lost the living memory of the founding generation. The 50th Annual Meeting established a Covenant Historical Commission to collect and steward the historical records of the church through a Covenant archives. Covenanters from across the denomination were requested to send books, letters, meeting minutes, photographs, and other records of historical interest—and these items began to arrive in the hundreds.

The five-person Covenant Historical Commission immediately expanded their team with Gerard Johnson becoming the de facto archivist, cataloging and filing the vast materials received, and with the appointment of a Commission representative within each district conference to collect additional material for the central denominational archive.[13] Each year the Commission thanked those who had donated materials and repeated its appeal for historically valuable documents. "The Commission wishes to repeat its appeal to all Covenanters to save and send to the archives old letters, photographs, diaries, records and memorabilia of Covenant enterprises, pioneers and local churches. Even seemingly insignificant items may be of value in preserving some phase of Covenant history."[14]

As those documents multiplied, the pressing need for space became a refrain in Commission reports. The documents collected were housed both in Old Main on North Park's campus, and at Covenant Offices, eventually converging on campus. At one point all organization of materials halted as the collection was moved off campus due to space constraints.[15] Even when limited in resources, the Commission continued the tedious, foundational work of source collection in preparation for the time an adequate space would be available: "The work which was done by Gerard Johnson some years ago and is now being continued by I.W. Jacobson is all in preparation for the day when adequate facilities

12 T.W. Anderson, President's Report, *Covenant Yearbook*, 1935, 5.

13 E. Gustav Johnson, "The Covenant Historical Commission," *Covenant Yearbook*, 1936, 98.

14 E. Gustav Johnson, "The Covenant Historical Commission," *Covenant Yearbook*, 1941, 109.

15 Edgar E. Swanson, "The Covenant Historical Commission," *Covenant Yearbook*, 1943, 99.

are made available for the caring of these records. In the meantime we shall continue our task of gathering, classifying, indexing, and preserving historical materials best we can."[16] That work continued in faith for fourteen years until the Wallgren Library opened in 1958 and the Covenant Archives gained a dedicated space in Nyvall Hall.

Through the work of an active History Commission and dedicated volunteer archivists, sources were collected, organized, translated, and interpreted through commissioned publications. The Commission and its humble archives supported the research leading to historical publications and generated publications of their own almost immediately, translating works and issuing biographies of key leaders, financed fully through sales.[17]

In commemoration of its fifty-year anniversary, then, the denomination took proactive measures to narrate its history through commissioned, communal history-writing and to ensure its history would continue to be known into the new generation—collecting and preserving historical sources and commissioning a committee to superintend that work. This was a full church effort.

Circling into a Second Century: Covenant Centennial (1985)

The breakdown of the language barrier and resulting potential for an expanded mission field that President T.W. Anderson celebrated in 1935 become a reality over the next half-century. When the Covenant gathered to celebrate its centennial anniversary in 1985, its 584 congregations included growing numbers of African American, Spanish-speaking, and Korean-speaking congregations.. This demographic expansion was in large part the result of intentional church planting and adoption efforts spearheaded by the Department of Church Growth and Evangelism, led by Robert Larson, who had named "ethnic ministries" the "issue of the decade" in the 1980s.

At the beginning of that decade, "ethnic churches" comprised 3.5 percent of total Covenant congregations; by the end of the decade that proportion had more than doubled to 8 percent (numbering thirteen Korean-American congregations, twelve Indigenous, seven African Amer-

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16 Edgar E. Swanson, "The Covenant Historical Commission," *Covenant Yearbook*, 1944, 75.

17 See, for example, *Covenant Yearbook,* 1943, 100 (archives supporting seventy-fifth anniversary history of the congregation in Swede Bend, Iowa); *Covenant Yearbook,* 1941, 109 (archives supporting fiftieth anniversary history of North Park).

ican, seven Latino, and one Vietnamese).[18] As the Covenant anticipated its one hundredth anniversary in 1985, it grappled again with its ethnic history and current identity, actively questioning how to effectively incorporate new ethnic communities, both European and non-European, and what role its own ethnically particular past should have, if any, in an increasingly multiethnic future—the realization of what T.W. Anderson had anticipated five decades earlier.

In 1979 the Covenant Annual Meeting had approved a "Resolution on Diversity," which both "affirm[ed] the ethnic heritage of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America and its early ministry to persons of Swedish descent," and resolved to "make a conscious effort no longer to assume Swedish-American culture to be the norm for the Covenant" in order to ensure hospitality to the increasingly diverse "national and cultural backgrounds" within the denomination.[19] This resolution indicates the desire of that time to acknowledge that the demographic composition of the church had fundamentally shifted such that a shared ethnic past could no longer be assumed. This had implications for how the denomination spoke about itself, the jokes it told, the languages it used.

In 1982 Covenant President Milton B. Engebretson presented to the Council of Superintendents a typology of a Covenanter, modifying an earlier typology offered by North Park President Lloyd Ahlem. Engebretson identified three subsets (or "circles") of Covenanters. First-circle Covenanters identified with the Covenant's Lutheran Pietist roots. They cared about theological education, social justice, and sacramentalism. Second-circle Covenanters aligned more closely with conservative American Evangelicalism, were more Reformed, and committed to biblical inerrancy, evangelism, and church growth. Third-circle Covenanters were relative newcomers who had "no investment in the history or heritage of the Covenant" and found its residual Swedish ethnic quality to be problematically overemphasized.[20]

The 1979 resolution and "circles" typologies show a phenomenological reality that the growing demographic diversity of the Covenant raised

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[18] For a detailed account of the growth of the 1980s and 1990s as well as the outcome of this growth on Covenant theology, polity, and identity, see Hauna Ondrey, "The 1992 LA Crisis as an Accelerant for Change in the Evangelical Covenant Church," in *Sacred Migrations: Borderlands of Community and Faith* (Chicago: Swedish-American Historical Society, 2020). Portions of this section are drawn from that essay.

[19] *Covenant Yearbook*, 1979, 198.

[20] Summarized by Paul E. Larsen in *The Mission of a Covenant* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1985), 16.

critical questions about its ethnically particular past. Anticipating the centennial celebrations, Lloyd Ahlem feared that "third-circle" Covenanters—those who had joined amid the postwar growth—would feel they were simply "invited guests at someone else's birthday celebration."[21] If a growing number of Covenant congregations and members did not share a common history, what was the implication for how the denomination told its own history as it made intentional investments to become more racially and ethnically diverse?

Attention to these questions is evident in the centennial publications commissioned. Karl A. Olsson, professor of English and North Park president (1959–1970), had emerged as the denomination's preeminent historian, having been commissioned in 1955 to write a historical narrative to mark the denomination's seventy-fifth anniversary, a request he acquitted seven years later with the commanding *By One Spirit*.[22] Olsson offered a more accessible history for the ninetieth anniversary, *Family of Faith*,[23] and was tasked with providing a similarly condensed updated account for the centennial, resulting in the two-volume *Into One Body… By the Cross*, the first volume appearing in time for the centennial and the second the following year.[24]

At the same time, the records of the Covenant Centennial Committee reveal a desire to look ahead—and the conviction that Olsson was a figure of the past. The volumes commissioned sought to balance past, present, and future, with attention to the past intentionally muting the denomination's Swedish roots. This is exemplified in the planned "Pictoral [sic] Volume" that never came to fruition: "Although it will be as historically accurate as possible, it will not emphasize 'Swedishness' as much as Covenant. It will therefore include involved ethnic groups, and a heavy section on 'New Roots'—section V of the proposed book, which has yet to be refined."[25] In searching for a suitable author, discussion noted both

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21 Larsen, *Mission of a Covenant*, 126.

22 Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1962).

23 Karl A. Olsson, *A Family of Faith: 90 Years of Covenant History* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1975).

24 Karl A. Olsson, *Into One Body...by the Cross*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1985–1986). Conference histories expanded with Philip J. Anderson's *A Precious Heritage: A Century of Mission in the Northwest, 1884–1984* (Minneapolis: Northwest Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church, 1984), commissioned by the Northwest Conference, as well as Paul A. Day's history of the East Coast Conference, *Unity and Freedom: One Hundred Years of the East Coast Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church: A Brief History, 1890–1990* (The East Coast Conference, 1990).

25 Covenant Centennial Committee, Minutes of September 25, 1980, meeting. CAHL 3/3/A, Box 1, Folder 19.

that "to fail to invite K.O. to participate would be politically unwise" yet found his "literary style" inconsistent with the intention of the volume.[26]

One of the commissioned centennial publications that did come to fruition addressed the role of the Covenant's ethnic roots directly. *The Mission of a Covenant* was written by Paul Larsen, then serving as pastor of Peninsula Covenant Church in Redwood City, California. Larsen argued that the Covenant faced an "identity crisis with a capital 'I,'"[27] exacerbated by its continued attention to ethnic roots amid growing multiethnicity. He warned that "without transcending its own story, the Covenant will disintegrate."[28] Larsen's book pursued that goal of transcendence by narrating Covenant history within a broader biblical pattern and a "theology of interior covenantalism" rather than Swedish immigration.[29] Larsen sought to build a historical account from Engebretson's phenomenological account of Covenant "circles," arguing for the equal claim of first- and second-circle Covenanters (i.e., Lutheran and Reformed roots) within denominational history and argued that the Covenant's "constructive future," including the continued vitality of the third circle, depended upon a fruitful dialectic between the first and second circles, a proposal Larsen focused in his 1985 Nyvall Lecture at North Park Seminary.[30]

In his contribution to Karl A. Olsson's Festschrift, Covenant historian Philip J. Anderson systematically critiqued the implicit and explicit historical claims in Engebretson's descriptions of the first and second circles as well as Larsen's attempt to equalize them historically.[31] Anderson argued that attention to historical sources required distinguishing Lutheran identity from Reformed influence in the self-understanding of early Covenanters. More fundamentally, Anderson challenged such typologies as unhelpfully static and phenomenologically rather than historically derived. Because they presented caricatures rather than accurate depictions of reality, they were ultimately unhelpful for understanding denominational pluralism and productively seeking unity within it. As

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26 N.d. CAHL 3/3/A, Box 1, Folder 19.

27 Larsen, *Mission of a Covenant*, 17.

28 Larsen, *Mission of a Covenant*, 18.

29 See, e.g., p. 127.

30 Published as "The Convergence of Covenantalism and Interiority," *The Covenant Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1986): 13–23.

31 Philip J. Anderson, "The Covenant and the American Challenge: Restoring a Dynamic View of Identity and Pluralism," in *Amicus Dei: Essays on Faith and Friendship: Presented to Karl A. Olsson on His 75th Birthday*, ed. Philip J. Anderson (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1988), 109–47.

an alternative, more dynamic image, Anderson offered David Nyvall's identification of centripetal and centrifugal forces throughout Covenant history, which held in balancing tension the goods of denominational unity and congregational autonomy.[32]

This historiographical debate between Paul E. Larsen and Philip J. Anderson suggests the ways in which Covenant history—especially its ethnically particular history—was contested at this time and the nascent impact on how that history would, or would not, be told. Moving forward from the denomination's centennial, Anderson's critique of Larsen's proposal put a stop to classifying Covenanters according to circles and to re-narrating Covenant history in a way that demoted its particular roots in Lutheran Pietism. At the same time, the sense that the very particularity of those roots was an albatross to the denomination's increasing diversity chilled denominational historiography. Moving forward from the centennial, people stopped talking about circles...and history stopped being attempted on any broad scale.[33]

The centennial celebration program, held in Minneapolis, gestures to this trend.[34] History certainly was not neglected in the program, chaired as the Centennial Committee was by James Hawkinson. A "Centennial Lecture Series" offered biblical, theological, and historical lectures on Covenant identity, the latter given by historians Zenos Hawkinson, Karl Olsson, and Glenn Anderson. The Commission on Covenant History led an oral history workshop, crafted an anniversary exhibit, and formed a new Heritage Society. However, President Engebretson's attention to history in his address is minimal and generic, the focus instead on the future.[35] The keynote address during the "Heritage Service" was delivered by Krister Stendahl, newly appointed bishop of Stockholm in the Church of Sweden, who urged the Covenant that the way forward was to enter its second millennium leaving behind its *Swedish* past and carrying with it its *immigrant* roots.

By and large, the denomination followed Stendahl's advice. Speaking at the 1994 Covenant Midwinter Conference, Paul Larsen, now president of

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32 Anderson, "The Covenant and the American Challenge," 133–38.

33 The revival of *Pietisten* in 1986, *outside* the structures of the denominational office is illustrative of the fact that the early history was largely viewed by leadership as an impediment to forward progress, pushing attention outside denominational structures—further reinforcing caricatures of history as nostalgia.

34 The complete centennial program booklet is available within the 1985 Covenant Yearbook, beginning on p. 82. https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_covyb/id/30901/rec/1.

35 See his full report in *Covenant Yearbook*, 1985, 7–15.

the denomination, told the gathered pastors in a transcribed aside: "One of our problems is we've got to start rethinking ourselves apart from our Scandinavian roots."[36] This conviction expressed from the Midwinter stage was indicative of the denominational trajectory as the Covenant moved into its second century.

Telling Our Story at 150 (2035): "Page Not Found"?

We are only a decade away from the 150th anniversary of the Covenant. What projects will be commissioned and undertaken to narrate the past half-decade of history? What sources will we have to tell that history? The Covenant has changed significantly since 1985, both in the sheer numbers of newly planted and adopted churches as well as in our becoming more fully a multiethnic mosaic community. Our total congregations have grown from 584 in 1985 to 856 in 2024.[37] At the Covenant's 125th anniversary in 2010, the proportion of Covenant congregations classified as "ethnic" or "multiethnic" had jumped from 3.5 percent to 25 percent. According to information provided by Paul Lessard, recent vice president of mission priorities, that proportion currently stands at 36 percent.[38] Strikingly, more than half (51 percent) of all congregations recorded in 2024 were organized after the 1985 centennial, with 38 percent organized after the turn of the twenty-first century.[39]

As it has in the past, these shifts have brought further questions regarding Covenant identity and Covenant historiography—among them the creation of the Fivefold Test in 2004 and its expansion in 2020 to the Sixfold Test, both of which call for a commitment to "purposeful narrative," as discussed above. Unfortunately, however, the call to purposeful narrative has coincided with a convergence of shifts in communication, publications, record keeping, and record preservation that jeopardize our capacity to tell any narrative at all. As I have sought to show, as a denomination our historians have drawn from a deep well of publications, meeting minutes, correspondence, and denominational journalism, all preserved through high standards of archival practice and dedicated archivists—a well that is not being replenished in ways that we must address proactively if we desire to actualize purposeful narratives.

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36 CAHL 9/1/8/1, Box 45, Folder 4.

37 This includes 758 member congregations and 98 non-member congregations. *Covenant Yearbook*, 2023-2024, 354.

38 Email to author, August 26, 2024.

39 *Covenant Yearbook*, 2023-2024.

The primary duty of an archive is to preserve historically significant records indefinitely so they can be accessed indefinitely by researchers to support historical knowledge and interpretation. However, it is prerequisite that records be sent to the archives—the communal action pleaded by the History Commission across its history. Since our centennial in 1985, fewer and fewer records have been transferred to the Covenant Archives and Historical Library. As one example, compare the presidential records currently held in the Covenant Archives, measured in linear feet of shelf space. Even accounting for relative term lengths, noted in parentheses, the trend is clear.

- T.W. Anderson (1933–1958): 60 linear feet
- Clarence Nelson (1958–1966): 26 linear feet
- Milton Engebretson (1967–1985): 33.75 linear feet
- Paul E. Larsen (1986–1997): 41 linear feet
- Glenn R. Palmberg (1997–2008): 11 linear feet
- Gary B. Walter (2008–2018): 1.5 linear feet
- John Wenrich (2018–2022): 0 linear feet

The shift to digital communication and record keeping provides a partial explanation of this trend, alongside shifting practices of administrative staffing. The papers of President Engebretson, for example, include copies of (seemingly!) every letter he received as well as his responses, copied, filed, and delivered to the archives by his assistant, Karen Farmer. His papers include meeting minutes and articles—likewise collected, organized by year, and transferred to the archives by his assistant.

Of course, postal mail was not the primary means of communication for either President Walter or President Wenrich but rather email. However, no presidential emails have been transferred to the archives for preservation. (By contrast, consider that the National Archives and Records Administration accessioned 200 million emails from the Bush Administration!) How many important decisions, conflicts, and deliberations take place within email—or even text message? How will that information be preserved and made accessible for researchers? Without these records, what is lost in our understanding of what led to and resulted from key actions and decisions taken during these decades of significant challenge and change?

Correspondence is only one preservation casualty of the digital shift. Consider websites where information is updated as it changes, simply replacing (i.e., erasing) prior records. If covchurch.org is our primary source of denominational information sharing, for example, what record

will we have of earlier explanations of departments, initiatives, values, identity, and decisions as webpages are updated? In the process of writing this article I looked for the webpage describing the 2004 Fivefold Test, which I had cited in a 2020 essay. Rather than finding this record, I received the ominous message that summarizes the digital dilemma: "Page Not Found." The same is true for conferences and congregations. To what extent does your church rely on its website for information sharing, and how would you access information from five or ten years ago that was shared in this medium? How, fifty years from now, would a historian be able to learn about your present congregation or ministry?

In an age of digital communication and web-based information sharing, we can take for granted the sheer abundance and immediate accessibility of information (and disinformation) around us. However, this can blind us to the true fragility of digital records. The preservation of paper records entails measures such as acid-free storage boxes and temperature-controlled spaces, removing staples, lamination or perhaps digitization if the physical condition is too degraded. The preservation of—and enabling access to—digital records is far more challenging as archivists handle hundreds of file types, triage against media obsolescence, and navigate proprietary restrictions.[40] And these are the challenges for the born-digital records that make it to the archives!

The need to systematically address digital records management and preservation is urgent, but it only provides a partial explanation for our diminished archival collection. Also at root is a concurrent contraction in denominational journalism, publications, and record keeping. Consider the contraction in publication frequency of our primary denominational publication, *The Covenant Companion*—at one time published weekly, the magazine is now printed biannually. Explore the extensive reports and Annual Meeting minutes available in Covenant Yearbooks until the mid-1990s through the Frisk Collection of Covenant Yearbooks,[41] and compare the level of detail in reports and meeting minutes in these volumes to the most recently available yearbook from 2020.[42] Fortunately the decision made to discontinue the yearbook entirely has been reversed! Nevertheless, the resulting gap in public records for 2021 and 2022 points to the critical importance of these denominational records for historical knowledge—and even now these records are not publicly

[40] I.e., data that can only be accessed within a specific software.

[41] https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_covyb.

[42] Available at https://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/376-433_2019-134th20Annual20Meeting.pdf, accessed September 9, 2024.

accessible but password protected, available only to Covenant ministers.

This is not to wax nostalgic for a bygone era but to recognize the concrete, communal actions that, in aggregate, either enable or preclude historiography. If these trends continue, we may have very little for a future Covenant historian to draw upon as they seek to answer critical historical questions of our time.

To offer one example of how these trends converge, in 2019 I wrote an article attempting to reconstruct the Covenant's reception of and response to the Black Manifesto fifty years prior.[43] Through extant records—detailed commission reports and statistical records published in the Covenant Yearbooks; archival collections of meeting minutes, extensive correspondence, articles, and reports; and preserved publications like *The Covenant Companion*[44]—I was able to trace the spread of knowledge of the Manifesto, conference and denominational responses to the Manifesto, resultant Annual Meeting action to create a new "relief fund for Black America,"[45] reactions both negative and positive to this action, and the mixed success and long-term evolution of the fund. This is one very small example of how history writing happens. It was my best attempt to answer questions posed by Covenant history students regarding how the Covenant as a denomination positioned itself within the civil rights movement and black power movement. Certainly, my interpretation could be critiqued or expanded, but it was only possible because sources were available. And they were only available because they were *created* by the denomination and then *sent* to the archives for preservation.

To what extent will a historian in 2100 be able to answer the question, "How did the Covenant respond to the Black Lives Matter movement?" or, "How did the Covenant respond to the legalization of same-sex marriage?" in all the complexity and rich context we who have lived through these decades know these answers to hold? How will they explain the significant movements of church growth—church planting and adoptions—that have indelibly shaped our denomination? What sources might they want to access to reconstruct or ascertain? Perhaps our social media posts that can be deleted? Our web-based articles that even now are difficult to

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43 Hauna Ondrey, "The Covenant Responds to the Black Manifesto (1969)," *The Covenant Quarterly* 77, nos. 2–3 (2019): 4–30, available at https://covquarterly.com/index.php/CQ/article/view/110/113.

44 Including commentary republished with annotations, https://covquarterly.com/index.php/CQ/article/view/111/112.

45 *Covenant Yearbook*, 1969, 157.

find and easily replaced or eliminated? Email correspondence that is not collected or archived? This is especially acute when we remember the vast proportion of Covenant congregations organized after the digital shift.

As we approach our 150th anniversary as a denomination of the Evangelical Covenant Church, we must demonstrate our commitment to purposeful narrative by building the infrastructure of record creation and preservation that will enable it, now and for future generations. On this point I find the words of Wilma Peterson appropriate: "I think we have a great responsibility for how we leave the world for the next generation and the generations to follow."[46] Here are some very basic action steps to this end:

1. **Communal history writing.** In the spirit of *Covenant Memories*, every congregation, regional conference, commission, association, and mission priority should appoint a team committed to narrating your history as a contribution to our collective story. What projects can be done to tell your ministry's story? A short anniversary history? Biographies of key leaders and turning points? An oral history project?[47]

2. **Source collection and preservation.** As this first goal is pursued, the prior work of identifying sources will immediately emerge—and this is an opportunity for a second, perhaps even more important task: collecting and preserving sources. Identify what sources already exist and whether they are being cared for. Are they protected, organized, and accessible? Identify what additional sources are needed and should be collected. Can you build a congregational archive[48]—or send your records to the Covenant Archives and Historical Library for preservation?[49]

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[46] North Park University, "Wilma Peterson Interview," https://youtu.be/8BakcYFr5X0 (2:11 to end).

[47] See the guide produced by the Covenant History Commission, "A Guide to Collecting Oral History for Local Covenant Churches," available at https://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Oral-History-booklet-for-web.pdf, as well as the digital oral history collection of the Covenant Archives and Historical Library, https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/npu_oracol.

[48] See the guide produced by the Covenant History Commission, "A Guide to Archives for Local Covenant Churches," available at https://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Local-archives-booklet-for-web.pdf.

[49] Information on transferring records to the Covenant Archives is available at https://www.northpark.edu/archives/donate/.

3. **Records management policy.** It is a matter of urgency that denominational leaders support the creation and execution of a records management policy that specifies what types of records are preserved and on what schedule they are transferred to the archives for preservation. Of special urgency is a policy for digital records preservation, including email, web content, and social media. This requires financial support for our archives and archivist to develop these guides and access the enormous volume of material it would rightly generate.

4. **Recommitment to robust record keeping and publications.** The fullness of future historical knowledge depends on our current commitment to robust, transparent record-keeping (e.g., detailed annual reports and meeting minutes that are publicly available) as well as commissioned publications, including magazines and books. Can we reinvigorate Covenant Publications?

Now is the time to commence this work so that when we come to the 150th anniversary of the Covenant we can celebrate the full mosaic of our body.

As we anticipate the coming anniversary, we need "histories," yes. But even more urgently, we need to shore up the much broader network of source creation and preservation that supports the writing of history. This is essential if historiography is to remain a possibility for the next generation of Covenanters: that the decisions, actions, and responses to internal and external challenges and opportunities that we are making *now* are available to the next generation. This is a responsibility we bear together, and only together can we adequately acquit it. While one person may write history,[50] source creation and preservation are communal commitments.

The real evidence that a community is committed to purposeful narrative is not the assertion of that commitment—nor even critiques of past or possible histories—but the corollary commitment to active creation and preservation of sources. Without sources there is no narrative. This is a practical problem, but it is also a spiritual one. Cicero wrote that "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain

[50] And thank God when one does! The critique should not be that someone attempted to write history but that more did not.

forever a child."[51] Every child believes the world began with them, and every parent knows this to be false. If we do not attend to our history as a denomination—if we come to questions of identity as though we are the first to be asking them—we replicate this childish myopia that is so prevalent, even championed, in our time. We need historical understanding to inoculate us from the myth that what is new to us is new per se, from the poor stewardship that reinvents wheels rather than wisely stewarding the past toward the future.

Conclusion

We are indebted to the hundreds of Covenant history keepers—historians lay and professional, archivists, and translators—whose careful, faithful work has enabled the rich historical record we steward. And we bear the responsibility to those who follow us to ensure they will be able to understand, critique, and learn from the decisions we are making right now that are shaping the church they will inherit from us. Whether the next generation will be able to tell a purposeful narrative depends on our creation and preservation of sources today.

