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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

I hope you will enjoy reading the many quality submissions to the 2017 Pittsburgh Theological Journal. Each year, the journal seeks to benefit the extended community of the seminary by encouraging academic rigor and growth. To fulfill this purpose, many processes, procedures, and structures changed/will change in regards to the PTJ. The changes are as follows:

1. The PTJ will no longer be a student group under the oversight of the Student Association. It will be under the Alumni Council. The reasons for this are twofold: To effectively enhance the ongoing relationship between the alumni, students, and faculty; To effectively enhance the consistency and professionalism of the Pittsburgh Theological Journal.
2. The Editor-in-Chief will be a qualified Alum who will serve for a minimum of three years and a maximum of five years. This provides consistency within the leadership of the journal to enable growth and stability.
3. The editors will be students to maintain a healthy communal atmosphere and to provide beneficial experience for later career endeavors.
4. There will be a faculty cohort that provides insight and advice in the editing process.
5. The Journal will be published in the fall of each year. While it may be nice to have the Journal for graduation, students editing their own work and the work of others causes stress beyond necessity.
6. The Journal will be mainly electronic in format. This will reduce costs, save trees, and will elate the editor-in-chief.

These changes and the production of this journal would not have been possible without the diligence of the editorial staff, student association,

alumni council, and the seminary administration. For each person involved, I am indebted and eternally grateful. May the journal bring insight, wisdom, and growth in your lives and ministries.

Blessings,
Jon Chillinsky
Editor-in-Chief

PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

RESEARCH

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Modern Science Resonates with Christian Theism

David Irving Deutsch

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As aspiring pastor with interest in apologetics, David Irving Deutsch studies at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary as a third-year Master of Divinity student. A native of the Pittsburgh area, he belongs to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and would like to pursue a doctoral degree as well as a professorship in the future.

The relationship between modern science and the Christian religion remains a major topic of academic interest. Due to the popularity of New Atheist leaders such as Richard Dawkins, Lawrence Krauss, Peter Atkins, and Stephen Hawking, who are also all scientists, it is easy to see how public opinion seems to sway toward the conflict model of the two disciplines. Lesser known though equally valid voices from the Christian members of the scientific community have apparently taken second place to the secularists. This essay will reveal both the consistency and mutual support that exist between these areas of study.

PART I: WHAT MODERN SCIENTISTS BELIEVE CONCERNING RELIGION

Though exact numbers would be impossible to find, evidence from major recent studies and the testimonies of prominent scientists themselves suggests that a higher than expected percentage of professional scientists active in the last century have not been atheistic. Oxford mathematician John Lennox (1943-) reports how at “a 2006 discussion in Oxford, [he] asked a group of scientists and theologians whether it was legitimate to look for scientific evidence of the involvement of intelligence in the origin of the universe and in its laws of operation. The response was overwhelmingly positive.”¹ Part of the reason for this, according to Nobel chemist Melvin Calvin (1911-1997), has to do with the history of modern science and its philosophical foundations. Lennox quotes Calvin on the ideas that gave rise to science, “namely that the universe is governed by a single God, and is not the product of the whims of many gods, each governing his own province according to his own laws. This monotheistic view seems to be the historical foundation for modern science.”² A whole host of famous names from the history of science could be listed among those who are known to have held the Christian faith (Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, and Maxwell to name a few), supporting Calvin’s observation. However, the question remains whether the scientific community of today continues to see a need for the creating and governing role of a God in the universe.

The answer to the above query would seem to be, in many cases, a yes. After receiving the 1927 Nobel Prize in physics, Arthur Holly Compton (1892-1962) commented: “that few indeed are the scientific men of today who will defend an atheistic attitude.”³ More recently, Compton’s fellow

1 Michael Peterson et al. eds., *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings Fourth Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 560.

