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Dear Church, Now What? Moving from Reconciliation to Reparations

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Editor's note: In June 2018, Dr. Jennifer Harvey was the theme speaker at St. Andrew's College ReJUNEvation, a three-day annual continuing education event for clergy in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. What follows is the first of three talks that she gave; it makes some references to the context in which it was given. The text has been modified to be more conducive to the written word.

What does the demand of repentance and reparations mean for churches whose legacies of Christian practice are bound up in colonial-settler and racist violence? What does the work of repentance mean in a world facing ongoing racial and nationalist turmoil? Might we simply put these questions this way: "Dear Church, now what?"

When I was first invited to be the keynote speaker at St. Andrew's 2018 ReJUNEvation event, I posed these questions as the focus because they seemed urgent. I confess that I was honoured to receive this invitation, but was actually a little nervous. Having never lectured outside the US, it was a bit daunting to imagine doing so where I'd be such an outsider.

But now, in the year since my initial "yes," the consequences of the 2016 US presidential election have really taken hold, and my context as a US-American has changed radically. I remain grateful for the invitation to cross your southern border. But like so many

others in that nation to the south of Canada, and in a week where the southern border of the US is making international news for the worst possible reasons, I'm struggling with a deep disorientation.¹ I'm horrified at what my nation has unleashed domestically and on the world—especially on the marginalized within and outside of US borders. So, if I was daunted when I was first invited, I arrive here closer to terrified.

Yet, if the questions above had the capacity a year ago to convene an urgent cross-border dialogue, and a theological and moral one, they still do—perhaps more so—now. With each passing week, they have seemed to carry within them the question of the future of the

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church, perhaps that of the church's very existence. So, what *does* the demand of repentance and reparations mean for churches whose legacies of Christian practice are bound up in colonial settler and racist violence? What *does* the work of repentance mean in a world facing growing racial and nationalist turmoil?

I want first to engage these questions by arguing that the framework of reconciliation, which the white US-American church uses to remember the US civil rights movement and to describe relationships between white and Black US-Americans, needs to give way to a more truthful remembering of that movement. A more truthful remembering compels recognition that the church needs to make a theological shift from reconciliation as the normative paradigm through which we understand race in the church, to a repair or reparations paradigm.

Second, I want to unpack ways this shift to repair pertains, as well, to colonial-settler realities. On the one hand, the conflicts and divisions between people of African descent and people of European descent, and the anti-Black injustice pervasive in any context implicated in the imperial movements of Europeans since the 1400s, are no doubt present in Canada. So, even if it is informed by the US experience, my initial focus is relevant in the Canadian context. On the other hand, the US civil rights story isn't the Canadian story. Further, the very notion of "civil rights" assumes things about the legitimacy of nation-states that already fails to reflect First Nations realities. On top of that, Indigenous and white colonial-settler relationships have a particular saliency in Canada. To that end, then, I want to show how repair is also the appropriate framework for the church to honour the moral imperatives embodied in relations between Indigenous and colonial-settler peoples.

The Failure of the Reconciliation Paradigm

I begin by taking us back to the fall of 2014. On August 9 of that year, a young man named Michael Brown was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Michael Brown was Black.

The following morning, newspapers across the US were full of images that were eerily similar to those that filled newspapers at the height of the civil rights movement. There were fires blazing across Ferguson. Military tanks had rolled in. We saw pictures of protesters holding their hands up while standing toe-to-toe with police officers in riot gear. There were images of young children crying because their eyes were burning from plumes of tear gas as a militarized police force let loose on non-violent protestors night after night.

Most US-Americans had never heard of Ferguson, but it soon became a household word. On its heels other words became familiar: "Cleveland," where twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was murdered by police as he sat in a park playing with a plastic water gun; "Baltimore," where Freddy Gray was brutalized by police so badly his spine was broken, after which he died in a coma; "Charleston," where nine Black Christians were massacred during Bible study; "Minneapolis," where Philando Castile was shot and killed while his girlfriend and young child sat in the same car after they were pulled over, presumably for a broken tail light. The litany of words and names could go on and on.

In the time since we woke up to those images of Ferguson, many US-Americans have seemed stunned. Among my white brothers and sisters that stunned has been a feeling of surprise. It has had a coating of disbelief: "What?" "We are (still) this racially alienated?" "We (still) live in worlds this different from each other?" "How do we make sense of this?" This was before the 2016 presidential election. Since the election, it sounded like "Oh my god. How did *this* happen? Who did this?"

My sisters and brothers of colour have also seemed stunned since the fall of 2014. But their expressions have been qualitatively different. Theirs have not been the stunned or surprised, but of a deep and fierce despair, inflected with a powerful outrage. These expressions have sounded more like this: "Enough!" or "¡Basta!" And since the 2016 election: "What do you mean *who* did this?" "Read the voting demographics!" "We've have been telling you this for so very long."²

It is in this context that I want to frame the way we have largely engaged race in the US church. For decades, the most predictable commentary on race you are likely to hear in US pulpits is the following statement: "11:00 on a Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour of the week!"³

This statement was first made by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the early 1960s. Statistically, it remains true. Christians in the US worship in spaces as racially distinct today as we did before the civil rights movement.⁴

The eleven o'clock statement is always invoked as a lament. Separate worship seems to be a sign of sin and brokenness. It must mean there's resistance to difference, or some level of mistrust and non-acceptance in our churches.

White US Christians have, therefore, responded to this lament, rather logically, by making the call to work for interracial togetherness the primary way we talk about

race. We invoke images of the Christian community as one in Christ, for example. We lift up metaphors about being one family. We emphasize the diverse beauty of God's creation.

Theologically, the concept is "reconciliation." But it's better to understand this as a reconciliation paradigm. The addition of "paradigm" here matters. A paradigm is like glasses. The shape and size of the lens in a pair of glasses affects what you are able to see. It directs your focus, bringing some things into view and leaving others blurry. A paradigm functions like that. It emphasizes some things while leaving other things out of the frame altogether. It predetermines not only the answers you can arrive at on a given problem, but the questions you even think to ask.

I have no interest in disavowing reconciliation itself. I long for a racially reconciled church, nation, and world. As an outsider here, I certainly have no interest in disavowing the way reconciliation informs colonial-settler and First Nations dialogues in Canada (though First Nations perspectives on the appropriateness of "reconciliation" must always be given deference over colonial-settler perspectives on it).

I am clear, however, that the reconciliation paradigm has long since and utterly failed in the US context. It has particularly failed communities of colour, for reasons we can identify and about which we must get serious if we care about the "now what?" question.

There are a number of problems with the reconciliation paradigm. A major one is that it rests on the assumption that our differences can all be similarly celebrated and embraced. The moral logic goes something like this: "I need to come to better love your blackness, or your Native-ness, or your Latino-ness. And you? You need to come to love my whiteness." This is a morally incoherent position.

Despite that incoherence, decade after decade, main-line US Protestant denominations have committed and recommitted to the reconciliation paradigm. We've produced volumes of Christian educational material calling for sacred dialogue across lines of difference. We've framed questions of racial justice as queries into how to achieve inclusive, welcoming churches—by which we mean a church characterized by togetherness across lines of difference.

Of course, reconciliation has legitimate historical and theological precedents. It comes directly from the courageous and brilliant civil rights movement. Specifically, it comes from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who articulated a vision of "beloved commu-

nity" for the church, his country, and the entire human community.⁵

For King, "beloved community" signalled a vision of a truly integrated community. It was a place where people are with one another across lines of difference. It was a vision of life together that went well beyond mere legal desegregation. For King, love—specifically divine love—is our primary human condition; our original state. Hostility to differences indicates an alienated state. We are called, therefore, to our divinely intended state of togetherness and must realize that original state of love.⁶

Early civil rights work on desegregation and voting rights (two of the movement's most significant achievements) were attempts to realize this vision of beloved community. For in King's theology, the public and legal form of "love" had to be realized through securing "justice."⁷

Meanwhile, white Christians who were active in civil rights, or who watched the movement's courage as children, became captivated by this vision. Liberal and progressive white Christians, and over time, full denominations, bought in. There are denominational leaders still today who were there then. As a result, "beloved community" has gripped the white Protestant heart and mind ever since.

But, despite these precedents, the reconciliation paradigm rests on a "white-washed" and "colonial-settler" story. For, by the mid-1960s, Black power movements had begun to express disappointments with civil rights.

In 1964, riots and fires had consumed Rochester, New York—triggered by police violence. Organizers there said, "Hey, our problem isn't the right to vote"; we don't need "integration." "Our problem is access to jobs." By the late 1960s and early '70s, when city after city, from Detroit to Los Angeles, erupted into flames—usually triggered by police violence—Black power movements had thoroughly critiqued civil rights' analysis of the national racial situation, as well as the civil rights solutions for it.

Black power activists weren't hostile to the idea that everyone should have legal equality. But they were clear that equal rights were no panacea for the diverse, complex, and specific ways oppression and subjugation impacted Black life. This made Black power particularly critical of "beloved community." For, in this analysis, the primary problem was not segregation, for which the fix became reconciliation. The problem was power and systemic white exploitation.

Black Power and White Christianity

By the mid-1960s, Black power showed up in Christian contexts. There is a longer and larger story to be told. Space allows me to offer just three snippets of it here.

The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU) was one of the most important civil rights groups in the church, and it accomplished many things. But one of ESCRU's goals became to end all single-race parishes in the Episcopal Church. This makes sense if you believe the most significant problem with single-race parishes is that they are evidence of the sin of segregation. Integration, or work to realize beloved community or reconciliation, becomes your goal.

ESCRU's reconciliation vision could not see the difference between a Black-led, all-Black parish and a white-led, all-white parish. So ESCRU supported the denomination as it closed down financially struggling Black parishes and integrated them into white parishes. This was completely consistent with a reconciliation paradigm.⁸

By the mid-1960s, Black priests who had been central in the work of ESCRU and ardent supporters of integration realized ESCRU's advocacy was eroding their power. So in 1968 they moved out and founded the Union of Black Clergy and Laity.

The second snippet comes from the National Council of Churches (NCC) Commission on Race and Religion. This group was also very effective in its first two years, and Black and white Christians were initially active in it together. But historian James F. Findley says that as early 1965, the Commission "lost steam."⁹ In part, white US laity quit showing up to support civil rights after the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964. Securing voting rights was one thing, but as the issues became jobs and economic resources, they had far less enthusiasm. In part, Black Christians started publicly expressing frustration at how white-led the Commission and its decision making remained.¹⁰

When Benjamin Payton was named the first African American director of the Commission in 1965, therefore, he began his tenure by announcing, "The *rights* which have been *couched in law* [civil rights talk] are now being sought in life as *practical social and economic matters* [Black power talk]."¹¹ A year later, Payton called the Black members of the Commission to form their own group, the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC).