In his 1935 presidential report, T.W. Anderson wrote, "To attempt to review the history of the five decades that have passed since the inception of the Covenant in February 1885, would be superfluous. In our Jubilee volume, *Covenant Memories*, the challenging perspective is given. This book should find its way into every Covenant home to be read and appreciated."[52] May our Covenant president in 2035 be able to likewise say that a review of the five decades since 1985 would be superfluous considering the work we have done together as Covenant history keepers!

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[51] Cicero, *Orator* 120, in *Brutus. Orator*, trans. George Lincoln Hendrickson and Harry Mortimer Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library 342 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 395.

[52] T.W. Anderson, "The President's Report," *Covenant Yearbook*, 1935, 5.

Racial Discourse, Social Engagement, and Misalignment: Assessing the Impact of Multiracial Churches

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In 1969 then Evangelical Covenant Church President Milton B. Engebretson wrote an appeal to Covenant churches urging them "to give generously" toward "relief funds for black [sic] America."[1] As my brilliant colleague Hauna Ondrey shows in her paper "The Covenant Responds to the Black Manifesto (1969)," the Black Manifesto, or perhaps more precisely the intentions behind it, was recognized by the Covenant on the whole as important and worthy of attention, even if many did not agree with it in its entirety.[2] The establishment of relief funds bears witness to this. Speaking of the significance of the fund and what giving to it would represent, Engebretson wrote:

> This...could be the movement that would force open the gate to peace and understanding which is currently blocked by hatred, racism, and mistrust....We hold the key, in our small way, to share what we have been given, to demonstrate the love of Christ and to help improve the chances for peaceful, orderly development of the world, rather than for increased anger, rage, and violence. See that you excel in this hour of crisis.[3]

In researching Engebretson's life and work, I have been struck not only

[1] Hauna Ondrey, "The Covenant Responds to the Black Manifesto (1969)," *Covenant Quarterly* 77, nos. 2–3 (2019): 3–30.
[2] Ondrey, "The Covenant Responds," 3–30
[3] Ondrey, "The Covenant Responds," 17.

by his passion for evangelism but also by the way he seemingly understood that justice and evangelism do not represent an either-or paradigm; rather, the two go hand in hand. I resonate deeply with this. In my work I am particularly interested in multiracial churches, believing steadfastly in their potential to be a powerful witness to God's reconciling work in the world and to be sites where racial justice and healing can happen. My research interests are deeply personal and grow out of my desire that all may know Christ and experience his promise of abundant life. I am delighted to be able to share my work with you in this installation lecture.

Today I am going to share some of the findings from my most recent study. At the outset, let me say this work centers on Protestant multiracial churches. Much of the research on such churches, especially the earlier work, has focused on three things: 1) describing them, 2) exploring how such churches sustain their racial diversity, and 3) understanding the racial attitudes of people who attend multiracial churches. In the first category, the work of Michael Emerson and Karen Kim[4] is a good example. Their work produced the 80:20 ratio that has come to be the baseline definition for characterizing a church as multiracial. Sustaining racial diversity is featured in the work of Gerardo Marti,[5] as well as Korie Edwards,[6] and more recently, Jessica Barron and Rhys Williams.[7] Understanding peoples' racial attitudes finds good exposition in the works of George Yancey[8] and Yancey and Emerson.[9]

Recent scholarship has turned a more critical eye toward the impact of these churches on the racial status quo. The work of Jemar Tisby[10] is a good example, and this is where my work is situated. Having been involved with many different multiracial churches over the past twenty

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4 Michael O. Emerson and Karen Chai Kim, "Multiracial Congregations: An Analysis of Their Development and a Typology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 (2003): 217–27.

5 Gerardo Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).

6 Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

7 M. Jessica Barron and Rhys H. Williams, *The Urban Church Imagined: Religion, Race, and Authenticity in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

8 George Yancy, ed., "Introduction: Fragments of a Social Ontology of Whiteness," in *What White Looks Like: African American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1–23.

9 George Yancy and Michael O. Emerson, "Integrated Sundays: An Exploratory Study into the Formation of Multiracial Churches," *Sociological Forces* 36, no. 2 (May 2003): 111–26.

10 Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2019).

years and helping to plant two of them, I have come to understand that these churches are not monolithic in how they treat race. Thus, it is reasonable to suspect that the impact they are having is also varied.

With this in mind, I came to this project with two research questions. First, how does a church's racial discourse shape its social engagement? Said another way, what is the relationship between the way a church represents race through talk, text, and imagery, and how does that church engage with the larger community in which it is situated? My second research question grew out of my understanding that churches can have a direct impact on their communities through their social engagement, but they can also have an indirect impact by influencing congregants who then directly engage with their communities. Drawing on the work of Gregory Stanczak, I am defining this indirect impact as what Stanczak names "engaged spirituality."[11]

Stanczak defines engaged spirituality as a spirituality that both motivates and sustains a person's social activism. My summary of his argument of the four ways one's spirituality can become engaged is: 1) as an inheritance from parents and family, 2) by learning about engagement, 3) by a social encounter with injustice, or 4) through a spiritual epiphany.[12] My second research question was: How effective are multiracial churches at sparking engaged spirituality?

I will highlight two notable examples of engaged spirituality that I saw in the field. The first was the confirmation service for five high schoolers at one of the churches that participated in my study. During the service, these young people made faith confessions before their community and shared written statements about what their faith meant to them. These were personal statements, and the students were given freedom in what they chose to write about. And yet, to a person, each student connected their faith concretely to a justice-related issue. And, to a person, each named their church as having been hugely instrumental in helping them make that connection.

Another example came from a Black man I spoke to from another participating church, whom I call Michael. He told me that he had "not really been the marching type" prior to coming to the church. He shared that it wasn't that he was against marching and other types of demonstrations; he just had never thought anything was important enough for him to participate in such an action. What changed him was, in his words,

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11 Gregory C. Stanczak, *Engaged Spirituality: Social Change and American Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

12 Stanczak, *Engaged Spirituality*, 15-20.

"hearing a white woman share one Sunday about the protests she had been participating in." This woman had two young children, and she had been bringing them with her to the marches. Michael shared with me that hearing her conviction and passion sparked something in him and forced him to rethink his position on marching.

To answer my research questions, I did a qualitative analysis of four multiracial congregations located in Chicago, Illinois. The four churches that graciously participated in my study were: Revival City Church, led by Pastor James, located just outside the West Loop; Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, led by Pastor Nathan on the Southside of Chicago; Key Church, co-led by Pastor Jenny (lead pastor) and Pastor Freedom Warrior (executive pastor) located in the Near North neighborhood; and, lastly, Circle Church, co-led by husband and wife duo Renee and Richard in the West Loop. Revival City and Circle Church both identify as nondenominational churches, Cornerstone is a mainline church, and Key Church identifies as multi-denominational.[13]

Between October 2020 and May 2021, I conducted forty semi-structured, in-depth interviews, and more than twenty informal interviews with congregants. In addition, I spent a total of eighty-six hours in the field as a participant observer. During my time in the field, I spent at least one month at each church, attending all Sunday services and special services. I attended staff meetings when permitted and participated in other ministries when possible. There were months of overlap; for example, during the month of December I attended the Christmas services of all four churches, though I was officially at Cornerstone that month and had not officially started observing Revival City.

Included among the interviewees were the lead pastors, associate pastors, and executive pastors of each church, excepting Circle Church, whose lead pastors were on sabbatical during the period of data collection. The congregants I interviewed were either referred to me by their pastors or were people I connected with through volunteering at the church or attending service.

I focused my attention on interviewing members or regular attendees who actively participated in church-sponsored outreach or in ministries directly related to justice. The questions I asked centered on how they understood their service: whether or not they connected their service in the church to justice (social engagement), and what role, if any, they

[13] All names in this lecture, including the names of churches, are pseudonyms. In the case of individual participants, each person I interviewed chose their pseudonym.

saw their church playing in helping to nurture or sustain their social engagement. Lastly, I did a historical analysis of each of the churches in my sample. Both Key Church and Cornerstone Presbyterian have long and rich histories in their respective communities.

All four churches easily met the 80:20 threshold to be considered multiracial. However, in selecting churches for this study I also paid attention to what I have called "presence." In practice, most pastors do not know the exact racial demographics of their congregations unless those congregations are fairly mono-racial. This is true of my own church, and it bore out in my study. With the exception of Circle Church, which had recently had a professional group come in and do a survey of their congregation, none of the pastors I interviewed could give me precise breakdowns of the races of their members and attendees. Even in the case of Circle Church, though their estimates were more accurate, they were still estimates.

That said, the strength of the 80:20 ratio is that it points to the importance of that 20 percent threshold. Once a group of people makes up 20 percent of a population, be that in a neighborhood or a church, their presence begins to be felt. In my selection criteria, I paid attention to whether the presence of the ethnic and racial minorities in each church was felt. I took note of who the stakeholders were, defining stakeholders as those within the church who do not have any formal title and may not serve in a formal ministry, but who demonstrate ownership. This can often be seen in how they welcome newcomers or in the connections that they have with the various ministries of the church. These are the people who have the pastor's or the leadership team chair's ear.

A great example of this happened during my first visit to Revival City. Standing in the lobby before service was a table with a book by Tony Evans (a widely recognized African American pastor of a large congregation) about race and racial reconciliation that was labeled "Book of the Month." The table was unstaffed when I arrived. Captured by the title of the book, I stood at the table for a bit reading the inside cover and was soon approached by Dave, who greeted me and commented on the book I was holding. I assumed he was a greeter, so I asked him how to purchase the book. I soon found out that Dave was not a greeter, nor did he serve on any ministry team. He was simply a congregant who had arrived early for church. Dave didn't know the answer to my question, but he knew who would and where to find that person at that time. He graciously walked me through the lobby to a side corridor and introduced me to Ann, who was on staff and was able to assist me.

This interaction showed me that Dave was a stakeholder. He had organizational knowledge, and he felt a sense of ownership in this church. At that moment, though not serving in any official capacity, he became a representative for the organization and took it upon himself to do his best to make me feel welcome.

NAME OF CHURCH	LEADERSHIP	LOCATION	SIZE	RACIAL COMPOSITION (in order of most to least)	APPROXIMATE MEDIAN AGE OF CONGREGANTS
REVIVAL CITY	Pastor James (Black)	Outside West Loop (Chicago)	Midsize (120–200)	Black, Latine, white, Asian	27
CORNERSTONE PRESBYTERIAN	Pastor Nathan (white)	Southside (Chicago)	Small (70–120)	Black, white (almost even), Asian	50
KEY CHURCH	Lead Pastor Laura (white), Executive Pastor Freedom Warrior (Black)	Gold Coast (Chicago)	Midsize (120–200)	White, Asian, Black, Latine	50
CIRCLE CHURCH	Pastor Renee (white), Pastor Richard (white)	West Loop (Chicago)	Large (200+)	White, Black, Latine, Asian	30

As you can see in the table within my small sample, there is diversity with regard to denominational affiliation, congregational size, racial compositions, and the median ages of each church's congregants. So, while the sample is too small to allow me to make broad generalizations, the consistency of my key finding across all four churches, despite this diversity, points to its significance.

As stated previously, one underlying assumption I had in designing this study was that multiracial churches are not monolithic in their impact. With that in mind, I created a framework to help me better analyze what I expected to see. Here I drew on scholarship from the fields of social discourse and whiteness studies and identified racial discourse as an important variable for my study. I also drew on the work of Fred Kniss and Paul Numrich where they introduce the concept of moral projects.

Moral projects are directly related to how the congregation understands its role in the larger world. Moral projects can be collectivist or individualistic. The individualistic orientation emphasizes individual moral goods (e.g., personal piety, enlightenment, etc.). Conversely, the primary focus of the collectivist moral project is collectivist social goods, as understood by the congregation. Importantly, these are not mutually

exclusive.[14] I think a healthy church will attend to both collectivist and individualistic moral projects, though most churches tend to emphasize one over the other.

Racial discourse is the whole of how people communicate around race (through text and speech). More precisely, racial discourse represents the "negotiated meanings [that] provide a context for thought and action."[15] Scholars in the field of discourse and whiteness studies such as Ashley Doane argue that racial discourse is not passive. In other words, it is not simply a reflection of the larger social context; rather, it actively shapes the meanings people assign to racial difference and, by extension, their actions toward racial others.[16]

My study broadened discourse to include not only talk and text but also the aesthetic of the church. I paid attention, for example, to the art that was displayed and other ways leaders intentionally shaped the feel of both the physical (or virtual) space and the services. All these factors were important signals of what each church stood for and who each church understood itself to be.

In this framework, racial discourse can be either transcendent or oriented toward justice. Transcendent racial discourse centers the end of the story. It emphasizes our oneness in Christ with little to no acknowledgment of the sinful barriers to that oneness. Multiracial churches oriented toward racial transcendence tend to minimize or ignore racial injustice. They may talk about race but only as it relates to creating or celebrating a diverse worship experience. Conversely, justice-oriented racial discourse is in line with a structural orientation toward race. This discourse emphasizes unmasking and dismantling racist systems as a way of living out our oneness in Christ.

I argue that these two variables (moral projects and racial discourse) intersect to produce not only different types of social engagement but also different rationales for that engagement. In my analytic framework the intersection of these variables creates four distinct quadrants. The top two quadrants (Collectivist/Transcendent and Collectivist/Justice) represent churches that have a collectivist moral project but whose racial discourses emphasizes transcendence (quadrant 1) or racial justice (quadrant 2). The bottom two quadrants (Individualistic/Justice and Individualistic/

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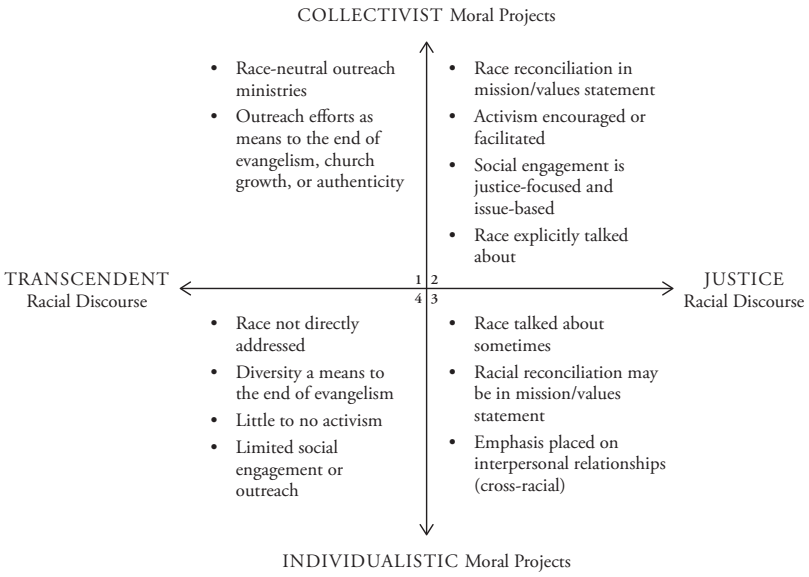
14 Fred Kniss and Paul Numrich, *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

15 Ashley W. Doane, "What Is Racism? Racial Discourse and Racial Politics," *Critical Sociology* 32, nos. 2–3 (2006): 255–74.

16 Doane, "What Is Racism?" 255–74.

Transcendent) represent churches whose moral projects are more individualistic and whose racial discourses emphasize racial justice (quadrant 3) or transcendence (quadrant 4).



The type of social engagement and the rationale for that engagement will differ across these four quadrants. So, for example, think about two multiracial churches that both tend toward collectivist moral projects but have different racial discourses, one that emphasizes transcendence (quadrant 1) and the other justice (quadrant 2). In a church with a transcendent racial discourse, social engagement will primarily be aimed at creating opportunities to directly share the gospel. Conversely, the church whose racial discourse is one of justice will be more likely to engage in social action aimed at directly addressing issues related to injustice.

Notably, the distinction here is not whether or not a multiracial church is interested in social justice or evangelism; these are not mutually exclusive aims. All of the churches in my study were deeply committed to evangelism. What is at issue is how a church interprets what it means to "go and make disciples" (Matt 8:28). For churches that emphasize racial transcendence, being able to invite people into a body that is ostensibly free from racial division is viewed as the best way to accomplish this. On the other hand, churches that emphasize racial justice understand Jesus's command as a call to address systemic issues that cement those divisions.

I found that in all four churches, there was a relationship between their racial discourses and the form their social engagement took. I was pleasantly surprised to see that all four churches engaged in actual (vs. aspirational) representation on their websites. By this, I mean none of the churches used bodies of color in their digital material to signal a level of diversity that was not present in the congregation.

The racial discourse in each of the four churches was one that I have called a discourse of inclusion. This is a justice-leaning racial discourse that demonstrates through talk, text, imagery, and aesthetic genuine concern for the lived experiences of people of color within the church and a willingness to be challenged by those experiences. In each church, the shape of their particular discourse of inclusion was reflected in their social engagement.

Cornerstone Presbyterian is a great example. Pastor Nathan used art in intentional ways as a means of reflecting to the congregation who they were. In his response to my question about why he uses art in this way, he said that he was:

> Sort of running with this vague intention that the aesthetic of the service should reflect the aesthetic of the congregation. So, if sixty percent of the congregation is Black then sixty percent of the hymns and art we encounter in our services should come from Black traditions. And if I think thirty percent of our congregation are first-generation African immigrants, then we should have some African hymns and African art. And we also have European immigrants and some white people in our congregation. So, I…am trying to vaguely reflect those properties.[17]

This theme of reflecting back was evident in the church's approach to outreach, and more specifically, how they chose what kind of outreach to engage in. While the church's outreach ministries were greatly reduced from former years, more than any of the other three churches the ministries they were involved in were closely tied to the expressed needs of the community.

Furthermore, those ministries were in service *with* the community and not just *to* the community. For example, one of their largest initiatives was led by a church committee, composed mostly of community members who did not attend the church. Speaking of this Pastor Nathan said:

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17 Pastor Nathan of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church.

> It's important to me that there's a reciprocal exchange of gifts with the community so the church isn't saying, "This is something this community needs, let us give it to you," but rather opening up and saying, "Who here has gifts and wants space to expand them and use them?" So, it's…people in the community giving back to the community what they have to offer.[18]

In all four churches, I saw a clear relationship between their racial discourse and social engagement. However, while their racial discourse did impact the form that their social engagement took, there was not a clear relationship to congregants' rationales for understanding that engagement.

This brings me to my most important finding and here I invite you to turn your attention to the graphic. Going into the field, I expected that a church's outreach efforts would largely occupy one of the four quadrants in my analytic framework. In other words, I thought that a shared racial discourse would intersect with a shared moral project to produce a particular type of social engagement and a shared rationale for that engagement. Further, I thought, based on having visited each church once or twice before selecting them for the study, that they would all fall within the second quadrant of the framework, which is the Collectivist/Justice quadrant; these are churches that have a collectivist moral project and a racial discourse that leans toward racial justice. However, this was not always the case.

What I found was a much more complicated picture. In all four churches, I found some level of misalignment between church leaders and congregants. For example, Key Church's weekly food distribution program, Christ's Table, was, from the perspective of the church leaders, a product of a justice-leaning racial discourse intersecting with collectivist moral projects. It was started because the lead pastor noticed an increase in the homeless population. She saw this as a social injustice and wanted to address two components of the problem: food insecurity and the dehumanizing stigma of homelessness. However, very few of the congregants I talked to named addressing a social injustice as a motivating factor for their service. Several people who served with their children talked about the importance of teaching them about service. Others spoke of serving out of gratitude for what they have. But few talked about food insecurity or the growing homeless population. The one exception was Christine,

[18] Pastor Nathan of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church.

who was a long-time member of Key Church and who had been present when the ministry started. She had the institutional memory that allowed her to connect Christ's Table to its origin story. She also had been raised by socially engaged parents and had inherited an engaged spirituality from them.

This misalignment between pastors and congregants meant that if one were to categorize each church based solely on sermons and conversations with leadership, one would say that all four were collectivist/justice churches. But if one were to attempt to categorize these churches based on conversations with congregants, where the church landed would depend upon who you talked to.

In multiple interviews across all four churches, congregants told me that the reason they served in the various outreach ministries of their church was to share their faith with people. And what they loved about their church was that those kinds of opportunities were provided, and this was true across racial lines.

Comparatively, Revival City's commitment to "seeking the welfare of the city," which is itself a commitment to justice based on their framing, came up in some way at every service I observed and in almost every archived service I was able to listen to. One key place it came up was in their mission statement, which they regularly referenced during services. Thus, it was unsurprising that in my interviews with congregants many named loving their neighbors as a motivation for their service in the church and that they associated love of neighbor with a justice-oriented evangelism.

This brings me to the second distinctive between Revival City and the other churches in the study framing. In addition to consistently reminding the larger church of their mission to "[seek] the welfare of the city," the pastoral staff of Revival City also regularly clarified what they mean by this. Seeking the welfare of the city was regularly named as how the church actively loves its neighbors and witnesses to Christ, and that was further clarified as being involving the pursuit of justice.

In closing, I want to touch on why my study is important. First, the focus of much of the research on multiracial congregations has been on internal factors that contribute to churches becoming or sustaining their racial diversity, or on analyzing the changing landscape of multiracial congregations in the field of congregations overall. One important contribution of my research is that it adds to the growing body of work that is exploring the success these churches are (or are not) having in challenging the racial status quo.

Secondly, another important contribution of my study is that it offers a way of analyzing multiracial congregations that centers not on what they are but on what they do. Multiracial congregations are not a monolith. These churches vary in how they understand and engage race and other issues of justice. The analytic framework I have created provides a way of analyzing and categorizing these churches based both on how they engage with these issues and how they engage their communities.

Finally, as a pastor/scholar, I feel a dual commitment to both the academy and to the church, and specifically to these types of churches. While my analytic framework may be most useful in furthering scholarship, my work also speaks to the issue of how the attitudes and commitments of people who attend multiracial churches are being formed or, more to the point, not being formed. It highlights an important gap between what leaders of these churches desire to do and what is actually happening with regard to formation. Current research suggests that multiracial congregations may not go as far as many of us hoped in deconstructing racial stereotypes or challenging the types of racial attitudes that undergird the racial status quo.

My research suggests that this may be because these churches are not adequately inculcating in congregants the values held by those in leadership around race and justice. In this way, my work makes an important contribution to those of us who are doing this work and may serve to help us be more effective in those efforts.

Be Loud and Brace for Impact: Anti-Asian Violence, the Model Minority Myth, and the Martyrs of Revelation 7:9–14

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The title of this address, "Be Loud and Brace for Impact," is a prophetic call for Asian Americans *not* to forget our own activist history and acts as a warning to all God's people that a public witness against injustice invites retaliation.[1] When the preacher speaks loudly against injustice and exposes institutions publicly for their idolatrous practices, these fallen institutions (or what the Bible calls the "principalities and powers"; Col 2:13–15) will fight back. They will attempt to silence the prophetic challenge with intimidation and even violence. The antagonism of the powers should not, however, keep us from seeking God's kingdom first and God's righteousness for all humanity (Matt 6:33).

In Revelation 7:9–14, John, the seer and pastor of the seven churches in Asia Minor, beholds a vision of God's people from every generation, nation, tribe, and language who proclaim the whole gospel of Jesus Christ and suffer for their faithful witness. I will be reading and interpreting this biblical text from the social location and history of Asian Americans in the United States and focus on more recent events of anti-Asian violence since 2020 (in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic).

[1] This article is a modified transcript of the plenary address given by the author on the occasion of his installation as the Paul W. Brandel Chair of Biblical Studies at North Park Theological Seminary on February 16, 2024. It will be revised and expanded as a chapter in his upcoming, co-authored book on intercultural readings of the Bible with Dennis Edwards and Sophia Magallanes-Tsang (Baker Academic Press; forthcoming 2025).

Following the hermeneutical principles outlined in my article "Reading the Bible Interculturally,"[2] I begin my interpretation of Scripture using the traditional tools of exegesis and so locate the biblical text within its own ancient historical context. It is important, despite the challenge of historical reconstruction, to interpret Scripture within the sociopolitical and cultural location of the original author and readers, that is, to understand what the text meant to the first recipients of a given canonical letter, gospel, or—as in the case for this address—the visions of John in Revelation. But I also ask questions from my own current social location even in the very process of the exegetical enterprise. I ask: "What challenges and exhortations can be drawn from Scripture that speak directly to my personal identity and ethnic history as an Asian American Christian living out my faith in the United States?" Moreover, I think theologically with all of God's people so that any message I hear in my context is recognized as God's word to the whole body of Christ and not just to a specific cultural or ethnic group.