2 Ibid., 562.

3 Tihomir Dimitrov, comp., *50 Nobel Laureates and Other Great Scientists Who Believe in God* (2008), 23.

Nobel physicist Max Born (1882-1970) observed, “Those who say that the study of science makes a man an atheist must be rather silly people.”⁴ Even more recently, a third Nobel Laureate in physics William D. Phillips (1948-) voiced this contention, “There are probably more Nobel Laureates who are people of faith than is generally believed. Most people in most professions don’t make a special point to make their religious views known, since these are very personal.”⁵

Even the preeminent Albert Einstein (1879-1955), whose disdain for traditional religion is well-known and who is often therefore portrayed as an atheist, still accepted the existence of a God. Insisting that he was not an atheist (or even a pantheist),⁶ Einstein pointed to God as an explanation for the laws of the universe, noting, “God is a mystery. But a comprehensible mystery. I have nothing but awe when I observe the laws of nature. There are not laws without a lawgiver.”⁷ In fact, Einstein, though critical of mainstream theology, proved equally critical of those whom he called “the fanatical atheists whose intolerance is of the same kind as the intolerance of religious fanatics” and who “cannot hear the music of the spheres.”⁸ As nonreligious as he was in the common meaning of the term, Einstein still saw no conflict between natural science and religious faith, as this quotation of his makes clear: “Does there truly exist an insuperable contradiction between religion and science? Can religion be superseded by science? ... in my own mind there can be no doubt that in both cases a dispassionate consideration can only lead to a negative answer.”⁹ The modern reader

4 Frederick E. Trinklein, *The God of Science* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 64.

5 Dimitrov, *50 Nobel Laureates*, 20.

6 Antony Flew and Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2007), 99-100.

7 William Hermanns, *Einstein and the Poet: In Search of the Cosmic Man* (Brookline Village: Branden Books, 1983), 66.

8 Dimitrov, *50 Nobel Laureates*, 7.

9 Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1954), 49-50.

is compelled, therefore, to concur with the understanding that “Einstein clearly believed in a transcendent source of the rationality of the world.”¹⁰

Not to have their finest catch snatched from them so easily, many atheists contend that Einstein only spoke figuratively in quotations like these. His “God” simply served as a metaphor for the lawfulness of the universe itself. If one applies scientific principles to this hypothesis, the idea fails, however. It can never be disproven, and it complicates evidence that can otherwise be explained quite simply and directly. Also, if modern readers replace Einstein’s use of the word “God” with the phrase “a lawful universe,” many of his sayings on the subject cease to make sense. For example, “My God may not be your idea of God, but one thing I know of my God, he makes me a humanitarian.”¹¹ Einstein, then, is best described as a deist, as his current leading biographer Walter Isaacson has repeatedly opined.

The above expressions certainly would seem to conform to the data of Elaine H. Ecklund’s recent study on this topic. With the help of Jerry Z. Park, Ecklund discovered “that the majority of academic scientists, those in the natural and social sciences *as well as those who do not actually practice a religion*, perceive there to be no conflict between science and religion”¹² (emphasis added). Concerning those scientists who did report viewing science and religion as contradicting each other, the study made an interesting observation: “Being raised in a home where religion was not important increased the likelihood of adopting the conflict paradigm,”¹³ which suggests the presence of a subjective bias against religion. Oxford biochemist and priest Arthur Peacocke (1924-2006) sums up the current situation well when he writes “that new voices have been heard from within the community of science itself, voices that challenge the dismissive attitudes

10 Flew and Varghese, *There Is a God*, 101.

11 Hermanns, *Einstein and the Poet*, 119.

12 Elaine Howard Ecklund and Jerry Z. Park, “Conflict Between Religion and Science Among Academic Scientists?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48.2 (2009): 276.

13 *Ibid.*, 286.

towards religion.”¹⁴ He refers to surveys of US scientists, which reveal about forty percent with theistic views, and to his personal experiences, stating, “Hence the voice of science itself is not accurately represented by the anti-theistic guru-scientists.”¹⁵ Here, the renowned chemist Henry F. Schaefer III (1944-) is worth quoting at length:

Alan Lightman, a MIT professor with no obvious theistic inclinations, states in his book *Origins: The Lives and Worlds of Modern Cosmologists* (Harvard University Press, 1990), ‘Contrary to popular myths, scientists appear to have the same range of attitudes about religious matters as does the general public.’ This fact can be established either from anecdotes or from statistical data. Sigma Xi, the scientific honorary society, conducted a systematic poll a few years ago which showed that, on any given Sunday, around 41 percent of all Ph.D. scientists are in church; for the general population the figure is perhaps 42 percent.¹⁶

Concerning the admittedly significant number of nonbelieving scientists on the other side, Schaefer quotes the interesting insight of Stanford physicist Richard Bube (1927-), who remarks, “There are proportionately as many atheistic truck drivers as atheistic scientists.”¹⁷ This information is enough to establish that the scientific community is not as one-sided on the question of God as the New Atheists would like to think.