Throughout the US church, as Black power became more compelling among Black Christians, alienation between whites and Blacks grew more pronounced.

This was because white Christians who had been allies in civil rights utterly rejected Black power.

Finally, on May 4, 1969, after the devastating assassination of King and the faltering of the Poor People's Campaign—which had been intended to centre economic justice in the civil rights movement—civil rights activist James Forman, with a cadre of grassroots support from various parts of the Black community, interrupted worship at the Riverside Church in Manhattan, the flagship church of mainline US Protestantism. There he read the Black Manifesto, which began with these words:

We the black people assembled in Detroit, Michigan ... are fully aware that we have been forced to come together because racist white America has exploited our resources, our minds, our bodies, our labor.... We are demanding \$500,000,000 from the Christian white churches and the Jewish synagogues. This ... is not a large sum of money, and we know that the churches and synagogues have a tremendous wealth and its membership, white America, has profited from and still exploits black people.... Fifteen dollars for every black brother and sister in the United States is only a beginning of the reparations due us as people who have been exploited and degraded, brutalized, killed and persecuted.¹²

The Manifesto went on to specify in very specific terms how the \$500 million would be allocated.¹³

Black clergy and laity not only helped create the Black Manifesto but, in the months that followed, roundly endorsed its demands. But if white US-American Christians had disparaged Black power, they positively excoriated the Black Manifesto. Previously happy to talk about reconciliation, white Christians became hostile and intransigent as talk turned towards concrete forms of repair by those complicit in and benefiting from centuries of perpetration.

By the end of the civil rights movement, therefore, racial alienation came to rule the day. Findley argues that by the early 1970s, "[e]verywhere there were signs of disruption and decline in the old coalitions and friendships between whites and blacks in the churches."¹⁴ He claims the era of the Black Manifesto left Black and white Christians more alienated than they had been prior to civil rights.

This is precisely the opposite of how we tell our US civil rights story. Even if we admit we have a long way to go, we always emphasize how much progress we have made. If Findley is correct, however, this way of narrating the story is literally giving a white-washed version of our own church history.

Why does all of this matter so much? It's not that the civil rights movement accomplished nothing, or that it wasn't courageous and brilliant. It did and it was. It's not that the Black Power movement was perfect. It wasn't. But in the end, the critiques Black power made were proven accurate by urban rebellions in the US in the late 1960s and early '70s. At the end of this day, its critique remained terrifyingly predictive of the events we've seen unfold in the US since fall 2014, on through the 2016 election of a man enabling white Christian nationalism to take hold in the US, on through the KKK and neo-Nazi rallies in Charlottesville, Virginia, in fall 2017, and on through the horrors of young children being separated from their parents and put in cages at the US border—images descending on our consciousness just this week.

White US-Americans, like me, should not have been surprised by any of this. For if the US *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 was the national response to incredible civil rights organizing, the response to the analysis of Black power was silence, repudiation, and denial. To the extent that this analysis has never gotten a real public hearing or informed our economic, social, political, and religious initiatives, we have remained caught in the same racial realities we were caught in during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

But, as church, we've made reconciliation the takeaway point for the civil rights movement, despite the reality that it was unequivocally announced as and demonstrated to be inadequate. We've done so as if those critiques of our brothers and sisters of colour never happened. We've held onto a reconciliation paradigm and ignored, forgotten, or marginalized the calls for power, repair, and redress. We've repudiated the calls that offered, in the place of a reconciliation paradigm, a reparations paradigm.

Reparations in Colonial-Settler Relationships

If reconciliation is the takeaway point for a white-washed civil rights story, the takeaway point for the more complex, truthful civil rights story is reparations—more specifically, it's a reparations paradigm. Black Christians in the mid- to late 1960s weren't asking white Christians to sit down and talk: they were demanding that white Christians repent and repair. They were calling the churches to take seriously the material relationships that racial identity put white Christians in, relative to men and women of colour. They were demanding that white Christians respond to our structural and social location in a society organized so hierarchically and violently that reconciliation talk sounded more like resounding gongs or clanging symbols.

This is the point, then, at which I want to pivot to the Canadian context and to the question of colonial-settler realities. As I prepared to come to St. Andrew's, to this context different from my own, I read a little bit about Canada and race. Two devastating stories I encountered seemed to offer evidence that there are communities here experiencing reconciliation as something more like resounding gongs and clanging symbols.

I read, for example, about the killing of 22-year-old Colten Boushie, of the Red Pheasant First Nation in the province of Saskatchewan. After the verdict announcing that Boushie's killer would not be convicted, Erica Violet Lee, a Cree activist, said, "Watching the family go through the trial, we all realized that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian justice system as it's set up can't bring us justice." She added, "The pressure's on indigenous people to heal and to move on and forget the past. But the whole past is tied to this verdict."¹⁵

I read about Tina Fontaine. Then I watched the statement made by Sue Caribou, a Winnipeg advocate for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, after charges were stayed against the man initially charged in Fontaine's murder. Caribou said, "Not once in my life have I ever seen justice since I was f--king young. Not once do our people ever get justice. I have 10 murdered, two missing and to this f--king day we don't have justice."¹⁶

In 1973, Native theologian Vine Deloria, Jr. wrote: "Before any final solution to American history can occur, a reconciliation must be effected between the spiritual owner of the land—American Indians—and the political owner of the land—American Whites. Guilt and accusations cannot continue to revolve in a vacuum without some effort at reaching a solution."¹⁷ I am not presuming to put the word "reparations" in Deloria's mouth. But in this statement exists a demand for a paradigm shift. Similarly, in the cries of Erica Violet Lee and Sue Caribou exist indictments of reconciliation talk that demand a paradigm shift.

When Deloria speaks about reconciliation between the spiritual owner and political owner of the land, he is describing our radically distinct relationships to the land itself. True reconciliation, he believes, must happen and can only happen through the land.¹⁸ In an interview in *Christianity and Crisis* in 1975, Deloria was asked, "Would it be fair to say reconciliation is what Christians must be about, not reconciling souls to Christ but reconciling themselves to the land?" To this Deloria responded, "yes."¹⁹

In 2008, Australia apologized to Aboriginal peoples for the "indignity and degradation" they had endured.

The apology lamented the egregious and systematic oppression the government had visited upon a “proud people and a proud culture.” Shortly thereafter, I found myself in an exchange with another white colonial-settler US-American scholar and George “Tink” Tinker (Osage), a Native theologian. While many were applauding the Australian government, Tinker wrote to us that Indigenous peoples should reject any apology that comes without transfers of land. He insisted that an apology was worse than no apology, because it posed as a moral recalibration without actually changing the material conditions of Aboriginal peoples’ lives.²⁰

Deloria’s analysis (like Tinker’s) is the same type of analysis that was being made by Black Christians in the movements about which I just spoke. To reconcile through the land is to demand that white colonial-settler Christians repent and repair. It recognizes the historical and moral distinctness of Indigenous identity and as colonial-settler identity rather than presuming that our differences are parallels: that somehow, justice will come through more deeply embracing and celebrating them (what we typically emphasize in reconciliation paradigms). It’s very concrete. It insists we repair and redress historical harm and the material effects of injustice (in this case, for example, dispossession and removal of First Nations people) in order to transform our relationships, and as the way we actually transform them.

It is unequivocally clear that the call to a reparations paradigm extends far beyond white and Black relationships, and towards white, colonial-settler relationships with many other communities of colour. In fact, historically, just as Black power shifted the conversation from integration to power and justice, power movements among Native peoples, Latino/as, Asians, and Asian Americans in the US were also shifting and articulating reparations paradigms in the mid-1960s forward. These movements understood that analyses of colonialism were necessary for understanding the experiences of marginalized communities within US borders. They broadened civil rights talk to human rights talk (Black Power movements came to do so as well). For example, Chicano Power movements in the 1970s linked the situation of Chicanos in the US to the 1848 land grab by the US when it launched an illegal war and absconded with a majority of Mexico’s resource-rich lands. In response, Chicanos weren’t asking to sit down and talk. They were demanding redress of legacies of colonial-settler occupation. This was a reparations paradigm.

Now What?

It is in the demands made by power movements, demands that are still being expressed today, that we will find the work required of those of us whose legacies of Christian practice are bound up in colonial-settler

and racist violence. Rising to directly face and address the crises of racial and nationalist turmoil engulfing the world today requires that we deploy a reparations paradigm—the only analysis and framing of race that is adequate, accurate, and powerful enough to get us through and beyond the point at which we have been caught since the 1960s.

For example, as we contend with the relationship between Mexican and Mexican American people and white US-American people, as the US church attempts to take a stand against the Trump administration on immigration, we can’t do it by talking about “welcoming the stranger” or “hospitality.” No. There is an outstanding moral debt. Something is owed. Borders are so often the material evidence of long histories of violence and dispossession.

For example, as we challenge officials in the US as they busily attempt to erase the fact of climate change and implode collaborative, global work to address the climate crisis, we must centre deep understanding and public acknowledgement of Indigenous nations’ relationships to place. We must root our work for environmental justice in a reparative reckoning with colonialism and the land itself. For the land that has been degraded, the environmental crises that has ensued, was never ours to begin with. Further, First Nations peoples have long made clear the historical and theological connections between the ways white-Euro colonial-settlers saw and treated the land and the ways we saw/see and treated/treat Native bodies—as commodities for plunder.

Sovereignty and land rights struggles, immigration battles, and police violence against Black and brown bodies—all of these are all markers of historical, violent, and material relationships. None is less urgent than the other. In fact, they are all utterly interrelated.

It is time the church understands that our ability to envision and effectively work to create a truly just and liberative future in which all humans can flourish requires that we make reparations the paradigm through which we engage these interrelationships. Repair is the way we must work for justice with each other across racial and colonial-settler lines.

I realize that what I am sharing may sound overwhelming; that its enormity risks invoking despair. But we claim to be a resurrection people for whom death is never the last word.