So, an intercultural reading of the Bible is always a conversation between the text and reader. I—as a biblical interpreter who practices historical criticism—seek to create a healthy hermeneutical distance between myself and the ancient text so that text can speak back to me as other. I recognize and respect the text's own voice. The text is living, not dead. Through the agency and inspiration of the Holy Spirit the Bible can generate new meanings for us today and address situations not anticipated by the ancient author and reader. Yet such new meanings ideally follow the grain (and theological trajectory) of the text, never flowing against the grain. I read the Bible with my communities of faith in all their cultural particularity and recognize every call to the "obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:25–26) in the "now" addresses the cultural location of these communities directly but also to the whole church of God.

Exegetical Observations on Revelation 7:9–14

I translate directly from the Greek text of Revelation 7:9–14 as follows:

> After these things, I [John] looked, and there was a great multitude (*ochlos polys*) which no one could count, from every nation (*ethnos*), tribe, people, and language. They stand before

[2] For a more detailed description of the method for intercultural biblical interpretation, see Max J. Lee, "Reading the Bible Interculturally: An Invitation to the Evangelical Covenant Church and Evangelical Christianity," *The Covenant Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2015): 4–14.

the throne and before the Lamb, having been clothed with white robes, and there were palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, saying: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

And all the angels stood in a circle around the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures. Before the throne, they fell down on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

And one of the elders addressed me, saying: "These who are clothed in white robes (*stolas*)—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "My lord, you know."

And he said, "These are the ones who—having come out of the great suffering (*ek tēs thlipseōs tēs megalēs*)—have washed their robes (*stolas*) and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."[3]

Two quick exegetical observations should be noted before applying the text to the history of anti-Asian violence in North America. First, the "great multitude" (*ochlos polys*; v. 9) is a gathering of God's resurrected people. Justo González notes that at the resurrection, believers can still distinguish each other by their ethnicity, tribe, and language.[4] The word for "nation" (v. 9) is *ethnos* in Greek and does indeed refer to the ethnicity, geography, customs, culture, and religion of a people group in the ancient world.[5] So culture as a corporate expression of human beings made in God's image is retained at the resurrection. Our ethnic identity

[3] All English translations from the Bible are my own unless otherwise noted.

[4] Justo L. González, "Revelation: Clarity and Ambivalence: A Hispanic/Cuban American Perspective," in *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. David Rhoads (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 59–60 [47–61].

[5] See Steve Mason, "Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 457–512, especially his definition of *ethnos* on p. 484 that: "Each *ethnos* had its distinctive nature or character (*physis, ēthos*), expressed in unique ancestral traditions (*ta patria*), which typically reflected a shared (if fictive) ancestry (*syngeneia*); each had its charter stories (*mythoi*), customs, norms, conventions, mores, laws (*nomoi, ethē, nomima*), and political arrangements or constitution (*politeia*)." Mason's definition should also include religion as a major component to ethnic identity in the ancient Mediterranean world, as rightly pointed out by Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race*, The Library of New Testament Studies (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 97–105; and David G. Horrell, *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 47–65.

is not erased but preserved. So, although culture, like all things human, is tainted by sin, nevertheless God does not destroy what is human but removes sin's presence from it and transforms humanity. Sin gets expunged, but what remains is what was created as good (Gen 1:27). There is a continuity between the old and the new creation (Rev 21:4–5; cf. 2 Cor 5:17). Believers may not know in this present earthly life what resurrection will look like, but whatever composition our resurrected bodies might have, we will still be able to distinguish each other by ethnicity, tribe, and tongue.[6]

My second observation focuses on the basis of the unity for the great multitude, that is, their faithful witness to the Lamb despite persecution and suffering (v. 14).[7] God's call to testify and preach the gospel of Jesus means that our obedience will take us into dark spaces dominated by evil that will resist our work. Suffering (in Greek *thlipsis*, also translated as "tribulation," "affliction," or "trial"), even "great (*megalē*) suffering," is an intrinsic and unavoidable experience as we pursue God's calling in our lives.

It is unfortunate that many churches today often use the Revelation 7 passage as a kind of tokenism which celebrates the diverse or multicultural composition of God's people without understanding what the vision celebrates as the basis for their unity. It is our fidelity to the Lamb and our willingness to suffer for Christ that makes the church one body, baptized with one baptism, and servants of one Lord (1 Cor 8:5–6; Eph 4:4–5). We seek God's kingdom first and his righteousness, including God's justice for the world (Matt 6:33). As a corollary to our faithfulness to God's whole mission, we will be hammered by a broken, fallen world that wants us to recant our obedience to Christ. Even family, friends, and neighbors might misunderstand—and even attempt to hinder—our work (e.g., Mark 3:31–35). Nevertheless, we are called not only to endure suffering but not to let it misshape us, so that we emerge through the fires of affliction as blameless, washed in the blood of Christ and wearing white robes. The image of being clothed or wrapped with priestly robes (*stolai*) symbolizes our roles as a priesthood of believers (cf. 1 Pet 2:9) to mediate a message of peace to our neighbors and even our enemies.[8]

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6 See also the comments by Brian Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 149–51.

7 Blount, *Revelation*, 154–55.

8 Greg Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 434–37.

Reading Revelation 7:9–14 Interculturally in Asian American Contexts

Suffering is not foreign to the experience and history of Asian Americans living in the United States. Before interpreting Revelation 7 interculturally in a way that the text speaks to and from this history, I pause to give a brief description of what the designation "Asian American" means.

What is an "Asian American"? Most Asian Americans do not identify themselves as "Asian Americans." We identify ourselves by ethnic lineage, that is, as Korean Americans, Chinese Americans, or Filipino Americans. We usually refer to our ethnicity as an identity marker. The term "Asian American" originated in 1968 at Berkeley as part of a wider ethnic studies movement in the University of California educational system. It is a geopolitical term that acknowledges and describes how among East Asians, South Asians, Southeast Asians, and Pacific Islanders (collectively known as AAPI) who immigrated to the United States, though their histories and experiences are diverse, they nevertheless share a common struggle with the racial bias and prejudice lodged against them from a dominant, centrist European American culture.[9] No one of these ethnic groups with roots in Asia is large or influential enough to fend off marginalization on its own agency. Collaborative measures among Asian Americans of diverse ethnic descent are needed for social and political engagement. "Asian Americans" are a very broad collective who demonstrate solidarity in political, social, cultural, and economic concerns.[10]

I am a Korean American born in San Francisco, raised in California, yet I also self-identify as Asian American in solidarity with other Asian ethnic groups. I have experienced bias, prejudice, suffering, and threats of violence since childhood up until today. Anti-Asian bias and violence is a very real experience for many Asian Americans growing up in the States, regardless of their specific ethnic descent. According to the Pew Research Center, more than twenty-two million Asian Americans are liv-

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[9] From henceforth, the acronym AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) will be used to describe all Asians living in North America. Where a particular region or ethnicity is highlighted, such groups will be identified by their ethnic descent, e.g., Korean American, Filipino American, and so on.

[10] For a more complex description of "Asian American" as a sociopolitical as well as cultural designation, see Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), xi–xv; Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 1–11; Tamara C. Ho, "The Complex Heterogeneity of Asian American Identity," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*, eds. Uriah Kim and Seung Ai Yang (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 18–26.

ing in the United States, about 7 percent of the nation's population and growing since 2021. The largest group are East Asians, about 8.6 million people. The second largest group is South Asians, about four million.[11]

So Asian Americans are not a monolithic group. Jordan Ryan at Wheaton College has made an important point that the model minority myth, for example, tends to affect East Asians—that is, Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and Japanese Americans—but is generally not embraced by Southeast Asians (e.g., Vietnamese, Filipino, Indonesian, Burmese, Hmong, among others) who, upon immigrating to the States, tend to take jobs in the service industries. Many Southeast Asians live at poverty level and struggle to ascend in the American educational system. They do not subscribe to the model minority myth. This myth has actually been weaponized against them and has primarily been embraced as an East Asian experience.[12]

The False and Divisive Narrative of the Model Minority Myth

To introduce what the model minority myth is,[13] I encourage the reader to watch Canwen Xu's full TEDx Talk on YouTube (link in the notes). She shares her personal experience of growing up as an Asian American in predominantly white Midwest circles. She names stereotypes that are hard for Asian Americans to shake off. Here is a partial excerpt:

> My name is Canwen, and I play both the piano and the violin. I aspire to someday be a doctor, and my favorite subject is calculus. My mom and dad are tiger parents, who won't let me go to sleepovers, but they make up for it by serving my favorite meal every single day: rice. And I'm a really bad driver. So, my question for you now is, "How long did it take you to figure out I was joking?"
>
> As you can probably guess, today I am going to talk about race. I moved to the United States when I was two years old, so my entire life has been a blend of two cultures. I eat pasta

[11] Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, "Key Facts about Asian Origin Groups in the U.S.," Pew Research Center, April 29, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-origin-groups-in-the-u-s/.

[12] Jordan Ryan, "No Model Minority, Part 1: Invisible Asian Americans in the Midst of a Season of Apocalypse," Asian American Christian Collaborative, January 5, 2020, https://www.asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/article/no-model-minority-invisible-asian-americans-apocalypse.

[13] On the origins of the model minority myth, see Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 474–91.

with chopsticks. I'm addicted to orange chicken, and my hero is Yao Ming. But having grown up in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Idaho, all states with incredibly little racial diversity, it was difficult to reconcile my so-called exotic Chinese heritage with my mainstream American self. Used to being the only Asian in the room, I was self-conscious that the first thing people noticed about me was that I wasn't white. And as a child I quickly began to realize that I had two options in front of me: conform to the stereotype that was expected of me or conform to the whiteness that surrounded me. There was no in-between....

For me, this meant that I always felt self-conscious about being good at math, because people would just say it was because I was Asian, not because I actually worked hard. It meant that whenever a boy asked me out, it was because he had the "yellow" fever, and not because he actually liked me. It meant that for the longest time my identity had formed around the fact that I was different. And I thought that being Asian was the only special thing about me....

But, as amusing as these interactions were, oftentimes they made me want to reject my own culture, because I thought it helped me conform. I distanced myself from the Asian stereotype as much as possible, by degrading my own race, and pretending I hated math. And the worse part was, it worked. The more I rejected my Chinese identity, the more popular I became....

The truth is, Asian Americans play a strange role in the American melting pot. We are the "model minority." Society uses our success to pit us against other people of color as justification that racism doesn't exist. But what does that mean for us Asian Americans? It means that we are not quite similar enough to be accepted, but we aren't different enough to be loathed. We are in a perpetually grey zone, and society isn't quite sure what to do with us. So, they group us by the color of our skin. They tell us that we must reject our own heritages, so we can fit in with the crowd. They tell us that our foreignness is the only identifying characteristic of us. They strip away our identities one by one, until we are foreign, but not quite foreign, American but not quite American....

I wish that I had always had the courage to speak out

> about these issues. But coming from one culture that avoids confrontation, and another that is divided over race, how do I overcome the pressure to keep the peace, while also staying true to who I am? And as much as I hate to admit it, oftentimes I don't speak out, because, if I do, it's at the risk of being told that I am too sensitive, or that I get offended too easily, or that it's just not worth it.[14]

I thought hearing her testimony from the grass-roots level would be a good way to introduce a problematic and false narrative of the model minority myth. Many (East) Asian Americans listening to this story can relate to her biography. The racial stereotyping Canwen experienced as a person of Chinese descent growing up in the Midwest is something all Asian Americans have experienced in some way, shape, or form. I have personally experienced what Canwen names. I cannot tell you how many times when I was growing up in elementary school, middle school, and high school in the 1980s when the world was just not as politically correct as it is today, I was called "Jap," "Chink," and "Gook." Non-Asians confused my ethnicity all the time. Almost everyone thought that I was Chinese American. When I said that I was Korean American, they had no clue where on the global map the nation of Korea was located, even though the United States fought in the Korean War.

In today's world, people's biases have changed little. Even my sons growing up in Chicago during the early 2000s experienced the same kind of racial bias. One day, when Zach and Jonathan were walking down the street from elementary school, they heard a neighborhood girl point to them and say, "There go the Chinese boys." My sons were outraged. Later, I tried to explain to her father why calling them "the Chinese boys" was not an appropriate way to address any Asian child (regardless of the fact that my sons are Korean), but the father did not understand the offense. No wonder his daughter did not either. Ignorance is contagious and passed down generationally through imitation.

Frank H. Wu, currently the William L. Prosser Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of California, Hastings Law School, writes in his book *Yellow* this description of the model minority myth:

> I am fascinated by the imperviousness of the model minority myth against all efforts at debunking it. I am often told by

[14] Canwen Xu, "I Am Not Your Asian Stereotype," TEDx Talks at Boise State University, April 29, 2016, 9:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pUtz75lNaw.

nice people who are bewildered by the fuss, "You Asians are all doing well. What could you have to complain about anyway? Why would you object to a positive image?"...

"You Asians are all doing well anyway" summarizes the model minority myth. This is the dominant image of Asians in the United States. Ever since immigration reforms in 1965 led to a great influx of Asian peoples, we have enjoyed an excellent reputation. As a group, we are said to be intelligent, gifted in math and science, polite, hardworking, family oriented, law abiding, and successfully entrepreneurial. We revere our elders and show fidelity to tradition. The nation has become familiar with the turn-of-the-century Horatio Alger tales of "pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps" updated for a new millennium with an "Oriental" face and imbued with Asian values....

Thanks to their selfless dedication to a small business or an advanced degree in electrical engineering—or both—they are soon achieving the American Dream....Their no-nonsense regimen works wonders....In view of other Americans, Asian Americans vindicate the American Dream....They are living proof of the power of the free market and the absence of racial discrimination. Their good fortune flows from individual self-reliance and community self-sufficiency, not civil rights activism or government welfare benefits....Asian Americans do not whine about racial discrimination; they only try harder.... This caricature is the portrait of the model minority.[15]

The model minority myth claims: if I [as an Asian American] aim toward conformity, and I accommodate or even compromise my ethnic identity

[15] Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 39–44. Frank Wu also does not fit the Asian American stereotype. He emphatically states: "I am Asian American, but I am not good with computers. I cannot balance my checkbook, much less perform calculus in my head. I would like to fail in school, for no reason other than to cast off my freakish alter ego of geek and nerd. I am tempted to be very rude, just to demonstrate once and for all that I will not be excessively polite, bowing, smiling, and deferring. I am lazy and a loner, who would rather reform the law than obey it, and who has no business skills. I yearn to be an artist, an athlete, a rebel, and, above all, an ordinary person" (pp. 39–40). A number of biographies reflecting intentional and unconscious engagement with the model minority myth can be read in the anthology collected by Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: The New York Press, 1996).

to fit better with the larger dominant culture (as Canwen testifies above), there is a pathway to material, social, and economic success available to me through hard work. This is a myth. It ignores the reality of systems that marginalize people of color from succeeding by pure effort alone.

One result of COVID-19 and its tragic aftermath was the reawakening of a national collective consciousness to racial discrimination and violence which specifically targeted Asian Americans. John Cho, a well-known Korean American actor, most famous for playing the role of Lieutenant Sulu in the Star Trek movies, wrote an op-ed piece in the *LA Times* when COVID-19 hit. At the time, we had a US president who renamed COVID-19 "the Chinese virus." Other infamous nicknames include "Kung-flu." President Trump located the origin of the virus's widespread and destructive effect in China, and if the virus could be blamed on China, then people illogically blamed all Chinese people for bringing COVID-19 to the United States. Also troubling was that people could not distinguish between Chinese natives and Chinese Americans, or Chinese Americans from other Asian Americans. So John Cho offered this reflection in the wake of growing anti-Asian racial bias and persecution during the pandemic:

> Growing up…my parents encouraged me and my younger brother to watch as much television as possible, so that we might learn to speak and act like the natives. The hope was that race would not disadvantage us—the next generation—if we played our cards right....
>
> Like fame, the "model minority" myth can provide the illusion of "raceless-ness." Putting select Asians on a pedestal silences those who question systemic injustices. Our supposed success is used as proof that the system works—and if it doesn't work for you, it must be your fault.
>
> Never mind that 12 percent of us [Asian Americans] are living below the poverty line. The "model minority" myth helps maintain the status quo that works against people of all colors.
>
> But perhaps the most insidious effect of this myth is that it silences us. It seduces Asian Americans and recruits us to act on its behalf. It converts our parents, who in turn, encourage us to accept it. It makes you feel protected, that you're passing as one of the good ones….
>
> If the coronavirus has taught us anything, it's that the solu-

> tion to a widespread problem cannot be patchwork. Never has our interconnectedness and our reliance on each other been plainer.
>
> You can't stand up for some and not for others. And like the virus, unchecked aggressiveness has the potential to spread wildly....If you see it on the street, say something. If you hear it at work, say something. If you sense it in your family, say something. Stand up for your fellow Americans.[16]

As noted by Canwen Wu and Frank Wu, John Cho also describes how the model minority myth has historically pitted (East) Asian Americans against other people of color—and as Jordan Ryan has noted—even against other fellow (Southeast) Asian Americans who labor in service industries rather than enter the education-oriented acceleration track to material success.[17] Therefore, it is fundamental for all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, especially in a post-COVID-19 era, that we—as those sharing an immigrant heritage—reject this false myth and recover truer narratives that describe our own histories and common experiences of suffering—narratives which not only unite AAPI diverse ethnic people-groups but connect them with other people of color who also experience suffering from a white dominant culture. A truer narrative that embraces our past history of suffering and discrimination, and actively fights against it, that refuses to be silent in the face of racial injustice provides essential points of solidarity with non-Asian people of color as well and with the wider global church.

It is hard to think of anything good stemming from the horror of the pandemic. But one important result of the coronavirus for Asian Americans in the United States was a growing national awareness of our own story of endurance through systems of racism. In a multi-page booklet, the nonprofit organization Stop AAPI Hate (co-founded by Russell Jeung, professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University) has analyzed the history of violence against Asian Americans

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16 John Cho, "Coronavirus Reminds Asian Americans Like Me That Our Belonging Is Conditional," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-04-22/asian-american-discrimination-john-cho-coronavirus.

17 Ryan, "No Model Minority, Part 1." See also Jordan Ryan, "No Model Minority, Part 2: Filipino Americans, the Bible, and Resisting Racism," Asian American Christian Collaborative, January 12, 2020, https://www.asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/article/no-model-minority-part-ii-filipino-americans-bible-resisting-racism.

before, during, and after COVID-19.[18] What the coronavirus did was to make the problem of anti-Asian bias and violence more visible. The coronavirus did not create the problem; rather, the problem was always there albeit hidden from public eyes. The problem is not being resolved either; in fact, in many ways it is growing worse. COVID-19 made more visible a crisis that has its own long history. It gave anti-Asian racial prejudice an occasion to be bolder and shameless in the public forum. Anti-Asian violence came out of the depths of invisibility and became exposed through journalistic reporting and social media. According to the two-year study, Stop AAPI Hate catalogs that:

> Over 11,000 acts of hate against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have been reported to the national coalition Stop AAPI Hate since 2020 [i.e., March 19, 2020 to March 31, 2022], and [at] the start of the COVID-19 pandemic...nearly half (49%) of AAPI persons nationwide have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment that may be illegal.[19]

This discrimination and unfair treatment, according to the report, covered a broad range:

- harassment (67% of 11,467 incidents experienced by AAPI persons, 63% of which came in the form of verbal hate speech and only 4% were gestures, written, or other behaviors)
- physical assault (17%)
- avoidance and shunning (16%)
- online misconduct (9%)
- coughed or spat on (8%)
- job discrimination (6%)
- hostile work environment and job discrimination (6%)
- vandalism, graffiti, robbery, or theft (9%)
- refusal of services (4%)
- barred from transportation (1%)
- microaggressions and treating other people differently (3%)

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[18] Stop AAPI Hate (SAH), *Two Years and Thousands of Voices National Report: What Community Generated Data Tells Us about Anti-AAPI Hate*, through March 31, 2022, 1–17, https://stopaapihate.org/2022/07/20/year-2-report/. See also Russell Jeung's reflection on the important work of Stop AAPI Hate in his article "Asian Americans Are 'Bringing Heaven to Earth' by Fighting Racism," *Sojourners* (April 7, 2022), https://sojo.net/articles/asian-americans-are-bringing-heaven-earth-fighting-racism.

[19] SAH, *Two Years and Thousands of Voices National Report*, 10.

- threats or calling the police, and various negative interactions with people (1%)
- other forms discrimination and prejudice (2%)[20]

To reiterate, these attacks against AAPI persons are not new phenomena. Asian Americans have lived out a narrative of overcoming racial bias and even anti-Asian violence since the very beginning of their history on US soil. It is a narrative of faithful endurance against racial injustice, overcoming persecution, and prophetically calling out their persecutors to account for their evil.

A More Faithful Account of the Asian American Narrative

Mark Twain is credited for saying: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it does often rhyme."[21] The more recent pattern of anti-Asian violence after the pandemic rhymes as part of a larger pattern of anti-racial bias and violence against Asian Americans in a much longer history. It is not within the scope of this article to retrace this history in its entirety, but highlighting selective events is possible.[22]

In 2021, Paula Yoo published the book *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chen*, detailing not only the brutal attack on a Chinese American, that is, Vincent Chen, by white Chrysler autoworkers but also the activist work of his mother, Lily Chen. Vincent's death and Mrs. Chen's activist movement galvanized a generation of Asian Americans to engage justice work. They inspired the founding of American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), a nonprofit started in 1983 as an

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20 SAH, 10.

21 It is likely the axiom was inspired by Mark Twain but not actually written by him. For the history on its complex origin, see "Quote Origin: History Does Not Repeat Itself but It Rhymes," Quote Investigator, January 12, 2014, https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/01/12/history-rhymes/.

22 For a longer history, I leave it to the reader to pick up and study Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore* (1998), or Erika Lee's *The Making of Asian America* (2015); these works are cited in the notes above. See also the collection of essays from John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, eds., *Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (London/New York: Verso, 2014).

Asian Pacific American (APA) civil rights advocacy group.[23] The story begins in June 1982 when Michael Nitz was laid off from Chrysler. He blamed the Japanese automotive industry for flooding the US market with its cars, resulting in massive layoffs of workers in American-made auto factories and the declining state of the American auto industry. Nitz and his stepfather, Ronald Ebens (a plant supervisor for Chrysler), targeted Vincent (even though he was Chinese American not Japanese), and beat him unconscious with baseball bats outside of a Detroit restaurant where he was attending his own bachelor party among Asian and non-Asian friends. Vincent subsequently died in the hospital. His murder was brutal. Instead of attending his wedding, his friends and family attended his funeral. When the perpetrators were tried for murder, they received no jail time and a fine of only $3,000 each. Not until Lily Chen and the ACJ led civil rights protests in the streets and campaigned for a retrial was the case against Nitz and Ebens tried in a federal civil rights court in 1984 with Ebens sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. Nitz was acquitted, only to have the federal appeals court overturn the Ebens conviction in 1986. Both have remained free ever since.[24] Their case is a glaring example of civic injustice and the failure of the US judicial system to indict hate crimes against people of color. It is a reminder that Asian Americans remain "the perpetual foreigner" amidst a majority European American white society.

But this is one story of many. A longer history exists of Asian Americans experiencing racial bias, unjust legal rulings, hate crimes, and violence. There is also a concurrent history of Asian Americans marching against injustice and nonviolently engaging systemic racism. The history of Asian American discrimination is not new. As far back as the late 1800s, the Naturalization Act of 1790 limited citizenship to "whites" only, meaning only European immigrants could become US citizens, barring all non-white immigrants. The Naturalization Act remained in effect until 1952. First-generation Asian immigrants who built our transcontinental

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23 Paula Yoo, *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement* (New York: Norton Young Readers, 2021). The summary of events which follows comes from Yoo's book, but see also the fortieth-year remembrance by Wynne Davis, "Vincent Chin Was Killed 40 Years Ago. Here's Why His Case Continues to Resonate," NPR News, June 19, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/06/19/1106118117/vincent-chin-aapi-hate-incidents, and especially the legacy guide by the Vincent Chin Institute, https://www.vincentchin.org/legacy-guide/english. For the work of the ACJ, which continues today, see https://www.americancitizensforjustice.org/.