PART II: CHRISTIANS OF SCIENCE PRESENT THEIR CASE

With knowledge that the scientific community of today has in no way completely abandoned theism, the reader can now begin to look at some specific reasons of how and why scientists have embraced Christianity. In order to avoid the fallacy of appealing to authority, this essay will now examine

¹⁴ Arthur Peacocke, *Paths from Science Towards God: The End of all our Exploring* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Henry F. Schaefer, *Science and Christianity: Conflict or Coherence?* (Athens: University of Georgia Printing Department, 2004), 69.

¹⁷ Ibid., 26.

the arguments theists employ from science themselves. Nowhere will this piece seek to prove the existence of a Deity, for science can only disprove or support a hypothesis, and in this case, science supports the proposal.

The proper way to approach a hypothesis, which must be falsifiable in order to count as scientific, is to seek to disqualify it rather than prove it. Before converting to deism in 2004, former atheist philosopher Antony Flew offered four premises that would, if correct, disprove the existence of the God of Christianity. These contentions were as follows: (1) the universe is eternal in its existence; (2) life occurs randomly without direction; (3) the definition of God contradicts itself; and (4) God is inconsistent with a known fact, namely, the existence of evil. Only the first two of these are subject to scientific, rather than philosophical, investigation. Regarding point 3, it suffices to say for the purposes of this essay that the only definition needed for God is the harmonious concept of a Creator and Designer of the universe. Point 4 depends on an abstract idea (evil) that cannot be measured scientifically and whose definition varies from observer to observer. Using Flew's intellectual evolution as a model, the rest of this article will examine the first two of his old hypotheses against God to discover whether or not God can remain standing after being subjected to scientific inquiry.

If the universe is indeed infinite in age without origin, then no room can exist for the creating action of the Christian God. Such a view was the mainstream assumption of the scientific community for decades. This all changed in the twentieth-century when the Big Bang theory, first proposed by cosmologist and priest Georges Lemaitre (1894-1966), gained widespread acceptance due to the discovery of cosmic background radiation. Now science dictates an absolute temporal beginning to the universe approximately 13.7 billion years ago. In other words, space-time and mass-energy have not always existed but appeared from physical nothingness. Because of all this, old theistic arguments from philosophy

have been revived.¹⁸ Two Nobel physicists whose work contributed to the development of the Big Bang theory have noticed this new restoration. Arno Penzias (1933-) states, “The best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted, had I had nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole.”¹⁹ Following suit, Joseph H. Taylor, Jr. (1941-) comments, “There is no conflict between science and religion. Our knowledge of God is made larger with every discovery we make about the world.”²⁰

The arguments for God most positively affected by the Big Bang theory belong to a class known as cosmological arguments, those that rely on some principle of causation and the finiteness of a past chain of cause-and-effect. In his recent study of this sort of argumentation, philosopher Edward Feser notes “that at least some versions of it do succeed” and “that the criticisms raised by the New Atheists are intellectually unserious.”²¹ Originally proposed by Plato and Aristotle, cosmological arguments have a long history of support among prominent philosophers down to today.²² Affirming what the Big Bang has demonstrated, namely, that natural history does not stretch backwards to eternity, these arguments conclude that a first uncaused cause must exist to provide adequate explanation for how changes and events started to take place leading to the present. They usually also assert that this first uncaused cause is probably a Creator Being. Flew himself admits, “Certainly the revelation of a universe in flux as opposed to a static eternally inert entity made a difference to the discussion...this brought me back to the cosmological argument.”²³

18 Peter J. Bussey, “God as First Cause- a Review of the Kalam Argument.” *Science & Christian Belief* 25.1 (2013): 17-18.