Thus, I want to leave you with this. The reality of the enormity and interrelatedness of these issues means we can start anywhere. It also means that if we do the work right, and successfully come together and sustain work across racial and colonial-settler lines—something a reconciliation paradigm has never made

possible, but which a reparations paradigm might—we are powerful. We may even be the majority. We could win. Further, so many others have come before us in this work. When Black, Native, and Chicano Power movements challenged white Christians to engage in concrete, meaningful activities of repair and reparations, they did it while facing down the same violence of racism and colonial-settler hatred that brought us to this contemporary political moment. People in these movements planted their feet, stood up amid reigns of racial terror, and with courage and conviction and commitment said over and over, “We will be free.”

So, I close with the question “*Dear Church ... Now what?*”

In contrast to the confusion a reconciliation paradigm creates, a reparations paradigm offers a clarifying way to understand the meaning of race and settler-colonial identities in our lives and the actual nature of our interrelationships with one another. It can help us identify pathways far more productive, truth-filled, and life-giving than any reconciliation has been able to open up so far. It is also unquestionably morally coherent.

But I close by pointing out, as well, that a reparations paradigm is also deeply biblical. We merely need to remember that tax collector Zacchaeus. We shouldn’t fear reparations talk. The biblical witness is clear that in confessing sin, repentance and repair offer us the possibility of new life. Zacchaeus had profited from complicity with empire and served at the beck and call of imperial power. But when Jesus told him to come down from that tree, he gave half of his possessions to the poor and a four-fold reparation back to those from whom he had stolen. And then Zacchaeus ended up sitting at the true fellowship table. Zacchaeus got to go home with Jesus!

Repentance and repair isn’t easy work. It doesn’t immediately unfold into obvious paths. It is uncertain work. It’s difficult work. But it’s sacred work. And now is the moment for us to remember and learn a new old story, so that we can begin to write a new old vision on the wall for all to see. And for the white colonial-settlers among us, like myself, that vision begins with repentance and repair.

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1 In June 2018, news broke that the US government was separating young children from their parents at the southern border of the US. Horrifying images broke in the press of children sleeping on concrete floors and in wire cages. As of this writing, hundreds of children remain apart from their parents despite the orders of a federal judge for reunification. Reports indicate that some parents were already deported without their children and may never be successfully united again. See <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/06/27/immigrant-children-family-separation-border-timeline/734014002>.

2 White US-Americans voted for Donald Trump by overwhelming majorities. Among white women, 53%; white evangelical Christians, 81%; mainline Protestant Christians, 58%; and white Catholics, 60%. See <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis>.

3 Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by James Miller, transcript, December 18, 1962, www.wmich.edu/library/archives/mlk/q-a.html.

4 See the Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, “Religious Landscape Survey,” <http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits>.

5 Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 49.

6 James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 62–64.

7 *Ibid.*, 121.

8 For a longer discussion of ESCRU, see Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 32–37.

9 James Findlay Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 64.

10 For a more detailed discussion of this entire period, see Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle*, chapter 6, and Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, chapter 4.

11 Quoted in Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle*, 178.

12 James Forman, “The Black Manifesto,” in Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliott Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 120.

13 These included a southern land bank, publishing and printing industries, audio-visual networks, a research skills centre, a training centre, assistance to the National Welfare Rights Organization, a National Black Labor and Defense Fund, the establishment of an International Black Appeal to raise money for cooperative businesses in the US and the African Motherland, and a Black university in the South. See *ibid.*, 121–22.

14 Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle*, 220.

15 Leyland Cecco, “Canada: Indigenous Groups Urge Reform after Shock of White Farmer’s Acquittal,” *The Guardian*, Feb. 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/12/canada-indigenous-colten-boushie-trial-saskatchewan>.

16 Aiden Geary, “Indigenous Leaders Call for Change after ‘All the Systems’ Failed Tina Fontaine,” CBC News, Feb. 22, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/tina-fontaine-raymond-cormier-not-guilty-indigenous-leaders-1.4548159>.

17 Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red* (Delta, 1981), 75.

18 Deloria makes this more explicit in Vine Deloria, Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1999).

19 Vine Deloria, Jr., “God is Also Red: An Interview with Vine Deloria Jr.,” interview by James R. McGraw, *Christianity and Crisis* 35 (September 15, 1975): 206.

20 See Jennifer Harvey, “Dangerous ‘Goods’: Seven Reasons Creation Care Movements Must Advocate Reparations,” in Steve Heinrichs, ed., *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2013), chapter 18.

A Theological Interpretation of BTS and ARMY

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BTS and ARMY: The Scene

“No matter who you are, where you're from, your skin color, your gender identity, just speak yourself. Find your name and find your voice by speaking yourself.”—RM, at the UN General Assembly¹

BTS is a Korean popular music group. Its name stands for BangTan Sonyeondan (Bulletproof Boy Scouts, in Korean). It is a hugely successful example of the Korean pop music industry, or K-pop, as it is known. BTS has won the Billboard Music Awards, American Music Awards, BBC Radio1 Teen Awards, MTV Awards, and many more. It hit number 1 on the charts in 73 countries in 2017,² scored the No. 1 album twice on the Billboard 200 chart in 2018, and its world tour concerts have been sold out. Tens of millions of global fans, known as ARMY (Adorable Representative MC for Youth), follow them. They are truly “the biggest boy band in the world,”³ and BBC even refers to them as “the Beatles for the 21st century.”⁴ What sets BTS apart from other K-pop groups and Western boy bands is the content of their lyrics, the causes they support, the size of their fan base, and the intimate, reciprocal relationship between the band and its fan base. The group has received recognition from the United Nations for its impact on youth. On September 23, 2018, they appeared at the United Nations as goodwill ambassadors as part of the launch of a UN program aimed at youth. In his speech, RM, the group's leader, discussed the “Love Yourself” campaign that the group had initiated the previous year with UNICEF.⁵ BTS has often been treated by commentators on pop culture or by the music industry as just another “Idol” (teen pop in the Korean context) or a dispensable artefact. The lyrics from their song “IDOL” address this point.

Part of what makes BTS theologically significant is its message of self-acceptance and the resonance this has found in diverse youth cultures around the world. Many youth in this neo-liberalized world suffer from feeling worthless and replaceable while hoping they can become a subject of their life and history. In his speech at the UN, RM described himself as having been in this position and having learned to overcome

it by accepting himself despite his imperfections. Many of the group's songs convey to youth a call to self-acceptance. Through BTS's songs, their fandom has been provided with a scene to express their feelings and experience a sense of meaningfulness and empowerment.

Their scene could be said to resemble stories in the gospels. To declare oneself a BTS fan in North America frequently requires courage and determination, because “Asian cool” is not widely acknowledged. Against all kinds of prejudices and stereotypes, young people have joined the ARMY, though they risked losing status by doing so. Despite this, many ARMY members enthusiastically spread the good news of BTS with others. To today's Nathanaels who ask, “Can anything good come out of Korea?” or out of K-pop, the ARMY invites them with confidence like Philip, saying, “Come and see” (John 1:46), by showing them BTS music video(MV)s on YouTube, and making countless reaction videos. US (BTS) ARMY's etiquette sounds in some ways like a program to become a Christian. The admonition that “ARMYs are the Face of BTS”⁶ is reminiscent of Paul's injunction to the Corinthian Christians: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). Like the early Christians, ARMY members expect misunderstanding and even persecution from others, but encourage each other to “become a better person.”⁷ Their motto (instead of fan-wars), “Kill Them All with Kindness,”⁸ resonates with Paul's advice: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (Rom. 12:17).

The BTS message is not simply self-acceptance. It is also a call to work for change in the world. The passion of many members of the ARMY for BTS is partly their will to survive, but also partly a response to this call to make a change. For the ARMY, BTS's UN speech, “Speak yourself,” and its anti-violence campaign with UNICEF, “Love Myself,” make a lot of sense. The lyrics of BTS songs and the symbols and action sequences in their MVs articulate the oppression and alienation that many youths feel and offer them a sense of identity and purpose. Following BTS, the ARMY are called to be part of bigger things. As co-partners of BTS, ARMY members raised \$1.4 million as part of an

anti-violence campaign.⁹ While BTS is a product of the K-pop music industry, designed to turn a profit, it has to some extent transcended this through its message of self-acceptance and call to care for others, and through the response this has generated among youth in different parts of the world.

BTS and ARMY are a remarkable cultural phenomena deserving critical theological reflection. Something unprecedented is happening in this scene. In this paper, we will strive to listen to “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Revelation 2:7) in an unexpected form: K-pop.

Setting The Scene: “Blues as Secular Spirituals”

The idea that a form of popular music might deserve theological reflection is not new. In his book *The Spirituals and the Blues*, published in 1972, James Cone began a program of theological reflection on the popular culture of the oppressed, particularly their music and its lyrics, that continues today. Cone elucidated that the spirituals and the blues had legitimate theological significances.¹⁰ As a fan of the blues, this founder of Black theology declared, “I, therefore, write about the spirituals and the blues, because I am the blues and my life is a spiritual. Without them, I cannot be.”¹¹ His statement is not far from a Black female youth’s confession concerning the music of BTS. Deja Ferguson, who got into BTS in 2015, said, “They [BTS] are the reason I’m actually still alive to this day, I didn’t give up on life because they gave me hope and a reason to keep going.”¹² In *The Spirituals and the Blues*, Cone examined the lyrics of the spirituals and illustrated that they were deeply related to Black experience and reflected Black eschatological beliefs. White masters twisted the gospel, but Black people “rejected white distortions of the gospel” and “contended that God willed their freedom and not their slavery.”¹³ This longing for freedom also came to expression in the blues. More importantly, Cone endorsed the blues despite its profane characteristics. He acknowledged that the secular slavery songs seem to be not only non-religious, but also often anti-religious.¹⁴ But he argued that while the blues may “ignore the ‘religious’ concerns of the church,” they are *secular spirituals* because they “affirm the bodily expression of black soul including its sexual manifestations” and “are impelled by the same search for the truth of black experience.”¹⁵

Cone’s argument helped change the status of the blues from “the Devil’s music” to “God’s people’s music.” His interpretation of the blues has been criticized. Angela Y. Davis, a Black feminist scholar, argued that Cone tended to “view women as marginal to the production of the blues,” though he mentioned “Mamie Smith, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and other

women who composed and performed blues songs.”¹⁶ Cone’s “essentialist invocation of a single metaphysical ‘truth’ of black experience”¹⁷ did not pay adequate attention to Black female experiences. Despite these shortcomings, he succeeded in showing that the blues expressed theologically pertinent themes of existential protest and spiritual yearning for redemption. His example of theological attention to the popular music of the oppressed has had a number of followers and remains pertinent, even though the underlying assumptions of his approach have been criticized.