24 Yoo, *From a Whisper*.

railroads, farmed, and worked in factories and service industries (e.g., restaurants, laundry, and cleaning, to name a few) were from the beginning excluded from citizenship on the basis of their color.[25] They were "yellow," and not white.[26] It is a label with a racially constructed social agenda. As Keevak notes: "To call East Asians yellow, in other words, was a means of ensuring that while they might not be as dark-skinned as Africans, they could no longer be considered 'white' either," and therefore were prevented from experiencing any privileges inherent to whiteness.[27]

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 further prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years; only certain classes of Chinese (e.g., diplomats, merchants, teachers, students, and travelers) were exempt. The Geary Act of 1892 extended the prohibition. The Chinese Immigration Act was renewed and made permanent by 1904.[28] The National Origins Act of 1924 prohibited all Japanese immigration and also had the sinister agenda of preventing the growth of Asian families by prohibiting women from China, Japan, Korea, and India from entry and marrying Asian men.[29]

The earliest Asian immigrants were farmers who experienced "ethnic antagonism" from white workers in California when they moved there from Hawaii to the mainland. In 1910, Korean harvesters hired to pick oranges for Mary Steward's farm in Upland, California, were pummeled with stones by white laborers and told to leave the country or be killed.[30] Yet Japanese and Korean farmers were clearly industry leaders revolutionizing agriculture in the state. Agricultural entrepreneur Hyung-Soon Kim along with an employee named Anderson experimented with crossbreeding plums and peaches to produce a "fuzzless peach" called the "nectarine."[31] Despite such accomplishments, many Asian American farmers were unwelcome. The California Land Act of 1913, which stated that property could not be owned by "aliens ineligible to citizenship"—while specifically targeting Japanese farm workers, eventually forced not only Japanese but almost all Asian farmers out of the industry.[32]

The honest reader only needs to read the horrid accounts of the deten-

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25 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 14–18.
26 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 109–36.
27 Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 43.
28 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 94–95.
29 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 14–15.
30 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 14–15.
31 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 276.
32 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 203–4.

tion centers at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay for Asian migrants—especially Chinese (70 percent of the detainee population)—to understand that their experience was not the welcome which white European immigrants received at Ellis Island in New York. It was not atypical for a detainee to be held twenty months in substandard living conditions only to be sent back to their native country.[33] Over two hundred poems were written on the walls of Angel Island's barracks,[34] one of which laments: "Imprisoned in the wooden building day after day / My freedom withheld / How can I bear to talk about it?"[35]

Probably the most overtly oppressive chapter in Asian American history was Executive Order 9066, which authorized the internment of Japanese Americans on US soil during World War II.[36] On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed the order without putting it before Congress, and subsequently 122,000 Japanese Americans lost their homes, businesses, jobs, bank savings, property, possessions, and their entire livelihood as they were forcibly migrated to ten "relocation centers" in remote, desertlike areas across the nation, including among others, Manzanar, California, and Rohwer, Arkansas. First-generation immigrants (*Issei*) and second-generation Japanese Americans (*Nisei*) were deemed "enemy aliens" and their "evacuation" a "military necessity." To the Japanese, their living facilities were nothing more than "crude, incomplete, and ill-prepared camps" and their migration was to them a "desert exile" with little protection against the elements.[37] One inmate lamented that it "felt as if we were standing in a gigantic sand-mixing machine. Sand filled our mouths and nostrils and stung our faces and hands like a thousand dart needles." Behind barbed wire fences, daily life was characterized by "monotony, anxiety, and growing discontent" for the next four years (1942–46).[38] When the detention centers were

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33 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 230–69; Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 96–100.

34 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 96–101

35 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 238.

36 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 213–218. For context, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States declared war against Japan on December 8, 1941. This declaration triggered a series of events that led to the unjust detention of Japanese Americans. It is a matter of record that at the time US government surveillance reported to the Roosevelt administration there was "no Japanese problem" and that 90–98 percent of Japanese Americans were loyal to the United States. In fact, Japanese American newspapers proclaimed that loyalty and mobilized groups to support the US war effort against Japan.

37 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 229.

38 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 236–37.

finally closed at the conclusion of the war, many Japanese Americans were relocated to other parts of the United States, and a good number settled in the Midwest, including Chicago.[39] It was not until 1988, when President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, that the US government made a national apology for the "grave injustice" done against Japanese residents.[40]

This is the Asian American story—not the model minority myth which should be renounced, but one of survival and endurance through racial bias, discrimination, and violence. It is a story that should unite not divide Asian Americans of diverse ethnic descent, as well as create bonds of solidarity with other people of color. Yet solidarity is not automatic; it must be pursued intentionally because the very structures of racism oppose it.

Racism's Strategy of "Divide and Conquer" Yesterday and Today

In the previous sections of this address, I described how one strategy of systemic racism is to divide people of color, pitting them against one another. The model minority myth—a racial construct from a white dominant cultural center—has historically pitted Asian Americans against non-Asian people of color, faulting the latter for not "pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps" when the education acceleration-tube seems to pave a pathway to material success for the former. It has also divided East Asians from Southeast Asians, the latter of whom tend not to be included with the former as "model minorities." History might not repeat itself, but it does rhyme, and so we find that in today's world we have new strategies of division.

During the pandemic in 2020 when many non-Asians illogically scapegoated anyone of Chinese descent for bringing the virus to US soil, *all* Asians were indiscriminately targeted with violence. My own parents who live in the East Bay of Northern California—while eating at a restaurant—were screamed at, and threatened by, a white person mistaking them for Chinese immigrants. The incident produced real fear. As a result, my mother decided to accentuate her Korean ethnic descent in order to dissociate herself from mistakenly being identified as Chinese. She started wearing a T-shirt which featured two heart-shaped flags which

[39] The story of Japanese American resettlement in Chicago and other parts of the United States has been archived and preserved by the JASC (Japanese American Service Center) in Chicago, which preserves primary source testimony from those who experienced the internment; see their legacy center archive at https://jasc-chicago.org/.

[40] Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 312.

overlapped one another in a show of solidary: a flag of the United States and a flag of Korea.[41] Its message is clear: "I am not Chinese; I am a Korean American." She not only started wearing this shirt whenever she ventured out into the public eye, but she also sent shirts to my wife and sister-in-law out of a fear that they too might be targeted. I share this anecdote not to blame but to name the sheer terror Asian Americans as a collective whole have experienced throughout the country. Stop AAPI Hate, as noted above, has documented more than 11,000 acts of hate against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders recorded since 2020, and many more are unrecorded.[42]

There is an unfortunate history of Asian Americans succumbing to this strategy of division where one Asian ethnic group dissociates itself from another to avoid persecution, rather than coming to the defense of the persecuted and joining their cause in solidarity. Such was the case of Japanese internment during World War II. Because the United States declared war against Japan, and anti-Japanese sentiment and violence were on the rise, Chinese, Filipino, and Korean Americans were quick to distinguish themselves as non-Japanese. Japan had invaded the Philippines just seven hours after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, so Filipinos were readily seen by the US public as allies. But Chinese and Korean Americans had to be much more vocal about their loyalty to the US war effort and their animosity toward Japan for them to also be seen as allies

41 For as long as it is available online, one can see a photo of the shirt advertised here: https://www.amazon.com/South-Korea-USA-Heart-Americans/dp/B07TZCF4ZV.

42 SAH, *Two Years and Thousands of Voices National Report*, 10. It is hard to believe that already the fourth anniversary of the Atlantic shootings on March 17, 2021, is fast approaching (at the time of this article's composition). Six out of the eight victims were Asian American women, and the shooter Robert Aaron Long had exoticized Asian women as objects of temptation and sex addiction. Long irrationally sought to "eliminate" the temptation through a shooting spree at two spas where Asian women worked. See Richard Fausset, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, and Mario Fazio, "8 Dead in Atlanta Spa Shootings, With Fears of Anti-Asian Bias," *New York Times*, March 17, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/03/17/us/shooting-atlanta-acworth.

and not as "enemy aliens."[43]

The news media covering anti-Asian American violence during and after the pandemic has been mixed. On one hand, news agencies have done much to highlight cases of anti-Asian violence and spur public awareness as hate crimes occurred in New York City, Los Angeles, and other major urban areas. On the other hand, the same news coverage has focused unevenly on African American perpetrators even though a 2021 report by Janelle Wong at the University of Maryland points out that the majority of perpetrators in anti-Asian hate crimes are white, not Black. Social media "overreport and overrepresent black suspects."[44] Such biased coverage again pits one people of color against another—in this case, African Americans and Asian Americans—and distracts the public from the failure of the model minority myth to protect Asian residents. In a post-COVID-19 nation, it should be painfully clear that Asian Americans remain the "perpetual foreigner." It is about time and overdue that Asian Americans name, reject, and renounce such anti-racial strategies to "divide and conquer" and actively seek solidarity among themselves and with other people of color. Our ethnic histories are unique, but in our diverse experiences of suffering under the structures of racism we can nevertheless find a common calling.

Calling for Solidarity and Confronting Evil in Revelation

The grand vision of Revelation 7:9–14 focuses on the common calling of all God's people—a great multitude from every *ethnos*, tribe, people, and language—to endure suffering from the powers and principalities and proclaim the gospel that heralds: "salvation belongs to our God... and to the Lamb." It is a gospel message that confronts evil in a time of

43 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 258–63. It should be noted, however, that their stories are also complicated by a long history of brutal colonization by Japan of China (1937–45) and Korea (1910–45). One only need read Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* (New York: Perseus Books, 1997); Sunyoung Park, trans. and ed., *On the Eve of Uprising and Other Stories of Colonial Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2010); or the testimonies of Chinese and Korean "comfort women" (i.e., women forced to be sex slaves for Japanese soldiers) to understand that deep hatred for Japan already existed among many Chinese and Korean immigrants in the United States. It was not too difficult for the *Korean National Herald-Pacific Weekly* newspaper to rage in their support of the war against Japan: "Is there in this world a worse Jap hater than a Korean?" (p. 261).

44 Janette Wong, "Beyond the Headlines: Review of National Anti-Asian Hate Incident Reporting/Data Collection Published over 2019–2021," UC Riverside, June 7, 2021, https://socialinnovation.ucr.edu/news/2021/06/17/most-anti-asian-attacks-committed-whites-new-study.

empire during the first-century church's day and ours.[45] It is our fidelity to proclaim this gospel and to endure the pushback by those who wish to silence our prophetic challenge that should be the basis of ecclesial unity. Since the model minority myth divides and does not unite, Asian American believers are called by God and the Lamb to abandon this false narrative. We instead tell our true history and testify to how Christ has empowered his people through every anti-Asian attack, obstacle, and barrier.

Isolated moments of Asian American solidarity with other people of color should be shared as part of our story. These stories bear a collective witness to the Revelation 7 vision of a united people of God. Takagi, for example, reminds us that in February 1903 Japanese and Mexican American farm workers banded together to strike in protest of wage cuts and unfair laboring contracts. The Japanese and Mexican Labor Association (JMLA) led by Kosaburo Baba, Y. Yamaguchi, and J. M. Lizarras organized a labor union that pressured the Western Agricultural Contracting Company to pay farm laborers fair wages and return the then $3.75/acre wage cut back to its original $5/acre rate.[46] Decades later, we witness how the now famous United Farm Workers (UFW) grape strike and boycott of 1956–66, successfully organized by Filipino union leaders Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz of the Agricultural Worker's Organizing Committee (AWOC) and by union leaders César Chavéz and Dolores Huerta of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), brought about labor reforms in the agricultural industry. The highly publicized boycott and marches by the UFW featured a unified Mexican Filipino activist front. Chavéz, a deeply devoted Roman Catholic, was instrumental in making sure the movement was committed to nonviolence, prayer, and even weeks-long fasts to challenge the nation's moral conscience. Together the combined Mexican and Filipino labor unions won contracts that gave farm laborers safer working conditions

[45] For Revelation's anti-imperial, or rather, alter-imperial message and theology of justice, Shane J. Wood, *The Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Empire Studies and the Book of Revelation* (Biblical Interpretation 140; Leiden: Brill, 2015); cf. Blount, Revelation, 1–14.

[46] Takaki, *Strangers from a Distant Shore*, 198–200.

and better wages.[47]

On April 29, 1992, a jury of twelve found four police officers, three of them white, "not guilty" for the brutal beating of Rodney King that was caught on video by a bystander. The verdict, in the words of one resident, was the "lighter" that "blew up" a class struggle in South Los Angeles—a poor urban area frustrated by decades of unemployment, a deteriorating economy, racial bias, under-resourced schools, and gang violence. African American protestors—ignited by the verdict and fueled by decades of anti-Black racism which exonerated white officers but incarcerated Black men and women—swept through south central Los Angeles and into nearby Koreatown. Years of misunderstanding between Korean business owners and Black neighbors who could neither be employed in the former's stores nor felt welcome as customers exploded in a human toll of fifty-eight deaths, 2,400 injuries, twelve thousand arrests, three thousand businesses looted and destroyed by vandalism and fire, and $800 million in property loss and damages.[48] For the first three hours of the riot, there was zero intervention by the Los Angeles police. As commentators retrospectively noted years later, it was almost as if the city allowed for the violence to spread unchecked in order to distract attention away from the systemic problem of racial profiling by the LAPD, anti-Black racial bias, and the unjust verdict.[49] Instead, news coverage focused on the violence between African American looters and Korean American store owners as an interracial conflict. Once again, the strategy of "divide and conquer" set one ethnic group against the other.[50]

As painful and traumatic as the riots were, African American and Asian American churches and community leaders nonetheless called for

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47 Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 252–53; Craig Scharlin and Lilia Villanueva with Elaine Kim, *Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement*, 3rd ed. (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 2000), xxv–xxvi; Lisa Morehouse, "Grapes of Wrath: The Forgotten Filipinos Who Led a Farmworker Revolution," September 19, 2015, in *NPR Weekend Edition*, https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/09/16/440861458/grapes-of-wrath-the-forgotten-filipinos-who-led-a-farmworker-revolution. Also recommended is the 2014 film César Chavéz with Michael Peña in the lead role. The film highlights Chavéz's controversial fasting and hunger strikes.

48 Takaki, *Strangers from a Distant Shore*, 493–97.

49 Anjuli Sastry Krbechek and Karen Grigsby Bates, "When LA Erupted in Anger: A Look Back at the Rodney King Riots," April 26, 2017, in *NPR Special Series*, https://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney-king-riots.

50 Krbechek and Bates, "When LA Erupted in Anger"; Takaki, *Strangers from a Distant Shore*, 497.

and preached a message of peace. One African American minister called for an intercultural understanding between Blacks and Koreans, saying: "If we could appreciate and affirm each other's histories...there wouldn't be generalizations and stigmatizations, and we could see that we have more in common."[51] Rev. Paul Yung at Young-Nak Presbyterian Church in Lincoln Heights preached on the parable of the Good Samaritan the following Sunday and acknowledged that while many Korean families felt like the ransacked person left for dead on the road to Jericho, nevertheless, God's Word calls the Korean American church to cross the racial divide and love their neighbors. He exhorted: "I believe that is the time we should be united. United, not to condemn others, but united to care for others. United, not just to defend ourselves, but united to restore our community and rebuild our city."[52]

Churches and community leaders called for a peace walk a week after the riots. On May 2, 1992, thirty thousand Korean American marchers together with other non-Asian residents of the area walked through the streets of Los Angeles's Koreatown denouncing police violence and calling for peace.[53] Images of the march featured signs saying: "Love Your Neighbor—Jesus" and "We Can Get Along—Rodney King."[54]

There is a history of activism by Asian Americans whenever their civil rights are violated and, on each occasion, the model minority myth gets exposed as a lie. There is also a history of solidarity with other non-Asian groups who collaborate out of mutual regard for each other and a commonly pursued goal, as noted above.[55] Yet, in more recent years, we have also witnessed Asian Americans unite as advocates for, and in support of, non-Asian groups, out of a love for their neighbors. In the wake of what felt like a constant succession of Black lives ended needlessly and brutally at the hands of law enforcement officers in our nation—namely Trayvon Martin (1995–2012), Laquan McDonald (1997–2014), Michael Brown Jr. (1996–2014), and in more recent memory within the year of 2020

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51 Takaki, *Strangers from a Distant Shore*, 493.

52 Jeffrey D. Brand, "Assurances from the Pulpits: The Churches of Los Angeles Respond to the 1992 Riot," *Race, Gender, and Class* 11, no. 1 (2004): 44–45 [39–55].

53 Kim, Rose M. 2011. "Violence and Trauma as Constitutive Elements in Korean American Racial Identity Formation: The 1992 L.A. Riots/Insurrection/Saigu." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35 (11): 2012-2013 [1999–2018]. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.602090.

54 Jessica Dickerson, "Remembering the 1992 LA Riots Over Two Decades Later," *Huffington Post*, April 29, 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/1992-la-riot-photos_n_7173540.

55 For a longer history of Asian American activism, see Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 283–313, 373–402.

alone, Ahmaud Arbery (1994–2020), Breonna Taylor (1993–2020), and George Floyd (1973–2020)—the Asian American Christian Collaborative (AACC) organized a peace march through the streets of Chicago on Sunday, June 28, 2020.[56] President of the AACC Rev. Raymond Chang, along with local Asian American pastors and community leaders in the wider Chicagoland area and with the support of Rev. Charlie Dates and other African American pastors, led over one hundred churches to march with "Asian American Christians for Black Lives and Dignity."

The two-mile march began at Chinatown and ended at Progressive Baptist Church. I was there. I remember the march, stopping strategically along the way to pray, sing hymns, and hear from select preachers. It was a hard time for the Chinese American community who saw their own stores vandalized and looted during some of the previous Black Lives Matter protests in Chicago. Yet the Holy Spirit of peace led us to pray for bridges to be built between Asian American and African American communities, for justice and reform in our nation's law enforcement practices, and for works of mercy that address the needs of low-income families in our area. It was a solemn time of reflection but also of worship, much like it was for the first-century churches in the Book of Revelation, who praised God as an act of resistance against evil and in fidelity to the Lamb of God.

The hymns of resistance in Revelation (nine altogether, including 7:9–12; see also 4:8–11; 5:9–14; 11:5–8; 11:17–18; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–4; 19:5–8) function to claim that all "Praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power and strength be to our God for ever and ever" (7:12). Power, worship, and glory are ascribed to the Lord Jesus, not to Caesar, or any other Greco-Roman authority, empire, institution, principality, or deity.[57] Hymns sung by the early church were weapons of worship against their Roman oppressors. Hymns, sung then and today, especially during protests as the "Asian American Christians for Black Lives and Dignity" peace march, function to empower the worshipers and interces-

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[56] For what follows, see Raymond Chang, "The Asian American Christians for Black Lives and Dignity March in Chicago," The Asian American Christian Collaborative, July 1, 2020, https://www.asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/article/the-asian-american-christians-for-black-lives-and-dignity-march-in-chicago; and Curtis Yee, "Young Asian American Christians Are Finding Their Voice on Racial Justice," *Christianity Today*, July 15, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/2020/07/millennial-gen-z-asian-american-christians-racial-justice/.

[57] Blount, Revelation, 95–98; Max J. Lee, "Revelation," in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, eds. Gary Burge and Andrew Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 1585–1627.

sors. They are enabled by the Spirit through worship "to express—with the full range of emotion, volume of voice, mental acuity, and spiritual freedom—theological truths that speak to the reality of God in a sinful world" and invoke God's sovereign, justice-bringing actions into areas of life dominated by evil.[58]

Final Exhortations

Revelation 7 functions as an angelic trumpet call to all saints, including the Asian American Christian community, to clothe themselves with priestly white robes (*stolai*; vv. 13–14) and intercede on behalf others as a way to bear witness to God's love and justice for our world. It is no small task that requires nothing less than the blood of the slain Lamb (v. 14) covering over every priest and washing them of their own evils before trying to expose the evil of other external agencies. Anger can be a great motivator against injustice. In fact, something is wrong with the Christian if one is not enraged by the pain and suffering unjustly inflicted on others. In Ephesians 4:26, Paul exhorts the church: "Be angry and do not sin" (*orgizesthe kai mē hamartanete*). The church is commanded to be angry but not in an unfocused way that leads to vicious behavior. If anger is excessive, it spirals into revenge and undermines unity (Rom 12:17–19; Eph 4:26–27; 1 Pet 3:9; Jas 1:19–21).[59]

Thus, the intercessor must be washed by the blood of Jesus, repent and experience forgiveness, not so much for being angry, which we are commanded to become, but for those moments of weakness when anger takes over, spirals into demonizing others, and seeks revenge rather than justice. We all need the blood of the slain Lamb to cover us. We all need each other to expose evil. Evil fights back. Yet the church cannot be silenced when the Lamb of God has paved the way through the cross for victory over the powers.

So, with the great multitude, may all of God's people say, "Amen! Amen!"

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58 Lee, "Revelation," 1620–21.

59 Max J. Lee, "Moral Transformation and Ethics," in *Behind the Scenes of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, eds. Bruce Longenecker, T.J. Lang, and Elizabeth E. Shively (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024), 341 [339–47]; Dennis Edwards, *Might from the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice* (Harrisburg, PA: Herald Press, 2020), especially his chapter "The Power of Anger."

Ordination Sermon: John 12:20–33 (June 20, 2004)

Thomas E. Kelly, Evangelical Covenant Church,
global personnel; misionero jubilado del Pacto (1951–2024)

I bring you greetings this evening on behalf of your brothers and sisters in Christ who make up La Iglesia del Pacto de México, the Covenant Church of Mexico. Please keep your sister denomination and her leaders in your prayers. The church in Mexico is facing great challenges, complex problems, and tremendous opportunities for growth of many kinds. That sounds a bit like a description of Christian ministry, doesn't it? Pray for the *Pactistas de México*, the Covenanters of Mexico and for their ministries. I assure you that there are those in that country who, as their own vision of the world and awareness of the Covenant family expand, are also thanking God and praying for you.

This past spring, two of our neighbor ladies were continually sharing with us great excitement regarding their plans to travel to Rome in April and, among other activities, to see the pope. I could have engaged in one-upmanship with them and told them where I was planning to be tonight, and whom I was going to see. But I didn't! Still, it is good to be in Minneapolis, and a privilege to see President Palmberg! Glenn, we look forward to your next visit to Mexico.

To the Board of the Ordered Ministry and to its executive minister, I want to say, "Thank you." Thank you, Dave Kersten, for the invitation you extended to me, on behalf of your colleagues, to preach at tonight's service, to share in what Dean Glenn Anderson described as this "high and holy moment" in the life of our family of faith. The invitation takes on poignant meaning for me because yesterday, June 21, was the twenty-fifth anniversary of my own ordination. That night at the Annual

Meeting in Fort Collins, Colorado, forty-one of us made our vows and were duly ordained to the office of the ministry. So, thank you for this honor. And thank you for praying that God would use me and speak through me tonight.

The sermon text, John 12:20–33, has been read by Philip Stenberg. Now, before going any further, I invite you to join me in prayer.

> Help us now to listen, O God, not for thunder or for angels,
> but for your voice. Make us holy, consecrated with the truth.
> Your Word is truth. Amen.

Through our text, we have entered this evening into the Gospel according to John at the point where Jesus is moving toward the last Passover with his disciples, and the hour of his death and glory. In the scene described by the sermon text, Jesus says, "The hour has come" (v. 23).

Tonight, for those of you who are being ordained or commissioned, the hour has come as well. For Jesus, the hour that had come was the hour for him to die and be glorified. For you, sisters and brothers, the hour that has come is the hour to be set apart. As Jesus prepared for his final Passover, and for his death, he left this teaching that has to do with all of his followers, in every age. But tonight, it is teaching that specifically has to do with you—you who are being set apart.

At last February's Midwinter Conference for Covenant pastors and leaders, North Park Seminary professor Klyne Snodgrass said in one of his Bible study sessions, "I resist a clergy/laity distinction. Yet I live with the tension that there are some differences." He went on to affirm, "The same 'Christ identity' is expected of all believers. And it is obviously first to be seen in pastors and Christian leaders, and modeled by them, and passed on." Klyne's reminder to those pastors and leaders was this: "It is not your identity you are passing on. It is the identity of Christ and his community."

Tonight you are being set apart, ordained and commissioned, in such a way that your "Christ identity" will be seen by your people and the world; set apart to model the identity of Christ and his community, and to pass it on; set apart—using now themes from our text—to die, to serve, and to lift high the cross.

The scene begins at John 12:20 with what is often referred to as "the coming of the Greeks," with what William Barclay describes as "the first faint hint of a gospel which is to go out to all the world." We need to remember that these are not Greek-speaking Jews. These are Greek-speaking Gentiles. They came to Philip, a disciple with a Greek name who

came from a predominantly Gentile area. They came to Philip because he spoke Greek. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell his teammate Andrew, and then the two, in turn, told Jesus.

"Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Biblical commentator Raymond Brown points out that in the theological context of John, "to see" may well mean "to believe in."[1] So this request is really quite extraordinary: "Sir, we would like to see Jesus. We want to meet him. In fact, we would even like to believe in Jesus. Philip, please, can you help us?"

So what happened to the Greeks? We don't really know. Their coming to Philip, and their request is of such tremendous theological importance that John never tells us if they ever got to see, or ever came to believe in Jesus. They disappear from the scene!