19 Dimitrov, *50 Nobel Laureates*, 26.

20 Ibid., 30.

21 Edward Feser, “The New Atheists and the Cosmological Argument.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 37 (2013): 156-57.

22 Ibid., 154.

23 Flew and Varghese, *There Is a God*, 138.

At this point, the New Atheists step in and challenge the theistic implications of the Big Bang as developed by cosmological arguments. The first and most common objection to invoking God as the cause for the inception of the cosmos is the absence of any cause for God. As Feser points out, however, “*not a single* prominent proponent of the cosmological argument actually appeals to the premise that ‘everything has a cause’”²⁴ (italics in original), making this atheistic counterargument a *straw man* fallacy. Cosmological arguments merely purport that certain effects require causes, eventually regressing back to something that is a cause only and not such an effect. Examples of effects that need causes, according to these philosophies, include such things as changes in condition from one state to another and certainly the coming into being of new existence. Since God, as conceived by Christians and other theists, exists without beginning or change (unlike the universe), it is not only unnecessary but indeed impossible to assign a cause to God.

A second objection, again based on the straw man from above, is that the science of quantum mechanics has obliterated the common-sense view that everything that occurs has a preceding cause. Once more, however, the New Atheists fail to realize, in advancing this argument, that Christians in philosophy and science have never claimed that all things need causes in the first place. Their actual arguments are too long and complex to reproduce or demonstrate here, but it suffices to say that only certain types of effects require preceding causes, and these sets of causes and effects cannot be without an onset. As Nobel physicist and founder of quantum theory Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) explained to Einstein, “We can console ourselves that the good Lord God would know the position of the particles, and thus He could let the causality principle continue to have validity.”²⁵

Finally, many New Atheist leaders contend that even if there were a cause behind the beginning of the universe it would probably be something

24 Feser, “New Atheists and Cosmological Argument,” 169.

25 Dimitrov, *50 Nobel Laureates*, 13.

quite different from a God. Without going into detail, Feser highlights how none of the New Atheists have ever responded to the voluminous amount of material theists have written on this very subject.²⁶ One short argument for the divine characteristics of the first uncaused cause may go as follows: If matter, time, and space each started to exist a finite time ago, then their cause must be something that is (1) not-matter, (2) not-time, and (3) not-space. That implies, at the very least, something (1) immaterial, (2) eternal, and (3) omnipresent. Hence, from the knowledge provided by Big Bang theory alone, one can already infer a small number of divine traits for the universe's external cause.

Though more argumentation can and no doubt will be written on this topic, the material thus far has demonstrated that theism certainly fits in better with new cosmogony than it does with older theories. Next on the list is Flew's early contention that life is a randomized process. Just as an eternal cosmos would eliminate room for God as Creator, chance-led biophysics would snuff out God as Designer. As before, old arguments from the philosophy of religion are affected by scientific discoveries, and in this case, those affected belong to the family of teleological arguments, from the Greek word *telos*, meaning end, aim, purpose, etc. It is this definition of design - an end goal being worked towards - that teleological arguments employ, as opposed to the idea of artistic beauty or complexity. Ever since the finding of evolution via natural selection undercut the analogous teleological argument (William Paley's so-called watchmaker analogy), any other theistic design argument is met with much skepticism. Such skepticism is unfounded, for an even earlier teleological argument, that of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, has never yet been refuted but only supported.