Cone’s analysis of the blues and its mutations can help our approach to K-pop. The descendant genres of blues such as rap, hip hop, R&B, rock, and pop dominate the musical landscape of the United States, the biggest music market in the world. Particularly, hip hop and R&B are the most-consumed genres, accounting for 25.1 percent of this market.¹⁸ Hip hop, an important cultural expression of Black people, has spread around the world and has been translated into diverse languages in many different contexts, including South Korea. In 1992, a group called Seo TaiJi and Boys initiated K-pop, a new form of Korean popular music, by adopting the growing American music genres and creating original rap songs in Korean. It was a ground-breaking moment. From then on, K-pop has continued to evolve and grow. It has travelled back to the United States as well as becoming popular in other North Atlantic countries. BTS is part of this spreading popularity of K-pop. Thanks to globalization and digitalization, BTS has become a phenomenon in many parts of the world.

Blues is regarded as African American music.¹⁹ It reflects distinctive “rhythmic patterns” and “certain models of social interaction” of African cultures.²⁰ K-pop can be described as a hybridized mixture of translation of Western popular music genres from abroad and unique Korean cultural expressions. It is a product of the hybrid, interreligious reality of the post-colonial world. Investigating the religious dimensions in K-pop, one may not encounter direct, explicit conventional Christian doctrines, but one does encounter the root source of many Korean cultural expressions: Korean Shamanism.

Behind The Scene: The Source of Korean Cultural Expressions

Minjung theologians in Korea have reflected theologically on Korean Shamanism. Following the usage of *ochlos* in the gospel of Mark, *minjung* means “the mass” or “the public who are involuntarily deprived of their *belongingness*.”²¹ Minjung theologians have sought to contextualize the gospel in Korea through reflection on Korean *minjung* traditions and relating these to the salvation stories of Christian traditions.

Suh Nam-Dong, one of the founding minjung theologians, referred to this as the “joining of two stories.”²² Through doing this, minjung theology has witnessed to the presence of God’s Spirit at work in Korean Shamanism. We may find the same in K-pop.

Two of the most fundamental sentiments of Korean aesthetics are *han* (恨) and *heung* (興).²³ These seemingly opposite terms are rooted in Korean Shamanism and can be observed in many Korean cultural expressions. *Han* refers to “the long-term, often intergenerational, effects of unrelieved trauma on persons, families, and communities.”²⁴ *Heung* means “fun,” “excitement,” “rapture,” “possession,” and “groove,” which is linked with the religious ecstasy in Korean Shamanism rituals, *goot* (굿). Chung Hyun Kyung, a feminist minjung theologian, introduces *goot* as follows: “The shaman wore beautiful, colourful dresses and sang and danced until she reached a state of ecstasy. She then called to the ghosts and talked to them. Other times the shaman consoled the ghosts, played with them, or negotiated with them.”²⁵ The religious act of comforting *han* is called *han-pu-ri*. It includes addressing and overcoming *han*, which “comes from the sinful interconnections of classism, racism, sexism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and cultural imperialism which Korean people experience every day.”²⁶ *Han-pu-ri* (sublimation of *han*) involves *heung* in *goot*.

Han and *heung* form the roots of Korean aesthetic consciousness, which tends to be emotional and communal. In this regard, some scholars suggest that *Pansori* of Korea and American blues music have common characteristics: “*Pansori* and blues conveyed their dismal outlooks on human existence in a language laced with humor, irony, and satirical bite: they encouraged their community to keep laughing to keep from crying.”²⁷ Korean *Pansori* and American blues both belong to the arts “of communal healing.”²⁸ According to Suh Nam-Dong, “Through *Pansori* and mask dance in Korean traditions, *minjung* not only expressed emotional *han*, but only criticized and resisted against the false system, morality, power, and authority of the ruler by booing and satirizing them; as a result, *minjung* were able to liberate themselves and present their yearning toward the coming of a new world.”²⁹ Hyun Young-Hak, another first-generation minjung theologian, connected the ministry and salvation of Jesus Christ with the (*Bong-San*) mask dance of Korean *minjung* tradition.³⁰

As “a priest of *han* (Suh Nam-Dong),” BTS performs *han-pu-ri* by dealing with subjects such as mental health, the rights of LGBTQ people, and social and political issues in their songs and activities. However, even native Korean speakers cannot fully understand all their lyrics. How then can they communicate to non-Korean-speaking youth? The answer seems to

be that the messages in their songs are also conveyed through the choreography of their MVs. Gerardus van der Leeuw, a Dutch phenomenologist of religion, notes the importance of dance in this regard:

The dance is the most universal of the arts, since, as Goethe justly said, it could destroy all the fine arts. It is an expression of all the emotions of the spirit, from the lowest to the highest. It accompanies and stimulates all the processes of life, from hunting and farming to war and fertility, from love to death. It enables, in turn, other arts to come into being: music, song, drama. Despite all this richness, the dance is no formless complex, but a simple unity.³¹

This and what Chung Hyun Kyung says of *goot* are applicable to the idiosyncratic choreography of BTS MVs. It may be through this that BTS communicates most effectively to non-Koreans.

For example, in the MV of “IDOL,”³² BTS intentionally adopted various traditional Korean references, such as Korean traditional clothing, masks, dolls, architectures, paintings, patterns, dances, gestures, and sounds. Some unique phrases like “Ursoo,” (Yoo-hoo) “Jihwaja, Jota!” (Hooray, great!), and “DeongGiDuk Kung DuRuRu” (counting traditional rhythm sounds) come directly from *Pansori*. Through these representations, they create the sentiment of *han* and *heung* as well as the catharsis of *han-pu-ri*. Like most of BTS’s MVs, in the final stage of the video, something overwhelming and threatening (a huge shark and gigantic titans, here) comes up, but it turns out to be okay and safe, which can make viewers feel the sublime. Then, the MV ends with a spectacular group dance. BTS members dance with a lot of people in a high-spirited manner and celebrate the sense of a new community with viewers. In this way, BTS performs *han-pu-ri* in their *goot*, so people who cannot speak Korean may still feel and appreciate their message.

Beyond The Scene³³: Church as Fandom

Let us try to articulate “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” in this scene in terms of hearing the sound of *han*, creating narratives, and building a new community. BTS’s worldwide appeal has resulted partly from their listening to *han* of young generations. The band provides a message of resistance against the culture of *killling*, which causes depression, hatred, self-loathing, and suicide among youth. BTS’s music is made in the highly competitive and pressured Korean context, which features a high youth suicide rate.³⁴ Their message of self-acceptance speaks to this and to teenagers struggling with self-acceptance elsewhere, including so-called developed countries such as New Zealand, the US, and Canada, with higher

youth suicide rates than Korea's.³⁵ There is also a prophetic dimension to the music of BTS. Two songs, "Spring Day" and "Save Me," are examples of this.

"Spring Day" was dedicated to the victims and survivors of the Sewol ferry disaster. On April 16, 2014, the Sewol ferry sank near Jindo island. Of the 476 passengers, 304 people died and five remain missing. Most were students of DanWon high school.³⁶ This traumatic accident was caused by the accumulated evils in the extremely neo-liberalized Korean society.³⁷ For Koreans, this tragedy is representative of a callous social status quo that prioritizes profits over people and a conspiracy of silence, often involving the government, to the cost in human lives this involves. Through its "Spring Day" MV, BTS challenged this by paying homage to the novel *Omelas*³⁸ and the movie *Snowpiercer*,³⁹ and by commemorating the victims through symbols associated with the disaster, such as the seashore, yellow ribbons, piled clothes, lost shoes, and so on. The former president, Park Geun-hye, who was impeached three years later, made a list of the artists and celebrities who criticized the corruption of the government. While many conservative mega-churches kept silent on this matter, BTS publicly expressed their mourning and yearning in this song. At the end of the MV, when winter is over and spring finally comes, the BTS members stand in front of a tree representing a new world; this bears hope for *han-pu-ri* of God or a yearning for the salvation of God. BTS has supported the victims and survivors by donating "100 million won [approximately \$118,000 CAD] to the 4/16 Sewol Families for Truth and a Safer Society."⁴⁰ Through such songs and actions, BTS have protested some of the injustices in Korean society. Conversely, after some ARMY members criticized BTS's sexism and misogyny, BTS apologized for this and redirected their narratives.⁴¹

Conclusion

"Music is prophecy," said Jacques Attali, a French economic and social theorist. "Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code."⁴² K-pop can be a "transcending of everyday" or "the herald of the future."⁴³ In 2017, a protest at Ewha Womans University in South Korea revealed the roots of a massive scandal by former president Park Geun-hye. This led ultimately to her impeachment.⁴⁴ When approximately 200 female student protesters who occupied the building were surrounded and about to be suppressed by 1,600 police officers, they stood arm in arm and started to sing the popular K-pop song "Into the New World."⁴⁵ It was the 2007 debut song of Girls' Generation, one of the most popular K-pop girl groups. While it is treated as a shallow teenagers' love song, these protesters,

having grown up with K-pop, were able to refashion it to express their desire for social justice and a more authentic democracy. This illustrates how the meanings of K-pop songs are still in the making. These cultural expressions of Korean people have helped the young generation construct their identities and, in this instance, stand up against social injustice. Now, ARMY members around the globe are growing up with BTS and building a new community of feeling and memory, committed to self-acceptance, helping others, and being willing to protest social injustice. Erik Overton, an ARMY member, said, "Being part of such a big global family has been so empowering for me ... it represents the kind of world that I want to live in."⁴⁶ A new generation with the new range of possibilities is on the way. BTS and ARMY are at the centre of this.

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14 Ibid., 109.

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17 Ibid., 8.

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20 Ibid., 243.

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23 Shin EunGyung, *PungRyu* 風流: *The Source of East Asian Aesthetics* (Seoul: BoGo Publishers, 1999). In her book, Shin articulates three aesthetical sources: *Han* (恨), *Heung* (興), and *MooSim* (無心).

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The Commonwealth Interfaith Forum: Relevance in a Relic?

By James Taylor Christie

University of Winnipeg

In 2005, Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury, and his friend the Rev. Jim Wallis, the Evangelical founder of *Sojourners*, had an idea. More, they shared a vision framed in a question. What if there were a new way for the world's religious leaders to engage the world's political leaders? What if the planet's diverse multi-faith religious communities, at 85 percent of the global population the largest civil society network extant, were to articulate a tentative working partnership with the world's most powerful nations? With the Archbishop's long-time acquaintance, the United Kingdom's then prime minister, Tony Blair, set to host the 2005 G8 Summit at Gleneagles, Scotland, what better juncture to test the concept? So they did, convening a face-to-face summit of religious leaders at Lambeth, in London, with options for virtual participation. Those gathered, mainly Christians in that first iteration, developed a common statement and sent it to the heads of state of the UK, the United States, Japan, Italy, Canada, France, Germany, and Russia. The leaders received, no doubt with mixed degrees of appreciation, the statement issued by the Lambeth gathering.¹ This was the beginning of a new channel of discourse among political, civil, and religious societies on priority global issues: a conversation significant enough that from 2007, the G8/G20 Research Group at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy in Toronto monitors the annual statements and their impact.