However, in spite of an enigmatic picture of what happened that day, we have gotten the first faint hint of a gospel which is to go out to all the world, a gospel which, in fact, did go out—across time, across geography—to all the world. And because it did go out, and because it must continue to go out, we are here tonight, in Minneapolis, to ordain and commission, to be ordained and to be commissioned. Little did those Greeks know what they were stirring up!

The Greeks' request reached Jesus through Philip and Andrew. And Jesus replied, probably not directly to either the disciples or the Greeks but as a comment on what had just happened. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23, NRSV). The first Gentiles have now come to Jesus! And so he knows that "the hour," too, has come. Their appearance indicates to Jesus that the time has come to lay down his life. The hour of Jesus's return to his Father, through his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, has now come.

Jesus announces that he is ready for "the hour," the hour of laying down his life and taking it up again, for the life and salvation of the world. Then he follows his announcement with some statements, some teaching regarding what the coming of the hour really means—what it means for him and what it will mean for those who would be his followers.

Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24, ESV). Ordained, commissioned, set apart to die.

This very short parable about the kernel of wheat is about Jesus's Passion. The emphasis is on dying. In order to bring life to all people,

[1] Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 77.

Jews and Greeks, Jesus must die. This is the paradox: on the one hand, a dead seed; and on the other hand, a waving wheat field. Only through death is fruit borne. This is the mystery: unless a wheat grain dies, it will never be more than one grain. Only through death and resurrection can the full harvest of God's blessing be brought forth.

The parable is part of Jesus's reply to the remarkable news that some Greeks wanted to see him. So we know that it refers specifically to his death, his resurrection, and the rich harvest that will come as a result. But the context of the parable also makes the general meaning clear: Death is the means of gaining life, of bearing fruit. It is how people come to Jesus. It is how the crop can be harvested for eternal life (John 4:36).

Tonight you are being set apart, not to cultivate your own life in the world, not to promote your own aims, not to pursue your own desires and ambitions. You are being set apart, in surrender to Jesus and the way of the cross, to gain life, to be productive, to bear fruit. And so, in one way or another, you are being set apart to die.

Arden Almquist, former Covenant missionary doctor in Congo and, at one time, executive secretary of world mission for our denomination, wrote about dying in his book *Missionary, Come Back*:

> Ultimately, any effort at identification with Christ must accept the possibility that following Jesus on the road to Jerusalem may well mean climbing the hill of Golgotha. The church, at its best, has always known this. And there have been reminders in our own time that identification in life may have to mean identification in death.[2]

Then Arden goes on to tell the story that we have been remembering and honoring this week, the story of Paul Carlson, Almquist's successor at the Wasolo hospital in the northern Congo.

Paul Carlson accepted his expendability, indispensable as he was to a hundred thousand people for whom he was the only physician. This meant accepting the cross, not as an isolated single fact of human history, but as a possibility for himself as a follower of Jesus Christ. "Thus he died, in a hail of bullets triggered by a nervous finger, at the very moment of rescue as a prisoner in Stanleyville. In this, Paul Carlson took Christ as his example."[3]

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[2] Arden Almquist, *Missionary, Come Back* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Co., 1970), 185.

[3] Almquist, *Missionary,* 186.

Have we accepted our expendability? Have we accepted the cross as a possibility for ourselves? What Arden underscores is as true today as it was when he wrote these words back in 1970: "A gospel which excludes the cross is not a gospel that can win today's world. Our Lord does not ask us to *seek* martyrdom. He does ask us to be willing to follow him to the death, identifying with a needy and sinful world that it may know his love."[4]

Who of us has not been moved, and inspired, by stories of such a willingness to follow our Lord, and such an identification with a needy and sinful world, stories like the one published in last July's *Covenant Companion*, and updated in October, the story of Dennis and Susan Wadley. In 2003, Dennis ended an eighteen-year career as a Covenant pastor in California and moved with his family to Cape Town, South Africa. There, Dennis and Susan began a holistic AIDS relief and development ministry.

Last September, the Wadleys were robbed at gunpoint while driving in a township outside of Cape Town with their three children. This coming Sunday, *Covenant Home Altar* readers will begin a week of devotions written by the Wadleys. On one of the days, Susan reflects on that traumatic robbery event:

> Later I found myself wrestling with God in prayer: "I'm not willing to put my children in danger, Lord. This is serious! I'm not willing!" The verses from Matthew 10 came echoing through my mind: "Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me...; anyone who does not take his cross and follow me...." God was challenging me to surrender *all*—even my children—into his care. There were no guarantees for our safety, and there will never be no matter where we live. Our lives are truly in his hands. Believing anything different is an illusion.[5]

You who tonight are being ordained or commissioned are being set apart to surrender all, to accept your expendability, and to accept the cross as a possibility for yourself; set apart as leaders of a church called to follow her Lord to crucifixion, which precedes resurrection. Remember that the church's current dying, your current dying—from the biblical perspec-

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[4] Almquist, *Missionary,* 190.

[5] Dennis and Susan Wadley, "I Surrender All," *Covenant Home Altar* 66 (Second Quarter 2004), June 30, 2004.

tive—is but the prelude to a great harvest. Remember the words of our Lord, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24, ESV).

The Lord Jesus also told them, "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26, ESV).

Ordained, commissioned, set apart to serve.

But the service has a special quality to it. Jesus places a condition that needs to be taken into account. It is not just any kind of service. It is service that takes place within the context of following, following Jesus. J.B. Philips translated verse 26 this way, "If a man wants to enter my service, he must follow my way." Tonight you are about to be set apart for a very specific service to Christ and his church. What is essential here is that in your service, through your service, you follow Christ's way. Even in suffering and death—especially in suffering and death—you are called to be willing to imitate Jesus, to follow Jesus. "Whoever serves me," said Jesus, "must follow me" (John 12:26).

What will become of our service in the name of Christ if we enter into it but then we leave off following him and attempt to serve without following? It could eventually become a service characterized by bitterness and cynicism, or arrogance and nearsightedness. So it is that Jesus makes clear the utmost importance of following him even as we serve: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me...if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26).

We follow, so we can be where Jesus is. We follow, so that the Father will honor us. We follow, so that we can lead and be what Latin American theologian Jon Sobrino called the "true church, the church whose story, when it is told, is like the story of Jesus."[6]

"If any of you wants to serve me," says Jesus to you and to me, "then follow me. Then you will be where I am." *Then you will be where I am!*

And where is Jesus? We have remembered Paul Carlson during this Annual Meeting. Why did he cross back over the Ubangi River once his family was safe and go back to his hospital in Wasolo, back to where Jesus was, among the hungry, the thirsty, homeless and naked and sick and imprisoned? Was it not because of how he understood what it means to serve Jesus? "Whoever serves me must follow me. And where I am, my servant will be."

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[6] Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 30.

And Alik Berg, Esther Nordlund, and Martha Anderson—three Covenant missionaries shot by bandits on a road in Hupeh Province in January 1948—why had they crossed the Pacific Ocean, and gone to China, and *stayed* in China among a suffering people, in spite of turmoil and threats and hardship and danger? Was it not because of how they understood what it means to serve Jesus? "Whoever serves me must follow me. And where I am, my servant also will be."

This is our first Annual Meeting since we said goodbye to Burton Nelson.[7] If he were here and were asked to reflect on what it means to serve Jesus, we all know whose story he would bring up! Why did Dietrich Bonhoeffer decide to leave the safety of New York City in 1939 and head back to Germany in order to, as he wrote, "live through this difficult period in our nation's history with Christians in Germany"?[8] Was it not because of how he understood the cost of discipleship, how he understood what it means to serve Jesus: "Whoever serves...must follow."

At Burton's memorial service, the following passage from Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* was read. It is a quote that Burton kept on his desk.

> Nobody is too good for the lowest service....We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God, who will thwart our plans and frustrate our ways, time and again, even daily, by sending people across our path with their demands and requests. [If we pass them by], we pass by the visible sign of the cross raised in our lives to show us that God's way, and not our own, is what counts.[9]

Listen, now, you who are candidates for commissioning and for ordination: Nobody is too good for the lowest service, particularly if that is what following Jesus leads to. Even for such service, your church is about to set you apart.

When Philip and Andrew told Jesus about the Greeks who wanted to see him, he answered them with teaching about dying and serving. In verse 27, Jesus's words become very personal. He picks up the themes found in verse 23, the themes of "the hour" and of "glory."

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[7] Dr. F. Burton Nelson, North Park Theological Seminary professor of theology and ethics and well-known Bonhoeffer scholar, born August 22, 1924, in Hupeh, China, died in Chicago on March 22, 2004.

[8] Rodney Combs, *Bonhoeffer's Cost of Discipleship* (Nashville: Homan Reference, 1999), 32.

[9] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945), 99.

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say?" We hear words parallel to the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane as described in the other three Gospels. We see the true humanity of Jesus as John portrays him. Jesus is fearful. He struggles with the temptation to cry out, "Father, save me from this hour" (John 12:27, ESV).

But his triumph comes in submitting to the Father's plan: "Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:28, NIV).

God answers Jesus's prayer. For the first time in John, the Father speaks from heaven. Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify your name!" Then, a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it and will glorify it again" (John 12:28, NIV). What follows the heavenly voice are the last words that Jesus speaks during his public ministry, and the words that contain the third part of your commission.

Yes, you are being set apart to die, and to serve. You are also being set apart to lift high the cross.

Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:33, NIV). Here, for the third time in John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of being "lifted up"—in chapter 3, in chapter 8, and now again in chapter 12. "Lifted up"—the Greek word also means "exalted." This is a reference to Jesus's death on the cross. Jesus said this, notes the evangelist, "to show the kind of death he was going to die" (John 12:33, NIV).

But in the fourth Gospel, the "lifting up" of Jesus refers to the *total* mystery of Jesus's glorification, one continuous action of ascent. Jesus's return to his Father begins with the crucifixion but is completed only with his resurrection and ascension. And to what end is Jesus to be glorified? For what purpose is he to be lifted up? "And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32, NIV). His being lifted up will lead to the gift of eternal life to all who believe in Jesus. This is the good news!

This is also the foundation of your ordination and commissioning tonight. It is the foundation because it speaks of the Christian missionary enterprise. And as Lesslie Newbigin so eloquently and convincingly declares, "We must recover the sense that the Christian missionary enterprise is the enterprise of the whole Church of God in every land, directed towards the whole world in which it is put."[10]

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[10] Lesslie Newbigin as quoted in Michael W. Goheen, *As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You: J. E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (South Holland, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2000), 316.

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." For Newbigin, one of the premier missionary statesmen of the twentieth century, this verse gives a picture of the Church. The Church is the body that is drawn together by the risen and exalted Christ. And it exists in the world for a purpose! The Church exists in the world everywhere as the agent of Christ's gathering grace. And brothers and sisters, in your positions of leadership within the Covenant Church across the coming decades, you have the privilege and the responsibility of continuing the mission of Jesus.

You and I would do well to hear and heed the warning given by Walter Rauschenbusch. He is most remembered as a seminal thinker of the social gospel movement. What is not often remembered is that he looked to the modern missionary movement as a model for his ministry. From start to finish, mission informed his life's thought and work. Almost one hundred years ago, Rauschenbusch wrote, "If the Church tries to confine itself to theology and the Bible, and refuses its larger mission to humanity, its theology will gradually become mythology, and its Bible a closed book!"[11]

Friends in Christ, don't allow your churches to refuse their larger mission to humanity. Instead, encourage them, help them to lift high the cross, the place where the sin that separates us from God and divides us from one another, is dealt with and put away. The truth is that in being lifted up Jesus draws all people to himself—people of all races—like those Greeks who asked to see him.

But then the question is this: How to make that truth credible? Newbigin answers the question this way: "That truth is made credible only when the witness borne to it is marked, not by the peculiarities of one culture, but by the rich variety of all human culture."[12] So bear witness to the truth and make it credible! Equip your congregations to bear witness to the truth, the truth that, in being lifted up, Jesus draws all people to himself.

As you well know, the "larger mission to humanity" is not defined so much by geography as by people:

- by at least a dozen major cultural families throughout the world,

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[11] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 283.

[12] Lesslie Newbigin, "The Enduring Validity of Cross-Cultural Mission," *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 12, no. 2 (April 1988): 53.

- more than two thousand religions, six thousand languages,
- and thirty thousand distinct societies and cultures,
- not to mention an unknown number of subcultures and countercultures.

And the "home base" of missions is now worldwide.

The defining issue for mission is no longer one of geography, a point of view that insists "We are here" and "They are there." The defining issue is people—all people whom Jesus is drawing to himself, no matter where they are from, no matter where they are now. As one missionary veteran put it, "God is just as concerned about Iranians in Tulsa as Iranians in Tehran." As Nathen Chang[13] no doubt would put it, "God is just as concerned about Chinese people in the Twin Cities as Chinese people in Taiwan and mainland China." The defining issue is people, no matter where they are from, no matter where they are now.

Do you know there are more Muslims in Dearborn, Michigan, than in Mecca? And there are more Muslims in North America than in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates combined! So where is the Muslim world anyway? And do we really want to know? We really do if we are convinced, as is Newbigin, that mission is not a detachable part of the Church's being but is the central meaning of our being.

Indeed, we are here at this hour to celebrate the ministry that Christ has given to the Church in calling men and women to serve in its mission. And, as you know, in the United States and in Canada, the Church's mission becomes broader, more varied, and more complex all the time. Some see God at work in this expanding mission opportunity, and they get excited about it. Others are more likely to blame God for allowing such a mess to come about. They see this multicultural reality more as a threat than as an opportunity.

Samuel Huntington, author of *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*,[14] has recently become a familiar name in certain spheres of influence in Mexico, particularly in the media, among politicians, and in academic circles as well. The cause of the uproar was the publication in March of an essay by this well-known Harvard political scientist titled "The Hispanic Challenge," followed by the brand-new

[13] Nathan Chang is the founder and primary leader of the Covenant Churches of Taiwan.

[14] Samuel Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

book which expanded his views, *Who Are We? The Challenge to America's National Identity*.[15] Huntington believes that there are too many recent immigrants. He specifically is concerned about Mexican immigration, declaring it a threat to the Anglo-Protestant culture that supposedly was the dream of the Founding Fathers. His conviction is that the Mexican people are not adaptable and are hostile to assimilation. That means that the US is on its way to being split into two countries with two distinct cultures and two separate languages. Huntington is passionate about the preservation of an identity. And that concern leads him to promote a concept of racial and cultural purity.

Representative of the many facts and figures that disturb Huntington are these two:

1. In 1998, the name "José" replaced "Michael" as the most popular name for newborn boys, both in California and Texas.
2. By 2040, Hispanics will represent 25 percent of the total population of the United States. They are changing the fabric of the entire country.[16]

Fellow Covenanters, immigration from Latin America, and from other parts of the world as well, is here to stay. The challenges it presents are truly staggering. These challenges are placing increasingly tough demands on this nation's identity and politics. But ultimately, do immigration and multiculturalism pose a threat or offer an opportunity? For us, for the Church, they offer an opportunity—an opportunity to flourish, an opportunity for expanded mission, an opportunity to introduce Jesus, so that he may continue, through us, to draw all people unto himself.

So, rather than sinking into an attitude of fatalism or joining in with disdainful moralism, rather than spreading incendiary claims about immigrants and people of cultures other than our own, rather than contributing to whipping up nativist hysteria—rather than doing any of that, *we can lift high the cross!* And this, dear candidates for commissioning and ordination, is what you are being set apart to help the Evangelical Covenant

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15 Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenge to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

16 Samuel Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge," *Foreign Policy* 141 (March/April 2004): 30–45, https://doi.org/10.2307/4147547. "That'll be about the same time that the United States begins to transition into a 'majority minority' country in which those Americans who are White will be outnumbered by those who are non-White." Source: Ruben Navarrette, "Have We Failed Ourselves? Latinos Just Can't Get Along," *Latino* https://www.latinometro.com/havewefailedourselves.

Church do: to be the agent of Christ's gathering grace!

How prophetic were the words of Krister Stendahl, the bishop of Stockholm, Sweden, spoken to us on the occasion of our denomination's hundredth anniversary in 1985. He said:

> Having been immigrants once, you are called to be a special church, understanding, open to immigrants that now come. The point of the gift, the genius in your history is not the Swedishness, but your remembering what it is to be an alien, and hence able to understand, and serve those who now come to this land.[17]

Yes. Here is the point of the gift, the genius in our history. As we remember what it means to be an alien, we remember that all God's people are spiritually descended from migrants and wanderers, and we lift the cross higher and ever higher.

Thank God, we are headed in the right direction. As Gary Walter wrote in the Church Growth and Evangelism quarterly earlier this year, we are well on the way toward becoming "as diverse as the world the Covenant Church serves."

> Perhaps nowhere is the diversity of the Evangelical Covenant Church more evident than in the growth of ethnic churches—African American, Hispanic, Native Alaskan, Korean, Asian American, Laotian, Sudanese, Vietnamese, in addition to thirty multiethnic congregations.[18]

Ethnic ministries are growing more than twice as fast as the church as a whole, which itself is experiencing its most rapid growth in history.

Sisters and brothers, as you speak your vows and make your respective promises tonight, in the presence of God and this company of witnesses, remember what is important and what is not important. You are being set apart to die, to serve, and to lift high the cross. Remember, then, what is important. And what is not.

Fifty years ago, a sermon preached by Sigurd Westberg appeared in a book called *The Covenant Pulpit*. In 1954, Sig Westberg was a Covenant missionary to Congo. He later served as professor of mission at North Park Seminary and as the Covenant's archivist. His sermon, called "The

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17 Krister Stendahl, keynote address at Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church, Minneapolis, MN, 1985.

18 Gary Walter, *Church Growth and Evangelism Quarterly* (Chicago: 2004) Unpublished.

Attractiveness of the Cross," contains this reminder for us all, and particularly for those of you who are about to be commissioned or ordained:

> Mission, in its roundest meaning, is not a department of the work of the church. It was the very life of the early church. In proportion as it is not the life of the church today, just in that proportion the church is dead. Beside the spread of the Gospel, beside the lifting up of him who draws all people to himself, nothing is important.[19]

Sisters and brothers, remember what is important. *Y que Dios les bendiga.* And may God bless you. Amen.

[19] G. F. Hedstrand, ed. *The Covenant Pulpit: Twelve Sermons for Christian Living* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1954), 121.

A Great Ambition[1]

Howard K. Burgoyne, superintendent of the East Coast Conference, Evangelical Covenant Church

When I was in confirmation class in the early 1970s, we watched the vintage Covenant film *A Great Ambition*.[2] It told the story of our spiritual forebears and their spiritual aspiration to obey the Greatest Commandment while advancing the Great Commission. The Covenant's "Great Ambition" emerged as a response to the Spirit's "Great Awakening." That vision has been formative in my life as a Covenanter and as a Covenant pastor for almost forty years. I've taken that film title as my sermon title tonight.

I've been privileged to serve as a Covenant pastor in churches in Riverside, Rhode Island; Edgebrook and Batavia, Illinois; Saint Paul, Minnesota; and Bellevue, Washington, in over twenty years of parish ministry; and for the last eighteen years, as pastor and superintendent of the East Coast Conference. Thirty-five years ago, I received Holy Orders and was ordained with the laying on of hands as some of you will be tonight. I am privileged to preach this evening from the ordination Bible I was given in 1989. Inside the cover is a book plate with this charge:

> Receive this book: here are words of eternal life. Take them for your guide and declare them to the world. Keep watch over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has appointed you shepherd. Encourage the faithful, restore the lost, build

[1] Note: This sermon was presented at the Covenant ordination service at Gather 2024 in Covington, Kentucky, June 29, 2024. The theme of the 2024 Gather, as mentioned above, was "Faithfully Forward."

[2] *A Great Ambition*, created by Bryce Nelson, Bruce Johnson, and Dick Sundholm (Department of Christian Education, Evangelical Covenant Church, 1974), 15:54. https://vimeo.com/6436445.

> up the body of Christ; that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you may receive the unfading crown of glory.

I asked myself thirty-five years ago, "How will I keep this charge? I ask myself again tonight, "Have I been faithful to keep this charge? What is next?"

I was born into a Covenant family and raised in a Covenant church in Providence, Rhode Island. I was presented to the Lord as an infant, raised by godly parents, enrolled in Sunday school (with perfect attendance!). I first heard God's call to ministry at twelve years of age. I still hear that calling tonight! I was baptized and confirmed at fourteen. I joined the church at fifteen. I went to a Christian college, did an internship, and attended two seminaries to prepare for a life as a pastor.

Yet there were gnawing gaps in my discipleship, and my church community seemed unbothered, or unaware of my growing inconsistency. While the church seemed to be all about discipleship, few seemed to be focused on how to practice it, how we made it visible and practical. Discipleship, I think, was assumed. While we talked a lot about being a "fellowship," it didn't seem to translate into enough honest friendships, ones that invited transparency and vulnerability. I think we hoped programs would disciple people—but programs never do. Only people disciple people, life on life.

There is no fellowship if there is no friendship. The joys of *Life Together* require *The Cost of Discipleship*.[3] I'm here to testify that church coffee and cookies are not what a fellowship consists of. If church coffee and cookies made strong disciples, I'd be completely sanctified! But caffeine and empty calories are no substitute for the life and power of Jesus Christ. I suspect I may not be alone in making this confession. Here, I speak transparently as a disciple and a pastor about closing the gap in our discipleship and our disciple making. I believe it's a key area of focus if we are to move faithfully forward as a movement of the Spirit.

How about you? Have you been well discipled into the fullness of new life in Christ? Have you been nurtured and sustained in the core practices that cultivate the presence of the Spirit and that apply the power of the gospel into the bruised, broken, and dark places in your life?

When the day of Pentecost came, such discipleship was still lacking in the twelve apostles, in the seventy disciples, and in the 120 followers

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[3] Referring here to well-known books by Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2009), and *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Scribner, 1963).

who had been gathered in the upper room. They hadn't arrived either. Some were double-minded and halfhearted. Some were doubtful, and all of them were fearful.

The apostles had been with Jesus from the beginning—some from his baptism, all of them through his ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection. They'd been around the circuit with him for three years, but the spiritual wiring still seemed to be incomplete. They needed to find ways to "take (on) the yoke of Jesus" (Matt 11:29) by the Spirit and to consistently learn from him.

Our theme at Gather this year, "Faithfully Forward," is drawn from Acts 2:42. Acts begins, like Luke's Gospel, with an infancy narrative. The gestation of the church is underway by the Spirit in the womb of Jerusalem, mirroring the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. Mary is also present with the church in Acts. The infant church is being formed by the Spirit of Jesus into his likeness.

Acts, Luke's second book and the sequel to his Gospel, adopts the narrative structure of the book of Judges,[4] which starts at the death of Joshua and the transition to a new generation in the promised land. The cycle of apostasy is summarized in Judges 2:10: "Another generation grew up [after them], who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel."

When we fail to teach our children to walk in the ways of the Lord and when we fail to demonstrate a living faith, we bequeath disaster to them. Their failure of commission begins with our sins of omission. Judges describes the people's repeating pattern of faithlessness in four steps: sin, bondage, crying out to God, and God's gift of saving intervention. The remainder of the book is structured by the stories of prophetic leaders—men and women—who stood in the gap and struggled to disciple an unruly nation that resisted their great commission. It was a generation of failed discipleship, with but a few bright days of deliverance sprinkled in.

It's a chronicle we might entitle "Unfaithfully Forward." One step forward, two steps back. I'm persuaded that Luke adopts the narrative structure of Judges, not because he's a plagiarist, but because he's an inspired observer of Scripture and history. He makes a compelling point by offering a counterpoint. The history of Israel is here to teach us by both successes and failures, by contrast or complement.

[4] See Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010).

The book of Acts begins, like the book of Judges, with the transition of leadership from Jesus (a new Joshua) to the next generation, called to carry forward faithfully. That perceptive pattern of faithfulness is built on a singular and solid foundation. In a word, they "attached" themselves in four ways to the new reality of life in the Spirit, to be described below. To be a disciple is to be an attaché to Jesus.

Discipleship without heartfelt devotion is actually an attachment disorder built on legalism. Discipleship with devotion is built on grace by the Spirit. The rigors of discipleship unavoidably demand our devotion of blood, sweat, and tears. There's a narrow path to walk, a cross to bear, and a self to crucify—but we never walk that path alone. His community bears his yoke. Our discipleship demands openness to the fourfold movement of the Spirit.