Aquinas pushed for a Designer based on the apparently universal success rate of the laws of nature, comparing these laws to arrows that hit their targets every single time. Even if no archer can be seen, the constant

²⁶ Feser, "New Atheists and Cosmological Argument," 175.

accuracy and precision of the arrows, which are seen, leads the observer to infer, quite reasonably, that an archer indeed exists and that the arrows were not aimed haphazardly by the wind. In this metaphor, the archer is the Designer, who achieves his or her objectives by means of imposing physical laws on the universe. The seemingly flawless stability and rationality of the universe Aquinas imagined has not been overturned by science. Rather, science begins with the assumption that laws of physics exist and can be understood. What has changed scientifically in recent decades is the discovery that the end goal of the universe's laws seems to be life itself. This conclusion is based on what physicists have noticed to be incredibly narrow fine-tuning of the physical constants of the universe, all of which must be absolutely exact in order for life even to begin, let alone survive and evolve.²⁷ Princeton physicist Freeman Dyson's (1923-) famous summary of the situation merits quotation: "I do not feel like an alien in this universe. The more I examine the universe and study the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known we were coming."²⁸

Only two worthwhile hypotheses can compete to explain this fine-tuning. The first is simply to posit the existence of a God who acts as Designer to the universe. The second suggests that myriads upon myriads of different universes (a collective 'multiverse') exist, each with their own sets of physical constants. In this scenario, the paper-thin edge on which this universe's mathematical constants lie seems much less miraculous, given the presence of a whole ream of papers, perhaps stacked infinitely high. This multiverse hypothesis has been invoked by its atheistic supporters as the

27 John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler. *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

28 Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground between God and Evolution* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1999), 229.

only possible way of removing God from the picture.²⁹ Unfortunately for the proponents of this theory, the multiverse, unlike Darwinian evolution, is not widely accepted among the elite of the scientific community, so the teleological argument can still stand firm.

Professor of biology Kenneth R. Miller (1948-) of Brown University testifies that the “many universes idea has long been rejected by physicists and philosophers alike because of its enormous logical baggage. Few serious scientists would endorse the notion.”³⁰ Harvard astronomer Owen Gingerich (1930-) weighs in with two equally skeptical statements: “I am tempted to say that this is sheer metaphysics,” and “I find this an unconvincing solution.”³¹ Even physicists with no religious affiliation such as Paul Davies (1946-) admit that “the multiverse... is still regarded with great suspicion, or even hostility, among physicists...Multiverse theories raise serious philosophical problems.”³² One of the primary reasons for this skepticism, according to physics professor Russell Stannard (1931-), is due to the multiverse’s violation of the *Law of Parsimony*, which holds that science should “go for the simplest, most economical explanations. It is what we call the application of Occam’s Razor. To postulate the existence of an infinite number of universes all run according to their own laws of nature is to go as far in the opposite direction as is imaginable.”³³ The late professor of physics Ian G. Barbour (1923-2013) likewise notes how the multiverse hypothesis “is highly speculative and could not be directly

29 Karl W. Giberson and Francis S. Collins, *The Language of Science and Faith: Straight Answers to Genuine Questions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 189. See also Miller, *Finding Darwin’s God*, 232.

30 Miller, *Finding Darwin’s God*, 231-32.

31 Owen Gingerich, *God’s Universe* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2006), 58-59.

32 P.C.W. Davies, “Multiverse Cosmological Models.” *Modern Physics Letters A* 19.10 (2004): 741-42.

33 Russell Stannard, *Science and the Renewal of Belief* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2004), 138.

verified”³⁴ and is “in principle untestable, since we have no access to other worlds.”³⁵ Due to these reasons, physicist Karl W. Giberson (1957-) and geneticist Francis S. Collins (1950-), who served as director of the human genome project and the NIH, reject the hypothesis as “quite extraordinary” and “fantastic,” confessing they “can only marvel that there are theories that suggest such possibilities.”³⁶ Therefore, the multiverse hypothesis should not be credited as a scientific hypothesis. This leaves a Designer God as the best possible solution to the fine-tuning phenomenon by far.

None of what has been written here proves absolutely that the Christian God exists. What this information has demonstrated sufficiently is that science has grown increasingly sympathetic to belief in such a Creator/Designer. The large number of scientist-theologians continually emerging from both sides, who keep on making enormous strides in both areas without one hindering the other, reflects this positive relationship between the two fields. Concluding now is a summarizing quote from one such scientist-theologian, Cambridge physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne (1930-), who declares, “I believe that the true ‘Theory of Everything’ is not superstrings... but it is actually trinitarian theology.”³⁷

³⁴ Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2000), 43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

³⁶ Giberson and Collins, *Language of Science and Faith*, 189.