The World Religious Leaders Summits

This "new" channel included a series of Religious Leaders Summits, convened for a full round of annual G8 economic and political summits from 2005 to 2012; a focus consultation by correspondence among those religious leaders, which issued a statement in *The London Times* in 2013; and subsequently, G20 Religious Leaders Summits (now referred to as F20 Fora), thus far from 2014 to 2018. The religious leaders were drawn not from the ranks of popes, patriarchs, lamas, and their ilk, but rather from the second tier of governing religious leaders, ordered and lay, according to tradition. The expertise sought was wide ranging: theological, religious, sociological, commercial, activist, non-governmental organization (NGO).

First iterations were recruited by word of mouth. By 2008, an International Continuance Committee was established, with membership from the preceding, current, and subsequent fora. The Religious Leaders Summits continued essentially uninterrupted through iterations in Moscow, 2006; Köln, 2007; Osaka/Kyoto and Sapporo, 2008; Rome, 2009; Winnipeg, 2010; Bordeaux, 2011; Washington, 2012; and a virtual conference and collaboration through London in 2013.

A sea change in content and process occurred in Köln in 2007. Christopher Hill, Lord Bishop of Guilford, proposed a "consistency of content" for the deliberations and communications of the World Religious Leaders Summits. The Millennium Development Goals emerged from Kofi Anan's Millennial Summit at the United Nations in the spring of 2000. They were intended to sketch the essential requirements for an equitable and sustainable human future. I proposed "persistence of presence," committing the leaders to convene annually in conjunction with the G8 Summits. Both recommendations were adopted, and the MDGs, limited and controversial as they may have been, became the "Rosetta stone," the framework for discussion, among global political, economic, civil, and religious constituencies.

In 2014, a full cycle of G8 Religious Leaders Summits having been convened planet wide, an initiative born out of Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, was conceived in the fertile mind of Dr. Brian Adams, director of Griffith's Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue. Dr. Adams proposed that it was time to shift focus from the G8 (by then, G7, following the expulsion of Russia) to the annual G20 summits. The Religious Leaders Summits expanded horizons, and in 2014, a multi-faith summit, now designated a G20 Forum (F20), was convened in Gold Coast (Australia), followed by gatherings in Istanbul in 2015; Beijing, 2016; Potsdam, 2017; and Buenos Aires, 2018. The model for the G20 (F20) Interfaith Fora has developed more in the manner of an international NGO board.² This allows for a greater consistency of content and constituency.

Hence, more focused agendas have emerged. In Gold Coast, 2014, the agenda was "Religious Freedom,

Economic Health, and Justice”; in Istanbul, 2015, “Religion and Sustainable Development”; in Beijing, 2016, “Dialogue Among Civilizations and a Community of Common Destiny for All Mankind”; in Potsdam, 2017, “Religion, Sustainable Development and the Refugee Crisis”; and in Buenos Aires, 2018, “Building Consensus for Fair and Sustainable Development: Religious Contributions for a Dignified Future.”

Funding, ever vexing, varied widely from state and institutional sponsoring (e.g., Moscow, Rome) to religious communities (e.g., Japan) to full and extensive public cross-sectoral fundraising (e.g., Canada). Universities have often contributed substantial gifts in kind (e.g., Canada, Japan, Australia, Germany). From 2007, the agenda focused on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),³ with particular attention paid to the relevant religious interchange. The Rosetta stone that provides a framework for discussion is now the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),⁴ which in 2015 succeeded the MDGs.

In the G8 cycle from 2005 to 2012 (or 2013, depending on criteria), the agenda had proved somewhat idiosyncratic, depending in large measure on the domestic and international agenda of the host government. In 2010, as an example, the Canadian hosts, in addition to ensuring that all eight MDGs were in some measure addressed, noted in particular the issue of maternal and child health.

The MDGs were but an initial step in addressing a menu of mounting crises. Kofi Anan’s hope had been to be halfway to compliance with them by 2015. By contrast, it was hoped that accomplishing the seventeen SDGs would achieve nothing less than comprehensive application and universal compliance in eradicating all our planet’s major woes, and to do so not by authoritarian fiat but by democratic development. At each of the G8/G20 Religious Leaders Summits/Fora, it was observed that an expansion of the dialogue was devoutly to be desired.

The Commonwealth Interfaith Conference

The 2018 Commonwealth Games were scheduled for April 2018 in Brisbane. Griffith University had been named the first ever University Partner for the Games. With this in mind, Dr. Adams hypothesized that the Games, bringing together 53 nations from a total of 74 definable geo-political entities, might provide a valuable locus to explore the potential of the Commonwealth for international interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The Commonwealth of Nations, relic and troubled heir to the British Empire, is, after all, an international community with some sense of historical legitimacy, if uncertain relevance. It spans the globe, constituting over 25 percent of nations. The

Commonwealth contains virtually all the religious and racial distinctions of humanity. Wealthy and poor nations—developed and developing, with a full spectrum of governmental systems, including multiple variants of democracy—all belong to it, and, for the most part, all share a common language.

In a letter to potential participants, Dr. Adams outlined a concept. He noted the dramatic changes over the preceding two years, including the Brexit referendum in the UK; the election of an isolationist American president; the imperial ambitions of Mr. Putin; and Chinese transnational reach. The UN struggles valiantly on, but in the light of the demonstrably successful G8/G20 Religious Leaders Summits since 2005, might Commonwealth religious leaders gather in Brisbane to explore the possibility of this weary old structure finding new life as a true Community of Nations? The challenges were the usual: 1) Would the proposal be met with endorsement by significant leaders?; 2) Would there be buy-in by qualified, expert participants, Commonwealth-wide? and 3) Would sufficient funding be available?

The first two challenges were addressed swiftly and with marked enthusiasm. The concept received the imprimatur of Baroness Scotland, Secretary General of The Commonwealth. Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, one-time foreign minister for Canada, wrote enthusiastically:

Your overarching theme for the Inaugural Commonwealth Conference, “*Sustainable Peace and Development in a Polarizing World*,” resonates strongly with me ... I had the opportunity to articulate and advance both the concept of “Human Security” and “The Responsibility to Protect”. Both approaches to global community are under some duress, but both are the natural domain of a revitalized Commonwealth of Nations.

Buy-in was swift and gratifying, with nearly 100 religious leaders, legislators, scholars, writers, military chaplains, and activists representing directly or indirectly some half of the Commonwealth community expressing interest and support. In the end, over 30 internationals of varied disciplines were among the participants.

Funding proved challenging, but not insurmountable. Both partner universities contributed generously in cash and in kind. Dr. Adam’s Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue provided the venue; various community and private donors offered tangible support. Perhaps most intriguing was a start-up grant from a foundation in Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Workable World Trust (WWT), established in 2014 by the late Dr. Joseph Schwartzberg, professor emeritus of the

University of Minnesota and author of a much-translated book on improving the United Nations.⁵ Despite his deep reservations concerning the Commonwealth's origins, credibility, and future, Dr. Schwartzberg, with his American midwest pragmatism, was willing to invest in a well-articulated proposal, even if the returns seemed limited.

The Commonwealth Interfaith Forum

The inaugural Commonwealth Interfaith Forum convened from April 8 to 11, 2018. Dr. Adams and I, in regular consultation with confirmed participants, took responsibility for the structure of the program. Of particular priority was the objective of ensuring that the voices of others than “the usual suspects” were recognized and heard. Hence, the participation and leadership of women, Indigenous peoples, and youth were explicitly identified and featured prominently. Every effort was exerted to ensure that panels were never exclusively composed of males of certain years and status. Although some events were focused particularly on the perspectives of women and youth, for the most part all three constituencies were fully integrated throughout.

Indigenous and women participants were invited through the extensive global networks of the organizers. Young people (under 35) were proposed by the leadership of A Common Word Among Youth (ACWAY), an international youth movement spanning the globe, with membership in the thousands across six continents. Dr. Adams was among the founding inspirations of the movement, and I was a regular consultant on procedural and structural issues. Happily, Commonwealth youth are well represented in ACWAY.

As already alluded, participants represented a vast array of disciplines and professions: scholars, religious, theological, and secular; politicians (sitting and former) and political scientists; ecologists; historians; military chaplains; peace researchers, and activists; authors and journalists; economists; mediators; artists; and sociologists, religious, and secular. In short, a broad range of intellectual energy extant in the Commonwealth was mustered in Brisbane. An early decision was to emphasize both head and heart: thus, performance art was integrated into the program. Indigenous expression was prized, but the contemporary and avant garde were also incorporated through partnership with the Kinetic Collective, a company of young women and men active in Australia and South East Asia.

Throughout, the organizers shared leadership and chairing responsibilities with the principal constituencies noted above: women, Indigenous peoples, and youth. The final program, less only Professor

Ituma, whose visa remained in limbo, was structured around three overarching themes: the past and future Commonwealth; the Commonwealth and interfaith dialogue; and the Commonwealth, peace, and security. Each theme was allotted the equivalent of one day, and further delineated into plenary and parallel sessions. Keynote speakers were not employed so as to elicit the greatest possible participation. The opening plenary included papers presented by former British parliamentarian and human rights lawyer Keith Best; Maria Florencia Gor, representing the Coalition for an International Criminal Court for Latin America and the Caribbean; and Professor Derek McDougall, a celebrated Commonwealth historian. They focused on past and current Commonwealth history and structure, and pondered the Commonwealth as a “workable” model for global community. A plenary session and two parallel sessions ensued: the first addressing sustainable peace and development across the Commonwealth; and the second, the rich diversity of the Commonwealth tapestry. The plenary panel on sustainable governance included Dr. Sherrie Steiner of Purdue University, Fort Wayne, Indiana. She was joined by the Hon. Lemi Taefu, associate minister for Natural Resources and Environment, Government of Samoa; and Rachel Blaney, deputy whip of Canada's New Democratic Party.