Luke describes this recurring pattern of discipleship as one that assumed both priority and practice in the Jerusalem church and was scalable from 120 to thousands of people. It would scale in size and transfer from culture to culture, from Jerusalem to Antioch to Rome. Luke outlines the repeating pattern of faithful devotion to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. The remainder of the book is structured by the stories of prophetic women and men who stood in the gap to advance discipleship in carrying out their great commission. The early church, fully devoted, was open to the Spirit in these four ways:

1. To receive the mind of Christ: observing the apostles' *new teaching* (*didachē*)
2. To be the hands of Christ: welcoming one another in a *new ethic* (*koinōnia*)
3. To know the heart of Christ: serving one another at a *new table* (Eucharist)
4. To pray in union with Christ: joining in continuous prayer in a *new temple* (liturgy)

Where did these four practices come from? Were they adopted by a committee? Were they the brainchild of Peter, Paul, or Mary? They came from the faithful wisdom of the Spirit of Jesus. They are the social version of the fourfold pattern of Jesus's own journey. The core four practices of the early church map directly onto the Jesus pattern of incarnation, ministry, passion (death/resurrection), and his ascension: apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers.

Our union with the incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended Son of God is the central fact of our salvation, and it is also the central fact of the church. Our union with Christ is the center of our spiritual life and of the Spirit's strategy for discipleship and mission. The church finds its life and mission in Jesus Christ alone, in the power of the Spirit alone, and in the love of the Father alone. All that we are and do arises from the overflow of living in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.

These steps outline the stanzas in the hymn Paul includes in Philippians 2:5–11. Later the pattern will shape the confessions of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

In his incarnation, Jesus emptied himself of self-importance. The first step of a disciple is self-denial, a self-emptying that makes room for the Word. Jesus, in his ministry, became a servant to sinners. The second step of a disciple is to take on the yoke of Jesus and to learn of him as a servant. Jesus, in his ministry, was obedient through suffering to the point of death—death on a cross. The third step of a disciple is to be crucified and raised with Christ, living a new life by faith, reconciled and reconciling with friend and enemy alike. The risen Jesus, in his ministry, was raised and restored to God's right hand to intercede and reign over all creation. The fourth step of a disciple, seated with Christ, is to live and pray and reign with Christ, worshiping the Father with him, and through him.

In a word, the formative pattern of Jesus's life becomes the formative pattern of the Church's life and her confession of Jesus in gospel narrative, hymns, and creeds. To go deeper in Christ follows the same pattern by which we grow further in mission. It is the logic of the logos. "The way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) are progressive. As we walk in the way of Jesus, we may apprehend the truth of Jesus, and we will know the life of Jesus. The order is not negotiable or reversible. God has resolved to reveal himself in step with reconciling us to himself. God will not be known clinically as an object; rather, he only discloses his divine glory to us experientially, as the subject of our worship.

Do our own lives and congregational priorities frame our discipleship and our disciple-making by the patterns revealed in the life of Jesus? What priorities are represented in our calendars and church community? Does the pattern for faithful discipleship remain central, or has it been lost?

The churches I served as pastor filled their calendars with a host of activities and events. Though joyful and wonderful, these activities often missed the mark as far as taking people deeper in Christ and into community with other believers. When I think of all the hours spent

organizing seasonal festivals, holiday events, Lucia pageants, community musicals and theater, and special concert series! They were all memorable and good, but honestly, all were secondary to keeping the main thing the main thing. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit introduces a fresh formation rather than a new formula.

These are now core "marks" of our baptism into Jesus. This is neither utopian nor unrealistic but a new trajectory for the whole human race, born of water and the Spirit for a life of freedom, unity, and fidelity. It's a chronicle we might title "Faithfully Forward." A great devotion to discipleship energizes a great ambition to a shared life and mission. It was true in 1885, and it can be true again for 2025!

What will future historians of the Covenant write about our generation in Covenant life and mission? What great ambitions will drive the Covenant in the years to come? What may be required for us to move faithfully forward? This is not an abstract theological question. It is the question for the whole church.

So I'll ask you again, what great ambitions will drive the Covenant in the years to come? What may be required of you, me, and the next generation to move us faithfully forward? How much of our blood, how much of our sweat, and how many of our tears will be shed? These practices and patterns of Jesus propelled the early church forward in the power of the Holy Spirit—we must follow their lead.

Mind of Christ: *Didachē*

The first focal point of the early church's devotion was to the apostles' teaching—in Greek, the *didachē*.[5] Like Jesus in his incarnation, the apostles first emptied themselves so they could receive the word of another. *Kenosis* is the Greek word used to describe the process when the self empties of self-importance, assuming the form of a humble servant who looks to the master in obedience.

In Christ the fullness of God dwells in bodily form (Col 1:19). Yet in becoming the human, Jesus, God the Son, emptied himself (Phil 2:7), learning obedience under the pressures of a fractured and fallen world. As he lived in loving union with his Abba, his faithfulness was tested as he overcame trials, temptations, and the testing of his faith in God. He earned his doctoral stripes in suffering, turning his anguish into a profound source of healing. Even as the powers of sin, darkness, and death

[5] Discussed here are the core teachings of the apostles (*didachē*) and not a reference to the anonymous early church document *The Didache*, outlining the way of life and the way of death, the sacraments, and church order.

assaulted him, he maintained his profession of faith in his Father's love.

The disciples were open to the mind of Christ, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching. The church's devotion began by giving attention to the incarnate Word of God into whom they were baptized. The gospel of Jesus begins with the incarnation,[6] with the Word made flesh, just as the early church begins with attention to the teachings of the incarnate One who is full of grace and truth. God's greatest truth is wrapped in the gift of a person: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus did not come just to give us truths. He came to be with us, to call us to come to him, learn of him, live in him.

We are to become observant followers of Jesus. This means we hear and hold his words in order to *do* his words. "Let the Word dwell in you richly" (Col 3:16). The Great Commission to make disciples requires "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20).

It is not enough to genuflect or to say, "Lord, Lord" (Matt 7:21). It is required that we listen to him, and that we do what he says (Mark 9:7). Jesus is not an empty figurehead we can fill with our own agenda. He already has a profound philosophy, a breathtaking theology, a prophetic social agenda, a justice-oriented cultural platform, and an unapologetic ecological basis for politics called "the kingdom of God." To claim a high view of Jesus as the "Christ" but to remain ignorant or unresponsive to his teaching is a travesty and treason in the church. It is a form of identity theft. This is what a wolf in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15) does to deceive the vulnerable: to assume the image, but not the content of Jesus.

The shepherds of the church have been entrusted with a great deposit of faith: namely, the sayings of Jesus (150-plus in the Gospels), the parables of Jesus (forty recorded in the Gospels) and the miracles of Jesus (thirty-seven stories in the Gospels). The four Gospels are a gold mine entrusted to us—Jesus Christ is pure gold!

In the mind of Jesus, we encounter a rare and exquisite pattern. It is countercultural and encoded in our baptism. It bears witness to one humble in incarnation, obedient in ministry, faithful in suffering (crucifixion), raised in glory, ascended in victory, and reigning at God's right hand. This is the core of the apostles' teaching; it is the logic of Christ's way, the genius of Christ's truth, and the genesis of Christ's life. The mind

[6] See the persuasive historical and theological work of John Clark and Marcus Peter Johnson, *The Incarnation of God: The Mystery of the Gospel as the Foundation of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

of Christ and the way of Christ established the pathway of repentance in the early church. The apostles repented from sins, past practices, and patterns of living, and they repented into a new way of life together. Being baptized, they bore the fruits of repentance. This is the way of the kingdom of God. Repenting into a new way of life is what pours the apostles' teaching into a new social reality called "the fellowship."

Hands of Christ: *Koinōnia*

The early church was open to being the hands of Christ. Their devotion to the fellowship committed them to do the works of Jesus. They continued to gather,[7] evangelize, and disciple one another in the works of Jesus. The apostles added to the preaching and teaching, the works of caring, healing, feeding, sheltering, and delivering people from oppression and injustice.

The incarnation brought divine revelation through the apostles' teaching; the ministry and mission of Jesus brought human reconciliation through their devotion to the fellowship. *Koinōnia* is a concrete economic partnership on earth, based on what is true in heaven: Our names are written alongside one another in the Lamb's book of life! We've all been given to drink of the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). We are his body, his bride, and his people.

The charismatic movement of the Spirit began to take shape organically. *Koinōnia* led to *diaconia*—a common life led to a common ministry. A true proof of the Spirit at work is the unity and depth of our partnership in common life and global mission. The urgency of the worldwide missionary task cannot be achieved outside of the task being undertaken by the Church in unity of spirit and purpose. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one purse were joined together in one fellowship. Unity of teaching led to unity of mission; a shared economy formed a community of love, mercy, and justice. All this bears witness to the world before we even speak a word.

Luke's first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor" (Luke 6:20), appears to be the first plank of obedience in the foundation of the early church. Addressing the plight of the poor was a jubilee mission priority for Jesus (Luke 4:18). Moving faithfully forward, the apostles, like Jesus, did not forget the poor (Gal 2:10). Those who had ample resources shared with those who lacked enough to survive. With great power the apostles

[7] In the Hebrew Scriptures, the "gathering" of God's people is the fruit of "returning" to the Lord.

preached the resurrection. With great joy they cared for the poor. The early church was so earnest in this regard that Luke reports, "God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:33). The acute threat of poverty was defeated by the grace of generosity. In Christ, a new birth, a new life, and a new community are part and parcel of the same whole.

The church was becoming an ecosystem and an economy in the world—a witness to a new social creation. The economic nature of the fellowship is described by Luke in Acts 3, 4, and 5 in two examples of donated property and giving to the needs of the poor. One example is positive (the example of Joseph, also known as Barnabas [Acts 4:36]), and one is negative (the conspiracy of Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 5:1–11]). The principle of *koinōnia* is illustrated in practices that energized and electrified the church with both awe and fear.

Heart of Christ: Eucharist

The third movement of devotion is *eucharist*: we become open to know the heart of Christ in the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread is the countercultural celebration of shared and sacred meals in the presence of Jesus in our homes and at our tables. It is the ancient practice of hospitality made universal and radicalized to be as inclusive, intercultural, and interclass as possible. The word embodies the spirit of a great thanksgiving, *eucharisteō*, "to give thanks."

It is significant that one of the essential elements in the recurring life of the early church was overflowing thankfulness to God for new life in Christ. An attitude of gratitude overflowed, even amid hardship, toil, and the threat of persecution. The solidarity of the church with the risen Lord was seen daily in the open heart and open home practices of these first believers.

Jesus began his discipleship ministry by inviting a few of John the Baptizer's disciples to spend the day with him where he was staying (John 1:35–42). In continuity, the church was always to be an open fellowship of radical hospitality and welcome. The fourfold actions of Jesus at table with his disciples formed the fourfold pattern of liturgy at the Lord's Supper: take, bless, break, and eat. "This is my body, broken for you" (Luke 22:19).

To be devoted to "the breaking of bread" signifies a commitment to what later becomes known as a sacramental life, including the ongoing mystery of the cruciform and risen way of Jesus. Jesus sat at table with sinners and broke bread with them. To break bread with one another as

a devoted practice requires that we be always oriented toward reconciliation and forgiveness. This is extremely countercultural in our climate of angry partisanship and fear of strangers. "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt 5:9) is also one of the planks in the foundation of the early church.

Without the gift of forgiveness and the ministry of reconciliation the church would never have survived the first century. The Roman Colosseum would have been the last word on those early Christians. But today, the Colosseum is merely an archaeological site whereas the church reaches around the world. Forgiveness and the invitation to break bread together prevail. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one purse, one table, one body.

Daily breaking bread together in our homes is a constant rehearsal on earth for what we will live like forever in the kingdom. Integration, reconciliation, and good digestion apparently go hand in hand. A cup of cold water still carries the emblem of Jesus forward in a thirsty world. A necessary requirement of living in such a close and caring community is that we join our life with the lives of others. There is no enduring fellowship without longsuffering friendship. Such fellowship and friendship cross all discriminating boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, relationship status, and gender.

In Psalm 23 Israel confesses, "You set a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (v. 5). In Jesus Israel confesses, "You teach us to love our enemies and to pray for them, to do good to them, and not to return evil upon them" (Matt 5:44–45). In Jesus our enemies become friends we invite to sit at table and to break bread with us. We are reconciled in the Good Shepherd, and our cup overflows.

Pray with Christ: Liturgy

The prayers of the early church were turbocharged by the ascension and reign of Jesus as Lord. They now had an Advocate seated at God's right hand (Ps 110:1; Heb 1:3–4), bending the ear of their Abba Father in continuous intercession for the needs of the church's life and mission. The early church prayed in their upper room, in the temple courts, and from house to house (three to seven times a day! [Ps 119:164]). In Acts 3 Peter and John even heal a lame man while on their way to the afternoon hour of prayer.

Being devoted to prayer is not limited to a discrete practice of how to pray or what to say. Rather, prayer becomes a way of life in which we listen to God and live in continuous encounter and awareness that God is at the center of all things, at all times. It is a living tradition.

Mary, the mother of our Lord, was part of the Jerusalem church at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). I'd like to think she taught those early believers a thing or two about prayer.[8] Her faith, contemplation, and obedience formed a great foundation for schooling others in the practices of prayer.

Devotion to the apostles' teaching and to prayer bind into one fabric the Word from above and the response from below. These practices weave together a pattern of grace into our souls. Devotion to the Word and prayer establish an interior framework, a backbone strong enough for living and supporting an exterior life.

Prayer enters us into the conversation that is always underway within the intimacy of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Prayer is the exercise of a joyful union with God in Christ. God is pleased to manifest his presence when we pray. If we grow weak in prayer, we become anemic in power. I'm grieved as I observe the impoverishment of prayer in so many of our churches. Our services are sparsely sprinkled with prayer. We rarely gather primarily to pray. We use prayer, but we don't give ourselves to prayer, fasting, or seasons of seeking God earnestly. Why is this? Why is the one thing most central to transformation the thing most often avoided? It is because prayer is in opposition to the flesh—a life lived independent of God. The flesh, so defined, always stands in opposition to surrendering in prayer. The flesh thrives on an awkward autonomy. The Spirit thrives in graceful dependency. In prayer we continuously welcome Christ to settle into our lives as Lord. Pastors, the primary gift you bring to your congregations is not your intellect, nor is it your personal charm. The primary gift you bring to your congregations is your devotion to Jesus Christ!

So, what do we all do with this? What are you going to do with this?

Covenant pastors, preachers, and lay leaders: How will you help move the Covenant faithfully forward in your ministry, in your communities, in your congregations, and in your regional conference? What does repentance before the Lord and a collective return to the Lord require? Are we yet a church open to the living Spirit of the risen Jesus? A church open to the Spirit of Jesus will move faithfully forward. Let us take our cue from Luke who tells us how the Spirit leads us faithfully forward. In Acts 2:43 the apostles' teaching was demonstrated daily: "Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles." Jesus's teaching was demonstrated by the believers in acts of healing love and miraculous mercy.

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[8] See Luke 1:38, 46–55 for examples of Mary's surrender and praise in prayer.

Ministry in the name of Jesus was in session day to day. It didn't remain just a classroom teaching but ministered in the temple courts, the city streets, towns, villages, and synagogues. When Jesus was raised, not just his body but his public ministry was restored—and continued through the growing church (Acts 2:44–45). The fellowship was not sentimental but sent. It was public, inclusive, and practical. Luke says: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need" (Acts 2:44–45). The church's open hearts and open homes were centered in the living Christ, not in doctrine. The living Word is the living host at his table. Luke says: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46). The church, with open ears and open mouth, prayed the words of Scripture and prayed with the living Word; a priesthood lifting up holy hands together in prayers that shook the neighborhood and called upon the power of God to thwart evil and advance God's kingdom.

Luke says they were "praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). The church was living out of her baptism into the person of Jesus, and out of the way of Jesus, the truth of Jesus, and the life of Jesus.

Does this look, sound, and act like a Covenant church? Does it look, sound, and act like a Covenant minister? Does this at all describe your ministry, your church, and your life?

Over the last eighteen years of serving as a conference superintendent, I've come to walk and work alongside churches in diverse contexts from Virginia to Vermont, and from Maryland to Maine. I delight in congregations who are focused, energized, and "on the move" by the Spirit. I agonize over churches who are distracted, depleted, and yet defensive. Their ministries are built on traditions that have long outlived their liveliness or usefulness. They may be awash in activities but are anemic and lethargic in spirit. Whatever patterns they are following, it is difficult to observe the way of Jesus, the way of the Spirit, and the priorities of discipleship, justice, and evangelism.

What's the difference? These churches have lost their first love. Their patterns no longer produce fruit that will last. If our witness has become impoverished, is it not related to our neglect of the way of Jesus? Have we forgotten, or worse, forsaken, our baptism into one Lord? The living

Word and the living Spirit agree and have a word and an invitation for the Covenant Church.

A great ambition is not just our heritage; it is also our opportunity to embrace. First, we must renew our devotion to discipleship. We must renew our baptismal covenant with one Lord and one faith, a renewed devotion to the pattern and the priorities of the risen Christ. Let us pray for and welcome a renewed great awakening, by the Spirit of the living God! Such a great ambition can only follow such a great awakening! Amen.

Toward a Pietist Homiletic

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The founding theologians of historic Lutheran Pietism, Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) and August Herman Francke (1663–1727), sought to clarify the meaning of the true Christian life in a society in which every child born into a Lutheran family was automatically deemed a member of the Church. This doctrine in seventeenth-century Germany often resulted in nominal Christian belief and practice. Pietists contended that simply being on a church register and sitting in a church pew were not enough. More is required to be a follower of Christ, an active disciple, and a true Christian. Pietists pushed for a *living faith*, and against what they called "dead orthodoxy." Assent to correct doctrine means nothing if it does not work itself out in Christlike living.

These unique theological emphases come together to make a compelling homiletic. Given that Pietism was spread primarily through sermons and tracts, perhaps this is not surprising. As we consider how to preach through modern challenges to contemporary congregations, historic Pietism's theological emphases offer us a helpful way to think about preaching. Here I offer an overview of Pietist theology and lay out an original Pietist homiletic, concluding with reflections on my implementation of that homiletic.

Pietism's Main Theological Themes

Pietism was not a movement built on novel theologies. Pietists were not interested in constructing another long set of doctrines or instituting another Protestant denomination. What is interesting, and what makes the study of Pietism worthwhile for us, is what ends up occupying their pastoral and theological attention. Roger Olson and Christian Collins Winn write, "Other Christian movements share many of these features

or hallmarks, but Pietism puts them together distinctively and emphasizes them in a manner most others do not."[1] Pietists did not invent but instead refurbished and restored those parts of Christian theology and practice they felt had become tarnished, calcified, or fallen into disrepair.

What we see when we drill into fundamental Pietist theology is not a discrete list of doctrine and dogma. Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom says that Pietism is best understood as an ethos, something that is "caught, not taught."[2] A pietistic ethic of life is not "decision-based," meaning it is not primarily concerned with "what should I do in this specific circumstance?" Rather, it is virtue-based, focusing on "who ought I to be?"[3] From that answer flow many specific applications, which occupied a great deal of the Pietists' time.

What the Christian *does* comes from who the Christian *is*. This is one of the hallmarks of Pietist theology, what C. John Weborg calls the "convergence of Pietism," belief and action converging in a living faith.[4] Weborg writes, "The Pietists wanted to restore a balance; bring doctrine and life into congruity and pastor and people together around the scripture as the source of promise and power."[5] Pietists worked to bring together many threads into a common weave, with God as both the weaver and the pattern. This was how the Pietists intended to renew the whole church and the world.[6] They wanted Christians, both clergy and laypeople, to integrate "intellectual belief, heartfelt commitment, and the practical living out of one's faith in love," as Christopher Gehrz and Mark Pattie write. "To put it simply, such a faith engages and enlivens one's head *and* heart *and* hands."[7]

Practical piety, or *praxis pietatis* as the Pietists would have written, is the central heartbeat of Pietism.[8] Underneath all the other theological

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1 Roger E. Olson and Christian T. Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism: Retrieving an Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 107.

2 Jane Chao Pomeroy, and Cathy Norman Peterson, "We Are Pietists" with Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, in *Love the Cov*, November 16, 2021. Podcast, website, 38:11. https://covchurch.org/2021/11/16/we-are-pietists-with-michelle-clifton-soderstrom/.

3 Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys: The Christian Ethic of Pietism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 15–16.

4 Weborg, quoted in Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 16.

5 C. John Weborg, "Pietism: 'The Fire of God Which Flames in the Heart of Germany,'" *The Covenant Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1985): 3–29.

6 Christopher Gehrz and Mark Pattie III, *The Pietist Option: Hope for the Renewal of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 8.

7 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option,* 64; emphasis original.

8 Ergon W. Gerdes, "Theological Tenets of Pietism," *Covenant Quarterly* 36, nos. 1, 2 (1976): 37.

concepts that occupied Pietists' attention was the constant drumbeat of righteous practicality. When Francke needed to distill the essence of the Christian life and the goal of our spiritual growth, he said: "Quite simply remember you would 1) believe, 2) do, 3) hope what is taught, commanded, and promised in scripture."[9]

In addition to shaping an individual's spiritual maturity, Pietist theology broadly follows those three contours: believing, doing, and hoping. In seeking to answer the question of what constitutes a true Christian, Pietism says it is one who believes rightly, does rightly, and hopes rightly. Believing, doing, and hoping will be our framework and guide for understanding Pietism's unique theological emphases and impulses as we move toward a Pietist homiletic.

Believing

The guiding, orthodox principles of the Lutheran Reformation—including sola scriptura—were foundational for the originators of Lutheran Pietism.[10] They worked tirelessly to identify and articulate doctrine grounded only in Scripture. Dale Brown writes in *Understanding Pietism*, "Pietism exalted the supremacy of the Bible above all other external standards."[11] Such an intense focus on Scripture over and against human teaching put Pietists outside the norm of seventeenth-century Lutheranism. Spener was adamant, however, writing, "The word of God remains the seed from which all that is good must grow."[12] What the true Christian believes must come from Scripture, which led the Pietists to develop a full pneumatology. Spener felt that the Spirit operated only through Scripture, and Scripture was only effective in transformation of the believer through the incessant work of the Holy Spirit.[13] Spirit and Scripture work hand in hand; both must be engaged for true understanding.

With right belief coming solely from Scripture and the discernment of the Spirit, Pietists developed a unique way of handling disagreements. They knew that Scripture can be interpreted in various ways, so they distinguished between what was essential Christian doctrine and what was

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9 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 90.

10 This was not necessarily true for Radical Pietists. See Douglas Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore: 2013), for a description of this and other branches of Pietism.

11 Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1996), 46.

12 Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996), 91.

13 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 50.

not. Spener summarized this position with the Latin saying *in necessari veritas (unitas), in non necessarii libertas, in omnibus caritas*.[14] Olson and Collins Winn render this well in English as "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things charity (love)."[15] Right belief includes the freedom to disagree about secondary issues and remain unified. Primary issues, for Pietists, are often tied up in individual salvation.[16]

It is perhaps not surprising then that right belief is shaped as an individual moves through stages of faith. Having moved from a corporate to an inwardly focused spirituality, the emphases in Pietist belief tended to fall on inward, individual experiences.[17] Spener wrote of a person moving through three stages when being saved: "the kindling of faith, justification and adoption as children of God, and the completion of the new [person]."[18] We will move through these stages as conversion, regeneration, and completion to understand Pietism's emphasis on right belief.

Conversion lies at the heart of the whole Pietist movement, and Pietists understood its complex nature. They sought to renew the church by growing true Christians. A true conversion is the beginning of the journey that distinguishes between real discipleship and mere nominal adherence.[19] A true conversion produces passionate followers of Christ. However, Pietists understood that conversion is more than simply the start of that journey, more than an initial mental commitment to Jesus. Pietists saw the Christian life as one of many conversions. We do not surrender our complete selves to Christ in one single moment, nor does complete faith in him spring up in us instantly. Ever and again, Jesus's followers are presented with opportunities to abandon our unbelief and to trust more completely.

Experiencing Jesus personally was considered an essential element of true conversion for the Pietist movement. Only those who had directly encountered Jesus and knew his salvation for themselves could be counted as a Christian.[20] Emotional expression evidenced true conversion. Many

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14 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 33.

15 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 104.

16 Theodore G. Tappert, "Introduction: The Times, the Man, the Book," in *Pia Desideria* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 26.

17 Gerdes, "Theological Tenets of Pietism," 51.

18 Manfred Waldemar Kohl, "*Wiedergeburt* as the Central Theme in Pietism," *The Covenant Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (1974): 2.

19 Jonathan Strom, *German Pietism and the Problem of Conversion* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), loc.112, Kindle.