³⁷ John Polkinghorne, *Quantum Physics and Theology: An Unexpected Kinship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 104.

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White Jesus Imagery: Reinforcing White Supremacy and Black Inferiority

Darren J. Rogers

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darren Rogers, MDiv, is a graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary class of 2017, and a 26-year Air Force veteran. While currently serving as Pastor of First Baptist Church in Wellsville Ohio, he is a volunteer chaplain at the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh, PA.

ABSTRACT

Christian religious imagery characterizing Jesus Christ as white is viewed in normative terms by white American society. It has been used as a tool to reinforce a cultural understanding of white racial superiority and demonstrate the inferiority of African Americans. White religious imagery has helped sustain a culture of American white supremacy and black oppression. This notion of the normalcy of whiteness, juxtaposed

with the perception of the evil of blackness, has created a negative self-image, and self-hatred, within black American culture. The Black Church has been complicit in allowing psychological oppressive white Christian imagery to continue unchallenged within walls of the black church. The contemporary black church reinforces black inferiority by not confronting the imagery issue, and consequently, perpetuating society's implicit racism against African Americans by ignoring it as a non-issue. The objective of this essay is not to make a broad-brushed political statement demonizing American and European society, White Christianity, or the Black Church. On the contrary, as a 26-year veteran of the United States Air Force, I have dedicated most of my adult life to making America a better and safer place for Americans. As a seminary graduate, my desire is to present a sensitive topic with thoughtfulness and theological clarity because it is extremely relevant and meaningful to African American Christians, yet oblivious, and a non-issue to most White American Christians.

INTRODUCTION

For over four hundred years American society has oppressed and exploited African slaves and their descendants both implicitly and explicitly through imagery associating whiteness with goodness and virtue, and blackness with evil and ugliness. According to Dr. Albert Cleage, the structure of American society and culture is framed on the premise of the superiority of white Americans over all other races, especially and particularly over African Americans.¹ The notion of African inferiority was systematically used as a tool by the dominant culture to subjugate African slaves into accepting their inferiority to their white slave masters. Every aspect of their thinking, psychological formation, and self-identity was

1 "Every institution in the western world is built upon the assumption of white superiority and Black inferiority. Every institution exists to serve the interests of white supremacy. The schools teach it. The churches preach it. The police power of the state enforces it." Albert B. Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church*. (New York: W. Morrow, 1972), 10.

dictated and programmed by the dominant culture to make the African slave docile, peaceful, and under control.

When the English first landed in North America, there was no such idea as whiteness in colonial culture or vocabulary. The early colonists initially struggled just to survive, and with the help of the native Americans, they not only survived but began to thrive. As the English worked to build a life in Virginia, they used indentured servants, both African and English for domestic and farm labor. However, power struggles amongst the Colonial leadership led to attacks and skirmishes upon the once peaceful Native American. Social conditions inspired insurrection among the poor who were often not treated fairly by those in authority.

One of the outcomes of what history calls “Bacon’s Rebellion”², the collaboration and solidarity of poor English indentured servants and African indentured servants/slaves, were perceived by wealthy landowners as a threat to their power. With the demand for more labor, and the lack of servants to meet the demand, landowners turned to slave labor. Their perception of close relationships between poor white and blacks was to them a clear threat to their power and to social stability.

To protect themselves from future insurrection, and to meet the growing demand for labor, the elite created a special racial status for poor whites, placing a wedge between poor whites and Africans, thus eliminating the risk of future revolts.³ “Deliberately and strategically, the planter class extended special privileges to poor whites in an effort to drive a wedge between

2 Grassroots Policy Project. *Race, power and policy: Dismantling structural racism*. Berkeley, CA: Grassroots Policy Project, 2016, 6. “1676. Bacon’s rebellion. Poor whites and blacks joined together to gain more economic control. Colonial authorities responded to the rebellion by driving a wedge between black and white servants. This was a step in the creation of ‘black’ slaves and ‘white’ workers, and the association of working class with ‘white.’”