The first parallel session was addressed by, among others, Dr. Syed Munir Khasru of the World Economic Forum; Dr. Nur Hidayah, vice dean of the Faculty of Medicine, State Islamic University of Alauddin Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia; and Thomas Albrecht, regional representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Australia and the Pacific Islands. The second parallel session, Plurality or Polarity: Diversity across the Commonwealth, was presented by three internationally known and widely published religionists: Dr. Paul Morris of New Zealand, presenting his vision of Cosmopolitan Piety from a Jewish foundation; Dr. Ahmad Yousif, of Brunei, from a Muslim perspective; and Dr. Ezichi Ituma, writing as a Roman Catholic from Nigeria. In Dr. Ituma's absence, his paper was presented, at his request, by me. Without enumerating each panel and every panellist individually, the reader will appreciate from these examples the range of depth and expertise gathered in Brisbane. Each session, it seemed to one participant, gleamed more luminous than its predecessor. Full details of the program, the participants, and the sponsors may be found on the website of the Griffith University Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue.⁶

These early sessions established a continuity of both form and function consistent with the G8 and G20 Interfaith Fora upon which they were modelled. Although all sessions proved to be positively received, three ought to be highlighted for particular consider-

ation: the plenary panel of military chaplains; the panel of Muslim scholars addressing peace and security; and women of the Commonwealth leading peace and development.

Major Moore of Canada, Chaplain Saunders of Australia, and Chaplain General Hawse of New Zealand stretched the imaginations of all participants as they described the Religious Leader Engagement doctrine, developed by Canadian chaplains serving in the UN mission to the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, which has garnered increasing favour across the Commonwealth and beyond. The idea is deceptively simple, strategically and humanly brilliant. Chaplains in theatres of operation seek to gather local religious leaders of all persuasions to engage in on-the-ground peace building: capacity building at its most basic and blessed.

On the Women's panel, Carol Angir, of Kenyan origins, a feminist and community activist; Rachel Blaney, a Canadian politician of mixed Indigenous and European heritage; and Dr. Nur Hidayah, an Indonesian health educator, demonstrated that peace and development depend far more often on foundational community women's leadership than might be imagined.

Panel chair Lina Salim, an interfaith organizer from Singapore and a teacher of Islamic studies for children, was one of the talented ACWAY participants. Her panel of Dr. Yousif of Brunei, Dr. Duderija of Brisbane, and Dr. Khasru of India, a member of the UN's SDGs Global Council, engaged in a lively series of presentations and conversations on the significance of reform and interpretation both within and beyond the Muslim community. The final session of the conference was convened as an open World Café-style participatory plenary, co-chaired by the organizers. Most happily for the organizers, nearly all the international participants were able to remain for this closing reflective session.

In planning and executing this conference, the organizers had one question: Is there, within the Commonwealth of Nations, a viable model upon which to build global community? In other words, is there relevance in the relic? We didn't so much hope, as hunch. Working with us during those three days in April were a multitalented team of internationals who, through their person or their positions, could in some measure speak to the interests and concerns of approximately half of the global Commonwealth community. Dr. Duderija gathered their thoughts in response to three manageable questions:

- Is the Commonwealth a model for a workable world? If yes, why?
- Is the Commonwealth a model for a workable world? If not, why not?

- If the Commonwealth is perceived to be a model for a workable world, what conditions might be required to make it so?

Given that the emphasis of this evaluation session was engaged conversation and principally anecdotal, an analytical tabulation of the results is not available. Such empirical data must await the establishment and outcome of formal research protocols. Let it be noted that participation was, by observation, unanimous, and that informal straw polls were used rather than formal voting procedures. Tabulation and formulation of comments was undertaken by Dr. Duderija in the first instance, and reviewed by the organizers.

The great majority of participants concurred that the Commonwealth offered a potential model for a workable world community. Four reasons were recorded for this positive assessment: 1) the Commonwealth already possesses the platform, processes, and formal supranational structures requisite for further development; 2) the "common table" of the Commonwealth could provide a "safe place" to acknowledge "past injustices, and controversial, contentious, and unresolved issues from the past and present." These include, but are not limited to, colonial legacy; refugee issues; climate justice; mining exploitation; tax haven status; 3) the diversity of the Commonwealth is viewed as a great gift to her peoples. This is not only in terms of race, ethnicity, and religion, but also in terms of climate, urban and rural contexts, and the contrasting and often conflicting interests of North/South and East/West; and 4) the Commonwealth, therefore, could prove a "springboard to counter division and polarization."

Dissenting views, though few, were acutely voiced. The reasons mooted countering the idea that the Commonwealth could prove a potential model for a workable world were as follows:

1. A formal apology from a suitable representative of the "mother" country must be a precondition for any serious pursuit of a future and transformed Commonwealth.
2. A small number of youth participants argued strongly that the Commonwealth "has no future" as it is "not known among Commonwealth youth." The most vocal exponents of this position were young women and men from South Asia.
3. Future focus ought to be on the "principles and values" of global community, apart from and not reliant upon a "particular historical framework or historical legacy."

With a clear indication that next steps towards rethinking the Commonwealth as a potential model for building global community with all caveats noted were

feasible, twelve necessary conditions were identified by the participants.

A Commonwealth Forum must:

1. raise awareness of the Commonwealth, its current objectives and capacities as well as its potential among Commonwealth youth;
2. solicit more active support from the existing institutional infrastructure, especially from the existing Commonwealth Office and its Secretary General;
3. develop and present clear policy recommendations aimed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) and the Secretariat;
4. meet regularly, coinciding with annual G20 summit meetings;
5. adapt or harmonize existing or proposed policies and resolutions with those of the United Nations;
6. develop and maintain a website;
7. adopt a funding model in the manner of the Commonwealth and the U.N.;
8. work with and within existing Commonwealth structures;
9. (as per the vision of Dr. Adams) meet annually and regionally; and globally every fourth year to coincide with The Commonwealth Games;
10. determine the extent to which interreligious and intercultural issues should be addressed discreetly or conjointly;
11. establish focused task groups to address issues and concerns, first and foremost, truth and reconciliation;
12. develop and maintain the principles of “legitimacy, capacity, effectiveness, and relevance.”

There were also the inevitable snapshot moments. The opening banquet of traditional Aborigine bush fare, highlighted by smudging and traditional Aborigine interpretation of the Australian ecosystem, was followed by a prefilmed conversation between Cesar Jaramillo, executive director of Canada’s Project Ploughshares, and anti-nuclear activist Setsuko Thurlow of Toronto. Dr. Thurlow, a survivor of the Hiroshima nuclear bombing in August 1945, was the co-receiver of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of ICAN. Her powerful victim impact statement set the tone for the Forum—and raised the stakes. Former British parliamentarian and international human rights lawyer Keith Best of London addressed the strengths and challenges of the Westminster parliamentary system. Dr. Upolu Vaai of Fiji emphasized the ecological crises precipitated in the South Pacific in this Anthropocene era. Leah Gazan, associate professor of Education from Winnipeg, addressed the critical need for the universal

adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

What does the future hold for the Commonwealth Interfaith Forum? While buy-in and endorsement remain positive, funding remains a daunting obstacle. As recently as January 4, 2019, Dr. Adams and I met with Major (The Rev. Dr.) Moore and professor Vern Neufeld Redekop of Saint Paul University in Ottawa to explore next steps. Proposals include closer collaboration with Commonwealth Societies worldwide, approaches to the Francophonie network of nations, and the engagement of international Roman Catholic justice networks.

At least a foundational Commonwealth Interfaith Network has been established. Should it prove viable to move ahead, the current strategy would be to establish regional Commonwealth Fora annually and a global plenary every fourth year, linked to the ever-popular Commonwealth Games.

Conclusion

The inevitable question after such a protracted, discursive narrative is this: What is the significance of all these efforts? Senior analysts of the G7/G20 Research Group of the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto have advised that such global interfaith fora do have an impact. Though this is difficult to quantify, they note that the evidence suggests that statements from these religious leaders’ convocations from 2005 to 2018 have played a role in keeping the MDGs and the SDGs on the annual agenda of the G8 and G20 gatherings. With only a first iteration of The Commonwealth Forum achieved, the Munk School has yet to pay the event and its outcomes serious attention, though conversations have been initiated. What is clear is that the participants believe a new kind of conversation has been opened concerning the nature and future of the Commonwealth of Nations as a positive civil society player. The desire for a second iteration has been clearly and repeatedly expressed. Belize City has expressed interest in providing a second iteration venue. Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are in conversation with the organizers of the first Commonwealth Interfaith Conference. Plans have been made to produce a book on the themes of religious engagement as loyal opposition and the use of religious soft diplomacy and the United Nations. While the content and perspectives planned for this book bear but a tangential relation to the Commonwealth forum concept, the majority of the contributors were introduced to one another, and to the international interfaith movement, through the April 2018 Commonwealth Forum.

A number of questions about the project remain. The Commonwealth enjoys greater historical, linguistic,

cultural, and traditional credibility than some international fora, including the G7 and G20. But does it have any carrying capacity to truly contribute to the qualitative growth of the global community? The MDGs and SDGs, while furnishing the Rosetta stone noted earlier, remain suspect in the minds of many critics, especially in activist religious circles, who fear that they may already have been co-opted by international economic and political interests, especially in the West. There remains the unsettled and unsettling question of whether the leaders of world religious traditions are capable of embracing a vision of the world as humanity's common home. Furthermore, will the practitioners of different religions develop an analogous capacity? There may be, for better or for worse, no more potent force in human affairs than religion. The Commonwealth Interfaith Forum is an attempt to bring this force to bear on global issues such as poverty and climate change for the sake of the common good. Only time will tell how successful it will be in this endeavour.

James Taylor Christie is professor of *Whole World Ecumenism & Dialogue Theology* at the University of Winnipeg and director of the *Ridd Institute for Religion and Global Policy* in Winnipeg.

1 The statement can be found at <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/interfaith/2005-interfaith-leaders-en.pdf>.

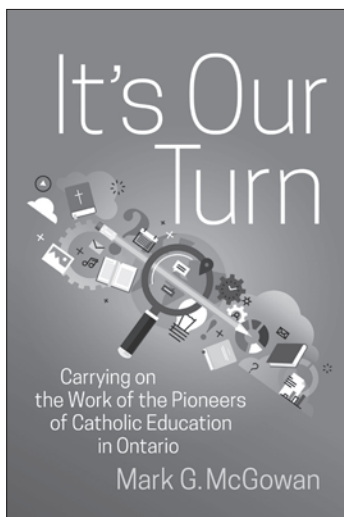
2 Information on the G20 Interfaith Forum can be found at <https://www.g20interfaith.org>.