20 Donald C. Frisk, "Theology and Experience in Early Pietism," *Covenant Quarterly* 27, nos. 1–4 (1970): 17.

early Pietists, Count Nikolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) in particular, described conversion as bringing about "joyfulness" that continued throughout the converted one's life.[21] Francke's own conversion was of this sort, a deeply emotional encounter with Jesus that moved him from disbelief and despair to the joy of faith in a single, radical evening.[22]

True conversion produces true discipleship, a changed life that is lived differently since meeting Christ and surrendering to him. Francke highlighted this when he said,

> We do not ask, "Are you converted? When were you converted?" But we ask, "What does Christ mean to you? What have you experienced personally with God? Is Christ necessary to you in your daily life?" And it is, to be certain, very likely that one does not know at all the period of time (of one's conversion).[23]

So essential to the Pietist is conversion of the whole life that one can only tell if he or she has been converted in retrospect, after a person has died. There is a decisive moment, to be sure, though as with so much of Pietist theology it must be born out in subsequent action. Thus, the Pietist emphasis on regeneration.

The theological doctrine of regeneration, which the Pietists often called "new birth" or "rebirth," was not new, but it had been overlooked and underutilized. The Lutheran Church of the time, following in Martin Luther's footsteps, highlighted justification over all else. Spener believed the church would only be reformed by emphasizing regeneration and its subsequent sanctification.[24] While the rest of the Protestant world focused on how one becomes a Christian, Spener highlighted what comes after conversion, the life of increasing holiness and devotion. Spener wrote in *Pia Desideria*, "I regard this as the principal thing. Our whole Christian religion consists of the inner [person] or the new [person], whose soul is faith and whose expressions are the fruits of life."[25]

Regeneration was the driving theological force of Pietism, not simply as

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21 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 94.

22 For a full description of Francke's conversion and a thorough treatment of Pietism's unique take on conversion, see Strom, *German Pietism*, 2018.

23 Francke, quoted in Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 78.

24 Denise D. Kettering-Lane, "Philipp Spener and the Role of Women in the Church: The Spiritual Priesthood of All Believers in German Pietism," *Covenant Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2017): 5–6.

25 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 116.

a doctrine but as a vital experience of the Christian.[26] Our new birth must be felt and lived. As Gerdes wrote, "New Birth, for Spener is marked by a new 'way,' a new nature, that slowly replaces the old one. It is a process of growth, a renewing of conduct that is lived out 'horizontally.'"[27] Here again we see the great convergence of Pietism. The Christian life is one of increasing holiness, which begins at the moment of justification and then continues.

Pietists are quick to point out that regeneration comes from faith and is a gift from God. As Clifton-Soderstrom writes, "The doctrine of regeneration allowed Spener, and subsequently other Pietists, to cling to faith alone as the basis of and motivation for action in the ethical life."[28] We are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone, without human effort or input. To be fully redeemed, that is for salvation to work its way through us, we must be changed from the inside out. God graciously gives us an encounter with Jesus, and from that experience we are moved toward Christlikeness.[29] Brown summarizes it well: "In the mysterious process of regeneration there is a moment of complete passivity in a person which gives room to the omnipotent working of God."[30] This work of God, however, requires us to be co-participants.[31]

For Pietists, changes from sanctification happen in a certain direction; it is not random change for the sake of change. We are moved toward Christlikeness in every area of our lives. This is the Pietists' idea of "completion."

The life of the Christian is "completed" when it is wholly transformed. Completion is as tied to regeneration as regeneration is tied to conversion. For the Pietist, the process that starts conversion always has a definite direction and orientation. Salvation is an experience of transformation through an encounter with the Holy Spirit by faith, where the believer personally appropriates God's grace.[32] That personal experience of salvation and faith translates into an individual, lifelong commitment to Christ, in which the true Christian becomes like him.

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26 Bruce Leon Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 329.

27 Gerdes, "Theological Tenets of Pietism," 28–29. "Horizontally" here meaning our relationships with others.

28 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 33.

29 Weborg, "Pietism: 'The Fire of God,'" 15.

30 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 67.

31 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 33.

32 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 89.

In emphasizing a theology of human completion, Pietists highlight transformation over information. This is the primary goal of God's revelation to us in Jesus and his communication through Scripture.[33] Transformation comes from intimate communion with God. We share our deepest selves, with all our sin and sinfulness, and we feel the Holy Spirit work there to bring about change for the better. When we are transformed, or rather as we are transforming, we will feel close to him. Quoting Spener, Olson writes, "Pietism was, and at its best is, about inward transformation by God through repentance and faith, which results in renewed affections, or feelings about God and the 'things of God.'"[34] While emotions were not the *goal* of Pietism, they were a convincing proof of one's true conversion and true Christianity. Sanctification toward completion brings our internal life, the realm of both thoughts and feelings, into ever greater conformity with Jesus.

Orthodoxy that lacks a lived and felt piety amounts to what Pietists called "dead orthodoxy."[35] Dead orthodoxy is an entirely cerebral faith, with no life change or heart change. It is possible to agree with all correct theology, all right doctrine, all church dogma and yet still not be converted as a follower of Jesus. Pietism "insists that without convertive piety, devotion that arises from and deepens the transforming personal relationship with God in the 'inner man,' doctrine and theology amount to little more than useless speculation."[36]

To avoid uselessly speculating about God and to achieve completion, Pietists strongly engaged a personal relationship with Jesus. The life of faith is primarily about a relationship with a living God who is active in an individual's life and in the present world. "True Christianity cannot be found in a relationship to God that is wholly mediated by symbols, rituals, institutions, and the like," write Olson and Collins Winn. "The true Christian relationship with God may include those, but it cannot be reduced to what they do. It is at its core unmediated, direct, and personal."[37] This is why the person of Jesus became so central to Pietist theology. Phyllis Tickle draws this out in her introduction to a collection of Pietist writings, saying, "It's probably not an exaggeration to say that while 'Christ' was central to Pietism, 'Jesus'…by virtue of

33 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 183.
34 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 3.
35 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 6.
36 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 183.
37 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 10.

being more personal, was more central."[38] Centered on Jesus, Pietists keenly felt their interpersonal relationship with him. That relationship drove conversion and regeneration and was the center of what Pietists considered right belief.

Pietism's emphasis on relationship did not stop at one's relationship with God. Relationships with other people, particularly other Christians, matter a great deal, particularly as the Christian moves toward completion.[39] This is to be lived out in the spiritual priesthood of all believers, one of Pietism's most-loved tenets. According to Weborg, "No doctrine was more persistently dealt with than the priesthood of all believers, and no effort was spared in attempting to effect a proper use of this doctrine."[40] This priesthood includes everyone, male and female, and presupposes that each person already possesses gifts from the Holy Spirit and that everyone participates in all aspects of ministry, except the ordination to Word and sacrament. All are baptized on equal footing, all take up the yoke with Jesus, and all are commanded to go out into the world to make disciples.

Pietists often mingle together what others might try to keep separate. Is the life of faith primarily about believing or about doing? A Pietist would say "both." Doing must be a part of a truly Christian life and if it is absent, one would wonder if that person has been converted. But action for its own sake is equally misguided. Spener embodied this tension, knowing that "true belief is not so much felt emotionally as known by its fruits of love and obedience to God,"[41] and that "outer faith without inner life would not do what the evangelistic mission of the church was supposed to do, namely live a life that witnesses to the truth of Christ."[42] Maintaining the balance and tension of belief and action is the goal of spiritual completion. Gehrz and Pattie summarize this well: "Engaging the heart along with the head was a key emphasis for the early Pietists. It is clear, though, that their ultimate aim was a life transformed….A faith that makes sense in one's head and even brings warm sentiment to the heart is still not a living faith unless it makes a difference in how

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38 Phyllis Tickle, in Emilie Griffin, Peter C. Erb, eds., *The Pietists: Selected Writings* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), ix.

39 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 6.

40 C. John Weborg, "Pietism: A Question of Meaning and Vocation," *The Covenant Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1983): 61.

41 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 76.

42 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 36.

one lives."[43] So believing flows directly into doing, and, as we will see later, moves into hoping.

Doing

Pietists were relentlessly practical, and their theology reflected this emphasis. Friederich Christoph Oetinger, a German Pietist who lived from 1702 to 1782, wrote, "All God's ways end in the flesh."[44] Right belief was only ever the beginning of the Christian life, the first step, with right action following as the second. If true Christianity is walking, a single step is not enough. We must take one step and then a second and then back again, alternating between these essential, foundational legs of belief and action.

As with many aspects of Pietist theology, these two steps were intermingled. Pietists were passionate about profession and practice remaining in congruence. This was seen in Christians' actual lives, not merely in systematized doctrine.[45] Right belief cannot be separated from right action, as one might memorize a poem and recite it by rote. Pietists grounded this ethic in Galatians 5:6, which reads in part, "all that matters is faith active in love." A true, saving faith works itself out in love; if loving action is not present, the Pietist wonders if real faith is there. As Weborg writes, "Faith, hope, and love are not just what one has; they are also what one is in relation to others."[46] Congruence between stated beliefs and actual behavior is where our faith and God's ways are enfleshed.

Spener emphasized the usefulness of faith. He left behind what he considered the overly philosophical theology of the previous century in favor of an "apostolic simplicity," emphasizing practical application for the Christian life.[47] "Theology," he wrote, "is a practical discipline," and all theological education should be tailored to the practice of faith.[48] This was the third of his six recommendations for reforming the church.[49] Spener and later Pietists' emphasis on the convergence of belief and doing found unique expression in their ever-present conventicles and their heavy use of the spiritual priesthood of all believers.

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43 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 71.
44 Olson, and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 78. Gerdes renders this quotation as "Corporality is the end of all the ways of God," in Gerdes, "Theological Tenets of Pietism," 52.
45 Weborg, "Pietism: 'The Fire of God,'" 4.
46 Weborg, "Pietism: A Question of Meaning and Vocation," 59–60.
47 Tappert, "Introduction," 25.
48 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 105.
49 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 95.

Spener's *collegia pietatis*, or conventicles, represent the Pietists' mixture of faith and action. The small group would meet a day or so after Sunday worship to summarize and then discuss the sermon.[50] Using what Weborg calls an "activistic reading of scripture," the members spent time discussing how that text could be applied to their lives, "how one is to enact and to embody scripture."[51] There wasn't much in the way of ministerial oversight or even direction. These believers gathered for mutual support as they all pursued holiness and godliness together.[52] As Frisk states, in these small groups "little emphasis fell on technical theological issues but rather on practical helpfulness. The goal of these *'koinonia'* groups was the development of personal insight and spiritual maturity in dependence upon the Holy Spirit."[53]

These conventicles were, ultimately, an exercise in the priesthood of all believers, one of Pietism's most discussed theological positions. It was here that lay Christians lived out that theology, caring for each other's spiritual wellbeing, correcting each other (or even the pastor!), and encouraging each other.[54] Here was the proving ground where Pietist belief met Pietist action. As the Holy Spirit transformed individual laypeople, unique gifts would arise. Pietists put a premium on those gifts, encouraging lay participation in nearly every area of the church and as agents of ecclesial, political, social, or educational change.

This emphasis on action did not slip into works righteousness, however. Pietists were adamant that every aspect of salvation, including this inward transformation, was God's work. But they also insisted that God's work must include whole-life transformation and the implementation of the spiritual gifts God has given.[55] Zinzendorf emphasized this in his preaching, holding that the true Christian, one who is in profound relationship with Jesus, will naturally produce godly actions and make Christlike decisions.[56] Christians want to please God and will work to do that without compulsion. Brown summarizes the Pietist position well: "Faith grasps God's love through Christ which alone brings about holy actions."[57]

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50 Weborg, "Pietism: 'The Fire of God,'" 19.
51 Weborg, "Pietism: 'The Fire of God,'" 20.
52 Alec Ryrie, *Protestants: The Faith That Made the Modern World* (New York: Viking Press, 2017) loc. 2985. Kindle.
53 Frisk, "Theology and Experience in Early Pietism," 27.
54 Frisk, "Theology and Experience in Early Pietism," 27.
55 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 89.
56 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 96.
57 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 22.

Pietist theologians insisted that right action was not limited to interactions between individuals; they had much larger goals. By focusing on improving the lives of the poor, Pietists envisioned nothing less than a changed world. Spener was a pioneer, teaching and leading his congregations to make a positive impact on the needy.[58] Francke took this much further, embodying what Weborg calls the "experimental character of Pietism."[59] Francke felt that a true Christian would be one who took risks on behalf of others, lived out a faith that acted in love, and lived sure of God's promises.

This spirit that experimented to find new ways to help their neighbor blossomed to encompass the whole world. The Pietists at Halle and Hernhutt were among the first Protestant missionary forces, and they used the same tactics abroad they used at home. Pietist missions relied on social action to improve the world toward the kingdom of God.[60] That social action had a broad footprint, including work to "transform the living conditions of the poor and oppressed, reform the prison system, abolish slavery, break down rigid class distinctions, establish a more democratic polity, initiate educational reforms, establish philanthropic institutions, increase missionary activity, obtain religious liberty, and propose programs for social justice."[61]

This action, both close to home and far afield, was driven by love for neighbor. Kohl summarizes Pietist missions with the phrase "Transformation of the world through the conversion of [humans]."[62] They longed for an in-breaking of the Holy Spirit, bringing ever-increasing love and peace. This was a particularly potent theology given the vivid memories of the horrific Thirty Years War (1618–1648) that remained fresh. Yet Pietists relentlessly "expected a revolutionary transformation of the world to be accomplished by God's work in changing human lives."[63]

The Pietists' focus on the congruence of right belief and right actions, and improving the world is built on their third major emphasis: hope for better times.

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58 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 101.
59 Weborg, "Pietism: 'The Fire of God,'" 18.
60 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 100.
61 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 86–87.
62 Kohl, "*Wiedergeburt* as the Central Theme in Pietism," 13.
63 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 22.

Hoping

For the Pietist, hope is the foundation upon which right beliefs and right actions are built. Looking for the ways God is breaking into the world to bring about new life, Pietists "always have hope for better times."[64] "Hope for better times" is so foundational to Pietism that Spener used the phrase as the subtitle for *Pia Desideria*. Spener's lofty expectations for what Christians could do and be in the world are easy to see in the *Pia*. He calmly proposed the idea that we ought to be able to handle doctrinal controversies well and thought that our fractured Christian church might be able to find a unified common ground. Hope infused Spener's work and carried through all of Pietism.

Hope enlivens the Pietists' orthodoxy and revitalizes their orthopraxy. As Clifton-Soderstrom writes, calling back to the Pietist ethical grounding in Galatians 5, "hope acts in such a way as to give content and context to *faith acting in love*."[65] As Pietists worked out their faith acting in love, their hope manifested itself in specific ways for people, for the church, and for the world.

As is evident from Pietism's theological emphasis on regeneration, Pietists are endlessly hopeful about the condition of the individual Christian. Spener believed all sermons should be first and foremost encouraging and edifying for those in the congregation, pointing them to the ways they can do and be better through the work of the Holy Spirit.[66] This comes primarily through God building a good conscience in us.[67] Through the prevenient work of the Spirit, the Christian learns to trust his or her conscience in daily decisions. This makes it possible to participate in a secular world, avoiding sinful activities while taking joy in what is not.[68]

Congruence between thought and action is also a fundamentally hopeful belief. Gehrz and Pattie write, "Pietism reminds Christians who imagine themselves to be people of faith to actually *be* people of faith, to put our hope resolutely in God and live like it."[69] Hope for better times for us individually ought to affect how we live, orienting our lives in an upward direction. Pietists believed that the whole person could, in fact, be transformed, and through a transformed person, whole communities

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64 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 8.
65 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 89. Emphasis original.
66 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 115.
67 Gerdes, "Theological Tenets of Pietism," 40.
68 Allen C. Deeter, "Pietism, Moralism, and Social Concern," *Covenant Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1975): 32.
69 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 37.

could be transformed.[70]

Individual transformation was always the first step for Pietists, but only ever the first of many; they intended to renew the entire church. A firm belief that the church could become more like the body of Christ that Scripture imagined inspired widespread renewal.[71] While Pietism was interested in inspiring true Christians, Pietist hope for the church was never about purging false Christians. Spener, like any good preacher, explained with a metaphor:

> Like a grain field is never free of weeds, we don't need to strive to have a church totally free of hypocrites. Instead, we should work toward a church that is free of "manifest offenses," where those who fail in these ways are corrected or, if they choose to remain in their sins, excluded. In this way, "the true members of the church should be richly filled with the many fruits of their faith," such that the weeds will not cover the grain but the grain covers the weeds, making them inconspicuous.[72]

The church will be a truly Christian church when the wide-ranging fruit of the Spirit is evident and spreading. The pietistic hope opens us to see where God is growing such fruit, wherever that might be.

Pietism's hope is thoroughly eschatological, but it is a realized eschatology. The hope was not simply that one day God would put the world right, but that God works in this world now to make it right. Pietists believed that they could bring about a close approximation of the kingdom of God on earth.[73] Their hope was not otherworldly but grounded in reality, and so they sought to redeem the world wherever they found themselves.[74]

Hope drove the Pietists' mission, both at home and abroad. It was because of their sure conviction that God would one day fully realize his kingdom on earth that they worked so hard to improve the lives of the poor. Leaning into God's promise of a brighter future for the Church, Spener sought to set the stage for God to work his future into the present.[75] Pietists spread this hopeful message throughout Europe and the world, making truly good news manifest.

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70 Olson, and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 10.
71 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 73.
72 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 81.
73 Olson and Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 100.
74 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 29.
75 Weborg, "Pietism: A Question of Meaning and Vocation," 64.

Clifton-Soderstrom shares this insight: "people who hope build."[76] Francke embodied this hope thoroughly, building myriad mission endeavors at Halle because the Pietists knew they could positively affect the world. Pietists "are fully persuaded that this present age can and will be refashioned and brought into closer accord with the mind of Christ through the continuing work of the Spirit of God," writes Frisk.[77] Pietists relied on the unpredictable and essential work of the Spirit in and through the church. Their hope drove them to build upon a strong foundation of biblical orthodoxy and the integrity of congruent action, all for, as the Pietists themselves would say, "God's glory and neighbor's good."

Toward a Pietist Homiletic

Pietism has a unique theological core heavily influenced by a drive toward practicality and Bible reading, necessitating a reliance on preaching ministry. While some have described Pietists as anti-intellectual, Gerdes holds that they simply maintained a different theological orientation than Protestant norms of that time. Pietists were more likely to *do* theology, not merely *think* it. "After all," says Gerdes, "Pietists are usually not found behind lecterns, but in pulpits."[78]

Given Pietists' unique theological emphases on right belief, action, and hope, we can move toward a Pietist homiletic. Pietist preaching should embody the same emphases and impulses described above, all with that uniquely Pietist way of doing theology. To describe this homiletic, we will look at the manner in which a Pietist preaches. It must start with the preacher's own heart, and then be rigorous, simple, and heartfelt. Then we will discuss the content of Pietist sermons. These sermons would share the same impulses as their theology, emphasizing believing, doing, and hoping.

Manner

Just as Pietists pushed for congruence between Christian thought and Christian action, Pietist preaching must maintain that same integrity. *How* we preach is just as important as *what* we preach. Pietism suggests a method of preaching that starts with the preacher's heart and is rigorous, simple, and heartfelt.

If the preacher has not truly encountered Jesus in the sermon text, if we do not know that the Holy Spirit has spoken to us, we will not be

76 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 98.
77 Frisk, "Theology and Experience in Early Pietism," 28–29.
78 Gerdes, "Theological Tenets of Pietism," 53.

able to usher others into that experience. Francke left no room for doubt, saying that if a preacher did not love Christ truly, or if the preacher's own heart was not warmed by the text, then the sermon "will be apt to be cold and lifeless, and therefore unprofitable and fruitless."[79]

Spener was so convinced of this that he included it as a fundamental idea in the *Pia*. Pastors must be trained in piety while in seminary, including engaging their own heart in sermon preparation. For Spener, "the preacher must comprehend the miracle of God first, and then pass that along to their people."[80] This experience then becomes the primary means of communication. The preacher's emphasis falls not on his or her powers of persuasion or rhetorical ability, but on the work of Christ in his or her heart. Many preachers, says Spener, can learn the craft of preaching through human effort, and they can do it well. They can teach biblical information and convey orthodox doctrine. However, these pastors and preachers are "without the working of the Holy Spirit" and are "altogether unacquainted with the true, heavenly light and the life of faith."[81] Preachers who have truly experienced the Holy Spirit and are truly converted and regenerated will be "faithful guides to Christian living as well as faith, basing this all on the word of God contained in scripture."[82]

Here again we see the Pietists' emphasis on congruence. For preachers to move a congregation, they must first be moved themselves. As Gehrz and Pattie say, borrowing a phrase from Spener, "For those in the common priesthood called to preach, proclaiming the word of God must begin with listening to the word of God. We must—as we hope those who hear us will—allow it 'to penetrate to the heart.'"[83] We cannot approach the text merely as words on a page, or else our sermons will be ineffective. If we bring our heart to the words of Scripture and the Word revealed there, the Holy Spirit will faithfully continue that good work in our own souls, which allows us to communicate powerfully to our people.

Preaching an effective sermon is not a simple task, which Pietists knew well. For Spener, sermons were far too important, and too essential to the improvement of the Church, to be taken lightly.[84] An effective pietistic sermon is one that is clear, accessible, and understandable. Spener's con-

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79 Francke quoted in Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 41.

80 K. James Stein, *From Head to Heart: A Compendium of the Theology of Philipp Jakob Spener* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2020), 236.

81 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 46.

82 Stein, *From Head to Heart*, 232.

83 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 106.

84 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 44.

cern was for the laypeople in his church, particularly the uneducated. The gospel is for them if it is for anyone, and if they can't understand the sermon, they won't hear the good news.

Our sermons must be clear communication, and it is worth honing the craft of preaching to meet that goal. Many books have been written on the craft of preaching; the Pietist preacher must take that self-reflective work seriously for the sake of the message. We must put time and effort into the structure and flow of the sermon so that the clear tone of the Word of God rings out.

There must be no mistake either that the Pietist preacher is preaching Scripture. Spener desired "to communicate and make familiar to his hearers the simple message of the Bible."[85] Though the original Pietists may not have been familiar with the Word, they certainly embraced the tenets of expository preaching. As we seek to communicate what the Holy Spirit has done in us through the text, we must use all our mental and spiritual faculties to ensure we are drawing authentic meaning from the Bible. We must be careful not to force our agenda or our ideas onto Scripture. Pietists are rigorous with both the craft and the content of sermons.

The Pietist drive toward core orthodoxies in our preaching takes the form of pressing toward simple truths. Pietists simplify, particularly when it comes to essential doctrines.[86] Our sermons ought to distill these, making them palatable and understandable to the laypeople in our specific congregations. For Spener's part, he targeted his preaching at the least educated and most vulnerable people in the congregation, instead of those who could speak Latin or Greek. Throughout his ministry, he found that those who were most vulnerable were often the most faithful followers and the most likely to be truly pious. As he sought to edify them through his preaching, and then by teaching them through conventicles, those in the lowest caste of society became the faithful yeast spread through the whole congregation.[87] To accomplish this, he simplified.

This is not to imply that Christian doctrine is uncomplicated, but rather it represents a drive toward the true purpose of the sermon: renewing and growing true Christianity. Pietists called it an "apostolic simplicity," emphasizing above all else what the apostles knew from personal experience. Following Jesus requires a close, personal relationship with

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85 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 52.
86 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 7.
87 Chao Pomeroy and Norman Peterson, "We Are Pietists."

him.[88] As Gehrz and Pattie write, "Pietism reminds us that the center of our lived faith is not an idea (however true) but a person."[89]

Again, pietistic preaching is not reductionistic or bland. We would rather not take the bite, or the meat, out of the text. To the contrary, we ought to provide as much good spiritual meat to our congregation as they can handle, as they grow from the spiritual milk of their early walk with Jesus. To achieve that, however, we call our people to come back to Jesus and to the simple orthodoxies of our salvation, regeneration, and sanctification. If we broach such subjects and get lost in the theological weeds, we will leave our people there, with little hope of finding their own way out. Pietists simplify for the sake of our hearers and their comprehension.

Finally, in crafting and delivering our sermon, we must be heartfelt, aiming at the heart of the hearer. Faith lives, as Spener put it, in this inner person. That faith is a gift from God and energizes and enables the outer person to do the work of God. Preaching must be targeted at the inner person, strengthening faith to produce outer change.[90] Spener writes, "Hence it is not enough that we hear the word with our outward ear, but we must let it penetrate to our heart, so that we may hear the Holy Spirit speak there, that is, with vibrant emotion and comfort feel the sealing of the Spirit and the power of the word."[91]

That inner space is the realm of the Holy Spirit where we find the power to live truly Christian lives, and so we must point our preaching in that direction.