3 The United Nations' eight Millennium Development Goals were 1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, 2) achieve universal primary education, 3) promote gender equality and empower women, 4) reduce child mortality, 5) improve maternal health, 6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, 7) ensure environmental stability, and 8) a global partnership for development. The target date for achieving these goals was 2015. See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>.

4 The United Nations' seventeen Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all UN member states in 2015. Their target date is 2030. They include ending poverty, ending hunger, and addressing environmental concerns. For a full account of these goals, see <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>.

5 Joseph Schwartzberg, *Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2013).

6 <https://www.griffith.edu.au/community/centre-interfaith-cultural-dialogue/commonwealth-conference>.



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Book Review

The Invention of Religion based on Revelation

Jan Assmann. *The Invention of Religion: Faith and Covenant in the Book of Exodus*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. xviii + 391 pp.

Jan Assmann is honorary professor of cultural studies at the University of Konstanz and professor emeritus of Egyptology at the University of Heidelberg. His focus in the first area has been the study of cultural memory: how events, ideas, or individuals are remembered in a society and how this shapes social life. His focus in the second area has been the religion and culture of ancient Egypt. Early in this latter career, he noticed mostly continuities and parallels between ancient Egyptian religion and that of ancient Israel. But gradually, the discontinuities between the two came to occupy him. His two careers came together in a thesis he developed: that ancient Jewish religion as codified in the book of Exodus had a novel, revolutionary character in relation to the cultural matrix from which it emerged. It represents the birth of monotheism in the Western world. Ancient Egyptians worshipped gods other than their own. They worried that they might neglect a deity. Contrary to this, characteristic of the religion featured in the book of Exodus is what Assmann called the Mosaic distinction: the idea that a people should worship only God and no other. This was a revolutionary distinction between true and false religion.¹ It laid the basis for the preservation of Jewish identity under imperial captivity and became a defining characteristic of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with ambiguous consequences for Western societies.²

Assmann has modified this thesis in his latest book, *The Invention of Religion*.³ This elegantly written major study of Exodus culminates years of research. In it he now speaks of three distinctions as central to the new model of religion appearing here, and of a fourth that developed during the exile in the Persian period. In his view, the shift to monotheism that took place with the first three is a milestone on the road to modernity, equal in importance to the invention of writing.

Four distinctions

The first distinction is between captivity and freedom, the old and the new. Assmann points out that in the Exodus tradition, the flight of the Jews from Egypt is not described as a movement from bondage to autonomous freedom, but rather as a change of servitude, from serving human masters to serving God. The

former enslave. The latter liberates (p. 79). Christians might add that serving God is also fulfilling. In the history narrated in Exodus, this liberation from slavery forms the decisive centre of meaning. Exodus means turning one's back on the familiar social order and journeying towards a new one. This combination of movement from one's past to a different future and the liberation it brings forms the backdrop for the next two distinctions, which are developed as the story unfolds. It decisively informs the second.

The Exodus leads first not to the promised land, but to the covenant at Sinai. Here the change of servitude is completed. The Israelites gain a new identity as the people of God, and two new distinctions are brought into play. The first is between those who belong to the covenant and those who do not. This is the distinction of loyalty to God alone. Belonging to the covenant is based on God's election, God's prevenient action, and entails the people's response, the directions for which are codified in the law. This sets Israel apart from other nations. By living according to the covenant and keeping the law, Israel separates itself from other peoples and is to be a light to them. This distinction has two trajectories: monotheism, the worship of God alone, and the sanctification of the people. It finds expression in the Ten Commandments. The first commandment, prohibiting the worship of other gods, is the central tenet of what Assmann calls the "monotheism of loyalty" (p. 217). It assumes the existence of other gods. The second commandment draws a line between God and other deities, with the exclusion of graven images. The fourth commandment, keeping the Sabbath, gives the people of God a visible presence in society.

This second distinction turns the history that Exodus narrates into a project that God initiates and the people participate in. Their deliverance from bondage involves their formation into a people. This project is ongoing with each new generation. Assmann sees this to be an idea unique to the Bible. New here is the idea of a nation based on divine law rather than race or territory, and of a religion based on revelation, an intervention of God in history. Though Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would later become the established religions in many societies, Exodus contrasts sharply with reli-

gions that sacralize the status quo. The God of Exodus is an agent of change, a source of hope for a better future. The combination of this and the first distinction involved a radical reshaping of cultural memory. The past now becomes something that can be narrated. History now has a plot and a goal. This narrative of the past is ongoing and headed towards a better place. People remember this narrative and live by it (p. 137). Assmann sums this up as follows:

The revelation narrated in the Book of Exodus does not belong in the world as it actually exists; rather, it intervenes in that world, remaking it from the ground up. It does not continually recur in various forms as an accompaniment to the everlasting processes of the universe; it happens once and for all time. What it requires of mortals, more than anything else, is that it be remembered. (p. 12)

New also is the way the law reflects the experience of liberation, making care for the vulnerable, the suffering, and the needy a matter of obedience to God. Assmann sees here a remarkable innovation that undoes the distinction between law and morality common in ancient cultures, making morality a matter of divine concern and moral action a way of moving closer to God (p. 222). He notes how the memory of the Israelites' enslaved condition shapes the mercy code of the law, so that the law and God who gave it are characterized by what theologians call a preferential option for the poor. He is aware that the Exodus story has been the template for subsequent liberation struggles. But Assmann does not read the book of Exodus from the underside of history, as a promise of deliverance for his people, in the way that Martin Luther King, Jr. and others did. Assmann is concerned with the social influence of Exodus, but not necessarily with carrying forward the project it initiates. Still, as his following comment indicates, he deeply appreciates the potential cultural influence of the mercy code:

Today, in the shadow of the appalling suffering that slavery and colonialism, two world wars, Shoah and Gulag have meted out on the human race, the biblical correlation of memory and justice has acquired an entirely new resonance and relevance. Only as a society that remembers its own history will the human race become an 'emphatic civilization', in Jeremy Rifkin's sense of the term, and only as an emphatic civilization will it be able to uphold human rights throughout the world and face the daunting challenges of globalization. (pp. 105–106)

While Assmann deeply appreciates this, he argues that the Exodus story introduced a third distinction, that between friend and foe, which remains a potential

source of violence. Unlike the second distinction of loyalty to God alone, which is not intrinsically dangerous, this third distinction makes violence against the enemies of the faith and its historical project a sacred duty (pp. 86–87). Assmann sees this distinction perpetuated in the anti-Judaism of the New Testament. He observes that various colonial enterprises identified Indigenous peoples with the Canaanites and used the Hebrew Bible to justify violence against them. This distinction between friend and foe, prominent in the book of Deuteronomy, belongs to the "teachings which are not good" (Ezekiel 20:25), which should be discarded.

Assmann notes that the book of Exodus casts a long shadow in Western history (p. 230). It has besmirched the reputation of Egypt. This third distinction has legitimated violence against other religions, critics of religion, and dissident parties within religions. Conversely, he notes that Exodus also has a democratizing impulse. In much of the action at Sinai, Moses mediates between God and the people of Israel. But as the covenant is made in Exodus 19 and the Ten Commandments are given, God speaks directly to the people, who as the partners in the covenant are the witnesses to God's revelation (p. 183). Through their acceptance of the covenant, they are constituted as a people. Furthermore, in Egypt justice was generally seen to be "incarnated" in the Pharaoh. But when the law is codified in specific commandments that were given by God, it becomes "excarnated" (pp. 237–39). Its source is no longer the person of the king but God, and it provides a divinely given basis for judging royal rule. Assmann sees implicit here "the great historical turning point of the 'Axial Age'" (p. 252), when religion and morality came to be seen as having a transcendent dimension and to express universal truths, capable of rational extension, that applied to all and that were not tied to people's immediate self-interests. One of the great strengths of this book is its even-handedness, the way it explores and lifts up both the beneficial and the baneful aspects of the model of religion and the religious teachings presented in Exodus.

Assmann observes that a fourth distinction was later introduced during the Exilic period in the writings of Deutero-Isaiah and others. This is the distinction of truth (pp. 83–84). In some ways, it is an extension of the monotheism of loyalty. It distinguishes between God and the other gods, but it departs from the second distinction in arguing that only God exists. The others are false and non-existent. This distinction resulted from interaction with the creation myths of Babylonians, Egyptians, and Persians. The Israelites transformed this cosmogonic monotheism into an absolute monotheism that could be combined with their monotheism of loyalty (p. 337). What Assmann does not observe is how in some ways it is this fourth distinction, the one between truth and falsehood, in

combination with the second, that can tame the third, between friend and foe. If God alone is true, then faithfulness to God means recognizing God's truth wherever it appears. When one notices that aspects of the truth revealed in Exodus or in Jesus are present also in other religions, then out of loyalty to God and/or Jesus, to the truth one honours, one must also recognize it as present and lived out in other religions. This reasoning is present in the thought of Augustine, who preached that the fact that people seek justice and peace, and love others, reveals that God reigns in their hearts, even if they do not acknowledge God.⁴ Similarly, the influential Jewish philosopher and theologian Maimonides (1138–1204) saw Christianity and Islam as having a providential role in preparing Gentiles for the coming of the Jewish Messiah. This fourth distinction, between truth and falsehood, can become reflexive in this way and can function as a warrant for respect and dialogue with other religions, and with the non-religious who seek truth, struggle for justice, and manifest compassion for others. This has been the case for many monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims, in the wake of the Enlightenment and horrors of modernity like the Holocaust. This reflexivity does not mean an abandonment of the monotheism of loyalty. Rather, it grows out of it. It is because Jesus is the centre of history for Christians that Christians are moved to recognize the truth in other religions and to dialogue with them.⁵

Assmann acknowledges that monotheism is capable of self-correction. While he emphasizes how it draws “a line between itself and other religions, excluding them as heathen” (p. 220), he also notes that “the principle of critical self-review is already built into the Hebrew Bible” (p. 227). His careful examination of the book of Exodus and its historical effects calls people to a critical awareness of the beneficial and the dangerous characteristics of its model of religion.