This begins in the preacher. We must first experience God through the text for ourselves before we preach it to another. As Weborg puts it, "People communicate themselves. The communication of the gospel is to be done faithfully to the gospel and with the feeling of the gospel."[92] Again, the Pietists' insistence on congruence comes to the fore. We must have a heartfelt experience of Christ before we attempt to communicate. Without that, we will fail to engender an experience of Christ for our congregants.

This does not happen in a homiletical vacuum, however. Pietists are always practitioners; Pietist preachers must first be pastors. For a sermon to reach the heart of the listener and have an impact there, Pietists, and

88 Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 32.
89 Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 96.
90 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 116.
91 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 117.
92 Weborg, "Pietism: 'The Fire of God,'" 20.

Spener in particular, insist that the preacher have a strong pastoral relationship with his or her congregants.[93] Armed with a firm love of our people, with the goodwill that a caring, pastoral relationship affords, we aim at the heart, both our own and those in our churches.

Like Pietism's theology, this manner of preaching is not a checklist to work through, but more of an impulse to hone. As we go about crafting sermons week after week, the Pietists' *way* of preaching becomes engrained in us like a second nature. If we start with our own hearts engaging with the text, then we will find our sermons to be rigorous, simple, and heartfelt.

Content

Pietists did not have a content program that said, "These are the things you must say and these you must not." Rather, the theology Pietists preach comes across as emphases, like using primary colors in a painting. Certain colors drew the Pietists' eye over and over again. The homiletic will take the same shape as our survey of theology above. *What* Pietists preach aligns with believing, doing, and hoping—all intended to grow true Christianity.

When preaching on what a Christian must believe, a Pietist preacher will focus on those doctrines that make up core orthodoxy. Much in Christian theology is valuable, but not all is essential. Our sermons ought to consistently emphasize that which is essential to our faith, leaving aside nonessential theology for other venues. Spener, as we saw above, felt that essential doctrines come from the human experience of salvation: conversion, regeneration, and transformation. Spener used the idea of "completion" but never supposed that we could achieve it in this life. Thus, I am opting for "transformation" here to convey completion's ongoing nature. These three are built on the foundation of the highest regard for biblical authority and a firm grasp of the Triune God's living activity in the world. This constitutes core doctrine.

It is best not to let our sermons become dragged down into partisanship or infighting, though we do not need to avoid controversial topics altogether. There are right ways and wrong ways to think about essential doctrines, and occasionally, we must correct or challenge our congregation in that area. For Francke, though, the correction should never be condemning. He wrote, "Admonishing one another need not be done by speaking critically to one another but by speaking in a way

[93] Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 45.

that uplifts and encourages another to desire to be good or to respond more faithfully next time."[94]

Pietists loved and relied upon the spiritual priesthood of all believers, and we should too. There is an interesting dynamic between a preacher, who is a priest, speaking God's Word to a room full of priests. We must not talk down to or belittle our congregation, because in this priesthood, we are all the same. All of us are sheep and Jesus is our shepherd (John 10:11). With this in mind, we preach in humility, wisely sharing our struggles, our need for grace, and the Spirit's transforming work in our own lives. As we do the work God has called us to do, we preach to encourage and build up our fellow priests for the work God has called them to do. Always with the desire to encourage truly faithful discipleship in our listeners, our sermons hone in on essential doctrines. We can use as a starting point Spener's three areas of human experience: conversion, regeneration, and transformation.

The life of true discipleship begins with our conversion. Spener wrote, "Preaching should be the divine means to save the people."[95] With so weighty a calling, we must take conversion seriously and treat it intentionally in our preaching. Conversion was a complicated and multifaceted experience in Pietist thought, as we have seen. However, preaching to conversion can be simpler. It begins not with us deciding but with an understanding that God's grace worked in us before we could acknowledge it. "While we were still sinners," Paul writes in Romans 5:8, "Christ died for us."

Only when we recognize God's already present work do we decide to convert. That human decision is essential. Pietists will always emphasize our need to partner in what God is doing. We must *choose* to convert. Our conversions are not only from atheist to Christian, but a continual kind of conversion, intensifying devotion by moving away from atheism in any area of life and toward true faith that is lived out. Francke treated conversion in this way, not only as a singular moment of my choice but as a regular re-examination of what Christ means to me. Am I personally experiencing God? Is Jesus necessary to my life, to how I live? These questions are fertile ground for Pietist preaching on conversion, both in personal experience and right thinking.

The more we consider conversion as both a moment and a lifelong process, the more it bleeds into regeneration, which we might also call

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94 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 39.

95 Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 116.

the new birth. This area is a heavy focus for Pietist theologians and will likely occupy the lion's share of a Pietist preacher's preaching calendar. It is so essential, though, that Spener encourages clergy not to tire of that repetition. "A preacher should not grow weary of *reminding*," he writes. "In fact, if he has opportunity, he would do well to tell the people again and again in his sermons what they once learned, and he should not be ashamed of so doing."[96]

Therein is the soul of regeneration, and an excellent summary of Pietist theology. If we *know* it, we ought to then *do* it. In our conversion, God has birthed a new life in us, a new way of life. We must participate in nurturing that new life, progressing in holiness. We participate individually, but not individualistically. Our new birth builds us into a vibrant community, the body of Christ, the remnant of true Christians in every church. The new birth entails myriad practical realities, both corporate and individual, to which the Pietist preacher can apply the gospel.

Once again, we find a tension in Pietist thought and preaching. The work of growing that new life is all God's grace, and yet, we must partner with him. We must give the Holy Spirit room in our souls in which God can do God's work.

We are transformed, or as Spener would say, "completed," through a personal relationship with Jesus. Just as Pietists would emphasize the person of Jesus over the title of Christ, our preaching ought to center Jesus, a person who wants to be in a relationship with us. Our God is not distant, cold, and far away, but as Paul says in Athens in Acts 17:27, God is "not far from any one of us," and this God wants us to "seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him." We find God through personal relationship with Jesus.

Later Pietists in Sweden would often ask the penetrating question, "How goes your walk with Christ?"[97] Viewing our Christian life as a walk with a friend can be a helpful metaphor as we prepare to preach. This kind of intimate relationship goes two ways. It offers open space for conversation, for listening, and for speaking. There is an intentionality of centering our relationship with Jesus that opens us up to those areas of our lives where we do not walk with him, or where we fear to walk with him. Transformation comes as we walk ever closer with our Savior. Ultimately, without that meaningful relationship with God, that

[96] Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 116. See Jeffrey Arthur, *Preaching as Reminding* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2017) for suggestions on how to "not grow weary" of reminding, as Spener says.

[97] Gehrz and Pattie, *The Pietist Option*, 114.

walk with Jesus, that intimacy with the Holy Spirit, no amount of right thinking matters.

For Pietists, a Christian faith is not true belief unless it works itself out in action. True Christianity requires a transformation not only of our interior selves but our exterior lives as well. As Clifton-Soderstrom stated, Pietists hung significant weight on Galatians 5:6b, "The only thing that counts is faith working through love," and there gave particular emphasis to the word "working." She goes on to write that one of Spener's main concerns for preaching "was doing, or application. He hoped that the congregation would be transformed by the hearing of the word—that those who heard would then have the capacity, or excellence of character, to apply the good news to their lives."[98] Spener's preoccupation with practicality came through into his preaching and ought to shine in ours.

What must Christians do? We work, as the popular Pietist axiom went, "for God's glory and neighbor's good." For the Pietists, the Christian obligation to action went beyond simply avoiding vices. Many Pietists could be very strict in this regard, but emphasizing action always included both *not doing* harmful things and *doing* helpful things. We must continually remind our congregants that they are gifted members of the spiritual priesthood, essential pieces of the body of Christ. Each one is gifted for ministry, that is, for doing the good works that God prepared for us (Eph 2:10). To ignore those works would be to squander God's gifts and do harm to our neighbors.

As we live out of our own vibrant personal relationship with Jesus, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit will guide our actions. This is why it is essential that one of the actions we take as true Christians is to join in small group Bible study, a conventicle. Our preaching ought to encourage this. Reading Scripture together will test and try the congruence of what we believe and how we live. When we invite others into vulnerable parts of our lives in safe and responsible ways, we offer the Spirit another avenue to do that transformative work and give us more chances to work out our own salvation.

For the Pietist preacher, this must extend beyond simply telling our congregation to do good works. We must lead them by example and join in the doing of our faith. Bruce Shelly points out that Pietism brought preaching and pastoral visitation to the center of Protestant ministry, combining the two like sides of a coin.[99] Spener felt this so strongly that

98 Clifton-Soderstrom, *Angels, Worms, and Bogeys*, 44.
99 Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 329.

he almost seemed to hold the two as equals. He said, "Of what does this (ordained) ministry consist? It consists not only in pure doctrine and preaching of the word, but also in faithful care of the congregation, as the preached word produces fruit among them. To this end belongs also public and private admonition (Ezek 3:17-21; Acts 20:31)."[100]

However strongly Pietists emphasize the necessity of action for both clergy and laity, we must not allow our sermons to slip into moralizing or works righteousness. All the will, energy, and ability to do good for our neighbor and glorify God comes from God alone. Spener said Christians represent Christ to the world "not only with their doctrine and words but also with their lives and holy walk, that people see the powerful grace of God which has so sanctified them to the Lord's glory."[101] God's powerful grace is effective in our lives, as evidenced by our works, and that is a powerful testimony to the world.

Just as God's grace effectively brings about change in an individual life, so too will God's grace bring about better times in the world. Pietists' hope orients our homiletical work and directs it to the good ends that God designed for the world. We set the stage for God's kingdom to come more fully into the world, and that is good news. So good is the coming kingdom and its inbreaking now that we ought to feel fundamentally hopeful about our situation and the world's condition.

This does not mean we ignore or downplay the world's most dire circumstances in our sermons. On the contrary, Christian hope takes those circumstances seriously and shines out brighter because of the darkness. Zinzendorf stands as an example. He felt that the Christian life ought to be joyful, even as he was mobilizing one of the first worldwide mission forces. Moravian missionaries brought joyfulness to the most abject and marveled at the work God did there.

We preach sermons full of hope, always with an eye toward encouragement. Stein wrote of the Pietists' goal, "In preaching, to seek nothing other than the edification of the congregation."[102] Through encouragement, we orient ourselves to the inexorable forward march of the kingdom of God. God is always advancing his kingdom, bringing with it justice and peace, life, and light. We must keep an eye out for places where God is breaking in and preach about it. God not only *can* do good works in our lives and in our world; he *will*. It is as sure a hope as we can have (Heb 11:1).

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100 Spener, quoted in Stein, *From Head to Heart*, 233.
101 Spener, quoted in Stein, *From Head to Heart*, 237.
102 Stein, *From Head to Heart*, 238.

A Pietist homiletic, like Pietism itself, urges congruence and integrity between the spoken word and the lived life. The homiletic begins with the preacher encountering Jesus in Scripture and suggests a manner of sermon preparation that is rigorous, simple, and aims at the heart of the listener. Just as Pietism comes across through a set of impulses or emphases, our homiletic is not a checklist but a heartbeat. The emphatic beats in the Pietists' sermons are right belief that centers on core doctrines such as conversion, regeneration, and transformation, followed by right action, all full of hope that God will continue to do God's work.

My Experience with Pietist Preaching

I had the opportunity to utilize this homiletic as I completed the project portion of a doctor of ministry degree in preaching. I intentionally infused my preaching with Pietist impulses for six months and then, through a pretest and posttest, measured the effect this kind of preaching had on the spiritual maturity of my congregation. This homiletic produced a small but measurable improvement, raising the overall maturity of those who filled out both surveys. I brought three key takeaways from that experience.

First, I deeply appreciate Pietism's emphasis on the preacher's own heart. I have long struggled with the (supposed) need to keep my own devotional reading of Scripture separate from my sermon preparation. I found that when I brought my soul to the study, I produced more heartfelt sermons. Preparing to preach became a joy, a place where God met and ministered to me and then through me. Undoubtedly, sermon preparation should not be the *only* place where the preacher devotionally encounters Jesus, but it also need not be excluded from that enriching space.

Second, I found it helpful to plan, track, and target my preaching to certain markers of spiritual maturity. Wanting to fully represent Pietism, I made sure to incorporate all the theological themes Pietists emphasize. In practice, this meant writing a sentence describing how the sermon highlighted an emphasis. By tracking that over the months, I could look back and see what I had already covered and how I did it. Looking at the upcoming months of preaching, I would select a different emphasis or present a familiar one differently.

Finally, practicing this homiletic quickly became second nature and, in the year since the project ended, has become habituated. I no longer think hard about which emphasis to preach; it arises from my soul-engaged study. Like a painter might be drawn to a certain color pallet over many works, I find myself easily reaching for these theological emphases of right

belief around conversion, regeneration, and transformation, right action, and right hope. It has become a natural part of my creative expression in the weighty task of proclaiming God's Word.

I had the chance to talk through this homiletic as I was forming it with Timothy B. Johnson, a long-time pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church. After hearing my description of a Pietist homiletic, he commented, "You know, I think I already preach like this." Many who have served a significant time in this Pietist-formed denomination will probably feel the same way. Pietism spreads through the church and through a pastor like yeast in bread; slowly, over time, those soul-enriching theological emphases bubble out of our inner selves and into our preaching. More preachers leaning into this homiletic will, I believe, speedily rekindle wholehearted devotion to Jesus, producing ever-increasing numbers of true, mature Christians who follow in both word and deed.

Reviews

Christina Burrows, president of the Association of Covenant Spiritual Directors, adjunct faculty member, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois

Prajakta David-Kelly, director of global advancement and mobilization for the Evangelical Covenant Church, Chicago, Illinois

Michael D. Thomas Jr., lead pastor and church planter at Radiant Covenant Church, Renton, Washington

Susan L. Maros, Vince L. Bantu, and Kirsteen Kim, eds. *Power, Agency, and Women in the Mission of God: Interdisciplinary, Intercultural Conversations* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2024), 257 pages, $37.

"Dream, girl, dream. What's the future going to be?"
— Mercy Amba Oduyoye[1]

Our vision as Covenanters and mission friends is to join God in God's mission to see more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world. In this volume, the editors provide us with ways we can dream and move toward this vision together, with a focus on empowering and giving agency to women as co-laborers with men in the mission of God.

[1] Mercy A. Oduyoye, "Be a Woman, and Africa Will Be Strong," *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective*, edited by Letty M. Russell et al., (Louisville: Westminster, 1988), 35, quoted in Musa Dube, "In the Circle of God's Mission: Power, Agency, and the Mission of God," paper presented at the Fuller Missiology Lectures at Fuller Theological Seminary, Online, October 2022.

The book presents lectures delivered during the 2022 Missiology Lectures at Fuller Seminary on the theme of "Power, Agency, and Women in the Mission of God: A Scholar-Practitioner Conversation." Amos Yong, dean of Fuller Seminary's School of Mission and Theology, describes the conversation as "less an apologetic for women in ministry…than intended to spark the imagination by exemplifying what women are already doing in mission" (xiii).

This intellectually robust and lively resource is an interdisciplinary, intercultural conversation among fourteen contributors. They are a diverse group of female and male scholars and practitioners representing various ethnic backgrounds and denominations from around the world.

The book is split into five conversations. Conversation One focuses on women in global Christianity, including a case study from Musa Dube of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, a conversation I found particularly encouraging in the way these women collaborate in scholarship and practice. Conversation Two discusses sexism in multiple frameworks, including "benevolent sexism," for example protecting women from "dangerous" activities. The presenters highlight the need to recognize those practices that have a negative impact on the capacity and competencies of women. Conversation Three addresses #MeToo and #ChurchToo. This conversation speaks to our need to respond to the horrors of the physical and sexual abuse of women. Conversation Four explores models of women's power, responding to dominant white, male, Western views, seeking to dismantle barriers for BIPOC women into academic spaces. Conversation Five centers on women's leadership, looking at ways women lead even within the constraints of traditional roles, as well as ways that we can help to develop women in leadership roles.

Yong suggests that "the contributors to this volume open us up to diverse and creative possibilities of women's responses to God's missional call, including their forging of new forms of church and ministry that explode or navigate around the conventions of maleness-and-femaleness we have inherited from our forebears" (xv).

A few recurring themes stand out to me as I listened to the lectures presented online via the Fuller Studio YouTube channel[2] and read the book. First, is the centering role of the mission of God and the desire of all the contributors to inspire others to join in God's mission. Second, is a sense of hope in the metanarrative of Scripture, that even though

[2] The video lectures from the 2022 Missiology Lectures at Fuller Semiinary can be accessed at https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/fullerdialogue/power-agency-and-women-in-the-mission-of-god/.

women's stories are not often at the center, God calls and anoints women throughout the Scriptures to fulfill God's kingdom purposes. Third, is a repeated call to love God and to love our neighbor. This is what the reign of God looks like, wherever we are in the world. Patrick Reyes says that "to lead with love as the divine loved humanity is leadership" (173).

Those of us who live and serve in North America tend to have a North American–centered lens on the world and can forget that the hub of global Christianity is currently in the Global South. This volume reminds us of the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit across the globe in drawing people to God, and that we get to take on the humble posture of a cultural learner as we observe global missional leaders.

All of us who are pastors and leaders can seek to empower women to live into their gifting and calling as co-laborers with men in the mission of God. This volume provides us with "actual and yet possible contributions of women to our common missional efforts" (xv). Those who listen to the voices from the 2022 Missiology Lectures will be inspired and equipped to explore new, creative ways of engaging in advocacy and empowerment for women in our own contexts and spheres of influence, wherever they are in the world.

CHRISTINA BURROWS

Andrea Nelson Trice, *Strong Together: Building Partnerships across Cultures in an Age of Distrust* (Sutton, UK: Global Resilience Publishing, 2023), 295 pages, $21.

In *Strong Together* Andrea Nelson Trice addresses the tensions between indigenous leaders from the Global South and Americans from the Global North in development work. Drawing on her expertise, she examines the root causes of these tensions and offers ways to address them constructively. Trice provides practical strategies for fostering stronger collaboration that can lead to mutual transformation for all involved—if they are open to it.

The author excels in her research, incorporating diverse voices that enrich the conversation around global partnerships. She moves beyond surface-level analysis, exploring how different communities' assets can work together to foster transformation. A key strength of her work is her critical examination of power dynamics, acknowledging how power imbalances and impacts trust.

Trice emphasizes the strengths and challenges each community brings to the table, avoiding the narrative that one group holds all the answers and assets. By addressing cultural differences, she highlights the importance of understanding, stressing that lasting partnerships require time and commitment to community buy-in rather than quick solutions.

The author also provides practical guidance on how outsiders can engage in partnerships, emphasizing the need to prioritize active listening to local leaders and responding to their invitations. She explores the differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures, and how these differences impact partnerships. Her focus on humility and self-awareness is central to her argument that understanding one's own strengths and limitations is essential for building effective and sustainable partnerships.

She also critically addresses how Americans have been shaped by media, foreign policy, and a "hero complex" as they approach global partnerships. By confronting these issues, Trice encourages readers to engage with humility and shared responsibility, laying the groundwork for more authentic and transformative partnerships. Overall, the book offers a nuanced and respectful approach, recognizing the complexity and depth required to build successful global partnerships.

While the author does name important issues such as power dynamics and cultural differences, she often stops short of fully exploring the "why" behind these realities. Trice tends to stay at the surface of cultural exploration, missing opportunities to dive deeper into the complexities of global cultures. Many assumptions are made, particularly about Western entrepreneurialism, that fail to acknowledge the broader picture. For example, the idea that entrepreneurship is primarily a Western trait overlooks the reality that people in many parts of the world are equally entrepreneurial. In various regions, individuals start working at a young age, selling goods or providing services to meet immediate needs.

Additionally, *Strong Together* does not consider the issue of survival in many global contexts, where people are focused on securing basic necessities rather than pursuing ambitious dreams. The assumption that everyone has the luxury to dream and innovate ignores the significant economic disparities that shape cultures and limit opportunities for many. As well, the book makes some problematic generalizations, such as categorizing certain cultures as more masculine or feminine, which oversimplifies complex cultural traits and can reinforce stereotypes.

The author misses the chance to delve deeper into how issues of colonialism, race, class, and historical inequities affect individuals' ability to succeed and how systems continue to favor the privileged not only around

the world but also in the United States. A more nuanced exploration of culture would recognize that opportunities for success, innovation, and growth are shaped by much more than location—they are determined by access to resources, government systems, and historical context.

In conclusion, *Strong Together*, by Andrea Nelson Trice, offers a thoughtful and valuable exploration of the complexities involved in cross-cultural partnerships. While the book excels in highlighting key issues of power dynamics and cultural differences, it falls short of fully addressing deeper systemic factors. Nevertheless, this is a significant contribution to the conversation on development, encouraging readers to engage more thoughtfully in global partnerships.

PRAJAKTA DAVID-KELLEY

Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: The Illustrated Edition* (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2018), 165 pages, $35.

Author Peter Wohlleben is a prominent forester in the Eifel mountains of Germany. He wrote this book to provide people a different lens with which to view trees. Industrial engineer and footwear designer Salehe Bembury said, "The most beautiful things are natural and things that we don't tend to focus on." I think that gets to the heart of the author's intent with this book: to help us really see trees, to be fascinated by all they bring to this world, and to illuminate aspects of their beauty that often go unseen.

Wohlleben confesses that this book reveals his discovery of what he thought he already knew after decades as a forester. Yet he found he was only scratching the surface of understanding trees. He had simply understood the suitability of trees for harvesting, milling, and marketing. Leading tourists into the woods for survival training began to illuminate an entirely different perspective concerning the vast depth of trees.

The Hidden Life of Trees invites readers into the joy that trees can bring. We enter into the beautiful world of trees and encounter the wonders of their ecosystem. The invitation is to re-enter our own world with refreshed perspectives on what has been out of focus or entirely hidden—elements of life that can help us flourish and remain stable throughout life's storms.

Wohlleben sets the stage by introducing the concept of community when it comes to the forest. He describes the deep diversity of trees and the ways they organically work as a community. The concept of

community is actually how they live so long and thrive. Trees work together, share resources, and have networks within the forest that provide mutual nourishment. This left me wondering about the Church: Why do churches operate so independently? How can the Church be more of a network and organically work as a community? Wohlleben emphasizes the magnitude of community by reporting how trees that have been cut to a stump can still live five hundred years because of the forest's communal nature to share resources in coexistence.

In chapter 2 Wohlleben examines the "life lessons" of trees. One of the most profound lessons is recognizing that trees have a family way of existing. Specifically, young trees instinctively attempt to grow up fast, presuming youthful vitality will be unending. But the mother and father trees—yes, that's a thing—parent wisely by ensuring the young grow slowly and healthily, prepared for life's storms. They do this through "light deprivation" (43), a process of restriction that allows the young tree to live to a ripe old age.

In chapter 3 we learn about the realities of aging and why decay can be a good thing. This thought continues the theme of embracing new perspectives. We learn that just as it's a good thing for human beings to shed dead skin in order to keep our bodies in good condition, so too it is with trees and their bark. It is possible to see beauty in death. When a tree completes its life cycle and dies, the nutrients it releases into the air and underground through its roots are vital for the flourishing of the forests. This reminds me of Jesus's words in John 12:24: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Chapter 4 gives us strategies for survival. The ways trees rest (a form of Sabbath) in different seasons and store up what is needed to face harsh winters are both fascinating and transferable to how we should approach surviving and thriving over the course of our own lives. I never knew that when trees' leaves change color in the fall, each color is an indication of when they are ready to rest.

Chapter 5 challenges us with troubling realities regarding the planting of trees in urban environments. While there is beauty and benefit in this practice, it creates a scenario where these trees have limited lifespans. They are disconnected from each other and must rely upon unnatural interventions for vitality that do not last.

The final chapter feels like a sermon of hope in which Wohlleben inspires us to envisage a world where trees could grow without limits. Not only do flourishing, healthy trees combat climate change, but they

also literally enhance the global atmosphere for the better. This chapter pushes us to consider the potential of trees and how the world can benefit from them.

I read this book during my recovery time from a fourth foot surgery within a year's time span. A fellow colleague in ministry who inspires me to go deeper into a life of spiritual direction and rhythms of Sabbath encouraged me to read something different as part of my self-care. Reading this book was transformational for me. I believe every pastor should add this amazing book to their library because so much of it translates into how we approach the "tree" of church. Through this unlikely resource, we stand to gain a healthier perspective on the church and our cooperative work within it.

This book also has given me a profound appreciation for Psalm 1:1-3.

> Happy are those
> who do not follow the advice of the wicked
> or take the path that sinners tread,
> or sit in the seat of scoffers,
> but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
> and on his law they meditate day and night.
> They are like trees
> planted by streams of water,
> which yield their fruit in its season,
> and their leaves do not wither.
> In all that they do, they prosper.

MICHAEL D. THOMAS JR.

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