Exodus and History

Assmann is not particularly interested in the historicity of what Exodus records. He notes that at some point, the question of the historical truth of the story arises for most readers. He argues that in relation to the book of Exodus, such questions lead nowhere. An extraordinary event of deliverance could lie behind traditions such as the song of Miriam (Exodus 16:21) (pp. 47–48). But nothing of this can be recovered through historical research. As a student of cultural memory, Assmann is interested not in whether Exodus records history, but in how it makes it (p. 328), and what led it to be remembered as it is. Chapter three provides a detailed examination of the redactional history of the text and argues that it took shape in three main stages. The first stage is found in the writings of Hosea and Amos during and after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern

Kingdom in 722 BCE (p. 64). The second stage was developed as a response to the historical disaster of the exile (pp. 66–67). Stage three occurred during the Persian period in 520–450 BCE. This involved the story of Exodus being incorporated into the Priestly source, which eventually included Genesis as well as Leviticus and parts of Numbers. Assmann notes some tensions existing between these books of the Torah: “[w]hereas the Book of Genesis is keyed to integration, understanding, and harmonious relations, the Book of Exodus takes a stance of exclusion, hostility, and violence, showing affinities to Deuteronomy in its antagonistic, confrontational identity politics” (p. 69). One can see these tensions as resulting from the ancient faith of Israel being related to different historical contexts and to different aspects and needs of the human condition. As Assmann notes, the Bible's continuing vitality in cultural memory stems from the variety and vividness of the stories it tells (p. 70), which enable it to speak to very different life situations.

The concluding chapters of Exodus are about how the people of Israel will live in God's presence. The story of the Golden Calf shows how difficult this can be for both, and inculcates an attitude of violent opposition against those who fail to remain loyal to God. But Assmann notes how the story of the Golden Calf is also about how God renews the covenant when the people break it. Here another trajectory opens up in the divine-human relationship. The first trajectory is the theme of the liberation of the oppressed. The second is the covenant and the law, which call for sanctification and identify this with solidarity with others. In the story of the Golden Calf, a third trajectory appears: sin and forgiveness, the breaching and repair of the covenant, and with this the correlating theme of intercession. These two related themes are perhaps overshadowed in Exodus by the three distinctions that Assmann highlights. But they have been very important in the history of Judaism and Christianity, for it is only by means of them that the covenant and the Exodus project can continue when broken by sin. These themes remain socially relevant in an era of truth and reconciliation commissions.

Exodus is the charter document for a historical project that begins with liberation from slavery. It becomes institutionalized through the making of the covenant. It is sustained by God's renewal of the covenant in the wake of people's sin. Each of these trajectories is crucial to the project of Exodus, its historical influence and its continued relevance.

God

God is at the heart of the book of Exodus. God delivers the people from slavery. God initiates the covenant with them. God renews the covenant when the people

break it. An important characterization of the God who does all this occurs in the revelation of God in the call of Moses in Exodus 3. This passage has been very influential in Western thought about God. Assmann devotes considerable attention to it. The name of God given in Exodus 3:14, often translated as “I am who I am,” has been a basis for classical theism, the understanding of God as unchanging and unrelated to creation. But Assmann argues that this understanding runs counter to the spirit of the Exodus narrative: “the God of the biblical monotheism of loyalty heralded in the Book of Exodus stands under the sign of becoming, not being” (p. 137). He also argues that the Hebrew term for “to be” here “denotes a supportive being-there or being-with” (pp. 131–32), and thus has a relational meaning. Others have argued something similar.⁶ But the revelation of God’s name here does also signal God’s aseity or self-sufficiency, which undergirds the creative freedom of God expressed in God’s interventions in history.⁷ The radical transcendence of God to history denoted by the notion of God’s aseity is what enables God to liberate the Israelites, enter into a covenant with them, and renew it when they break it. However, as Assmann notes, the divine name revealed here and the Exodus story as a whole also intimate that God is internally related to God’s people and, by extension, to the whole of creation. The preceding revelation of God in Exodus 3:6 also stresses God’s relationality. Assmann discusses Blaise Pascal’s famous attachment to this description of God. Many Jewish and Christian thinkers have understood God in light of Exodus 3:14, in line with Aristotle and Plato as the unchanging transcendent source of all being. But the description of God as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6) reveals God to be an agent who initiates relationships with people and calls them to service. Pascal favoured the latter over the former. Many theologians have done the opposite.

Exodus affirms both. It is as the radically transcendent God, who yet hears the cries of the oppressed, knows their sufferings, acts to deliver them, and keeps faith with them, that God is the engine driving the plot of Exodus. Both are essential to God being a source of hope for the overcoming of sin and evil.⁸ Understanding God as internally related to creation and history was a major achievement of various 20th-century theologies. Yet in faithfulness to the biblical witness and in order to sustain struggles for peace, justice, and reconciliation, God must also be understood as the radically transcendent source of hope who breaks into history.⁹

How to combine the internal relatedness of God to creation with God’s radical transcendence to it, both of which are signalled in Exodus 3 and throughout the story, remains a major challenge to Jewish and Christian theology. An important resource for this is the theology of Jonathan Edwards, who understood God as radically transcendent to the world, and also as becoming, in a relative but still real way, through God’s involvement in history.¹⁰

Conclusion

The understanding of religion present in Exodus has decisively shaped Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and through this it became a powerful force in Western and other cultures, irreversibly transforming them (p. 338). With this argument, Assmann dusts off a foundational book in the biblical canon so that the distinctiveness of its world view stands out anew for those who have been unaware of this. Assmann brings the book of Exodus to life so that its powerful message of hope and call for compassion can be heard anew, while at the same time casting a critical light on its themes of violence and exclusion. This book deserves a wide readership. It will be important for anyone concerned with the interaction of Judaism and Christianity with society and culture.

Don Schweitzer

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1 Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 23.

2 Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 125–26.

3 Jan Assmann, *The Invention of Religion: Faith and Covenant in the Book of Exodus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 79.

4 “... surely God is enthroned in all those who lead good lives, perform good works, and treat others with reverent charity, and surely God rules them?” Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 33–50 III/16, edited by John Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 331; *En. Ps.* 46.10. Regrettably, this did not tame the influence of the friend-foe distinction in Augustine’s later writings against the Donatists.

5 John Cobb, Jr., *Transforming Christianity and the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 81.

6 André LaCocque, in André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 315–17.

7 *Ibid.*, 324.

8 Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 265–69.

9 David Tracy, *On Naming the Present* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 40–44.

10 Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Book Review

The Meaning of Jesus' Cross for a Suffering Creation

Elizabeth Johnson. *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018. xvii + 238 pp.

Elizabeth Johnson, Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University, is a prolific Roman Catholic feminist theologian. Lately, her thought has turned to the doctrine of creation and the environmental crisis. In this beautifully written book, she develops a theology of accompaniment, an understanding of how God accompanies creation as a whole and each part. She does this by reinterpreting Jesus' death and resurrection as a promise of the flourishing of all creation, and she succeeds admirably.

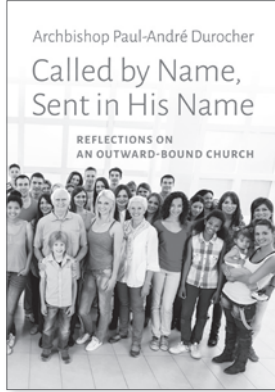
Anselm's theory of substitutionary atonement is the foil against which she develops her thought. Her book is written as a dialogue between herself and a fictional Clara, after the model of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* which presented his atonement theory through a dialogue between himself and Boso. Johnson notes that Anselm's treatise models how theology should be done in dialogue with one's culture, and that Anselm took the reality of sin seriously. However, she stresses much more frequently made and significant criticisms of it, such as that it models submission to abuse. For Johnson, "the signs of the times propel the living tradition forward" (p. 235), requiring theological creativity for the gospel to remain good news. In a time of environmental crisis, the question "How is Jesus' life, death and resurrection good news for the whole of creation, humanity included?" calls for a different understanding of atonement. For Johnson, this new understanding centres on the notion that Jesus' death is a gracious and merciful act of God's solidarity with all who die, animals and humans alike, especially for victims of injustice. Correspondingly, Jesus' resurrection brings hope to the same, among all the horrors of suffering and death that plague creation. Johnson argues that we must not domesticate Jesus' death so that it becomes just a cog in the machinery of redemption. This is a danger of some atonement theories, which treat Jesus' death very formally. Instead, we must remember that Jesus died a horrible death. This puts him into solidarity with all who suffer likewise and

gives his resurrection a foothold in places of suffering and despair. Through the solidarity of Jesus with all living beings that suffer, and through God's solidarity with the crucified Jesus, a hopeful future opens for all of creation, and a sense of God's nearness comes to the victims of history, even in their worst moments.

This is a delightful book to read, even though it is devoted to such a serious topic. Along the way we are treated to excellent summaries of the quest for the historical Jesus and the nature and meaning of Jesus' resurrection. Johnson rightly insists that our understanding of Jesus be historically concrete. Unfortunately, her treatment of Anselm's theory of atonement is one-sided. She rightly concludes that we should dispense with any idea that God needed Jesus' death in order to be merciful. The mechanism of Anselm's theory of atonement is no longer credible. But Johnson makes little attempt to reclaim its field of meaning. For Johnson, the fundamental message of Scripture is that God is always merciful and forgiving and that God's goodness will prevail over evil. But she fails to explore how that goodness overcomes the alienation of guilt and other forms of spoiled identity. She does not discuss Miroslav Volf's exploration of how an Anselm-like understanding of atonement enables one to accept those who are different and provides a basis for reconciliation between enemies. Nor does she consider how theologians like Kathryn Tanner have reconceptualized Anselm's theory in spatial terms, so that it is no longer about God requiring a victim, but instead about God seeking to re-establish communion. That said, this is a book that theologians, clergy, and lay people can all read and benefit from. It does an excellent job of expounding the saving significance of Jesus' death and resurrection and the mercy of God in relation to suffering, death, and the natural environment. Every theological library should have it.

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Called by Name, Sent in His Name *Reflections on an Outward-Bound Church*

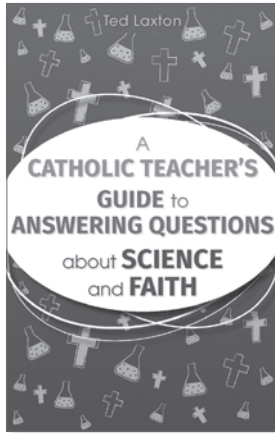
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Paul-André Durocher is Archbishop of Gatineau, Québec. He is the author of the three-volume series *The Psalms for Our Lives* (Novalis).

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Ted Laxton taught in the Wellington Catholic School Board (Ontario) from 1976 to 2009, and also served as a chaplain and a science and religion consultant. He is the author of *Building a Virtuous School: Guided Reflections on Catholic Character Formation* (Novalis, 2013).

144pp, PB, 978-2-89688-438-4 \$17.95



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