3 The reaction of wealthy land owners to the collaboration between English and Africans indentured servants in Bacon’s Rebellion prompted them to grant poor whites a slightly higher social status than blacks. It did not necessarily raise them from poverty, but it allowed the poor white servant a vested interest in maintaining the new racial hierarchy.

them and black slaves. White settlers were allowed greater access to Native American Lands, white servants could police slaves through slave patrols and militias, and barriers were created so that free labor would not be placed in competition with slave labor... Poor whites suddenly had a direct, personal stake in the existence of a race-based system of slavery. Their own plight had not improved by much, but at least they were not slaves.”⁴

Thus, wealthy Virginians created a social status called “whiteness” by establishing their racial superiority and control over Africans and Native Americans.⁵ In its use, the wealthy land owners found justification in the forced enslavement of Africans, and the genocide and expulsion of Native Americans. This concept of whiteness was used to manipulate the psychological formation of enslaved Africans into destructive patterns of self-hatred and foster a complete dependence upon whites for their sustenance. By Africans accepting their dark skin and physical characteristics as evil and inferior to whites, they would be more pliable to further self-defeating programming, and therefore, controllable.

Various methods were systematically and universally used to control the African slave. In addition, it created a culture of white superiority and dominance alongside black inferiority and dependence. In order to mitigate the risk of rebellion, Africans were separated from their families and those who spoke the same language. Over time, this resulted in the erasing of the slave’s cultural identity. They were not permitted to learn how to read or write in order to keep them ignorant, dependent, and from becoming independent thinkers. They had no geographical knowledge of the landscape, making it all but impossible to escape. Their use of religious imagery, particularly that of a white European Jesus, was probably the

4 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. 2nd ed. (New York; Jackson, Tenn.: New Press, 2012), 25.

5 Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 24, 25. The granting of special privileges to poor whites was a tangible demarcation point where the racial classifications and distinctions of black and white were defined and adopted into early American society.

most psychologically effective tool used to establish and reinforce white dominance and control over Black slaves.

White Christian religious imagery reinforced the perception that white supremacy and black inferiority were rooted in Christianity and supported in the Bible. By making both God and Jesus white, the dominant culture used implicit racism as a tool of oppression to compel African Americans into accepting a second-class, subservient, role in society through the false images of a white European Jesus. "The black Christian's struggle to accept fully God and His 'other-ness' is greater and less easily reconciled than that of the white Christian, because of the black's need 'to cope with a Western concept of God which implied that God is white.'"⁶

This essay will examine the use of white religious imagery, primarily of Jesus Christ, in the subjugation and exploitation of African Americans, how it began, how it evolved, and its effects on today's America. The paper will draw from the writings and research of theologians, historians, and anthropologists in hopes of answering some of the following questions: How has American society used implicit racism to oppress African Americans through the false imagery of a white European Jesus? What role has the church, both black and white played in encouraging or compelling African Americans to an acceptance of a second class, subservient, station in American society? Is the Black Church complicit in the oppression of African Americans by its responses, non-responses, or silence concerning the issue of white Jesus imagery? What are the implications of not addressing it and leaving it as a non-issue?

THE PROBLEM OF WHITE JESUS IMAGERY

In *The Color of Christ*, Edward Blum methodically reveals the evolutionary symbol of white power in the imagery of Jesus. In the early

6 Kymberly N. Pinder, "Our Father, God; our Brother, Christ; Or are we Bastard Kin?: Images of Christ in African American Painting," *African American Review* 31, no. 2 (1997): 223-33. From: Major J. Jones, *The Color of God* (Macon: Mercer U, 1987).

days of Colonial America, there was no imagery representation of Jesus in Puritan Congregationalist churches. They viewed visual imagery of Christ as idolatry and blasphemous. Puritans were suspicious of any Christian imagery because of its iconographic use by the Catholic Church. "In the early 1740s, English officials marched on an Indian community in western Connecticut and cross-examined Moravian missionaries, who allegedly had 'the picture of our Saviors in it & the cross.'"⁷

Prior to 1800, people from various ethnicities: English, Indian and African began to turn to Christ in large numbers. Methodist and Baptist missionaries ministered to Enslaved Africans, of which many readily embraced the hope of freedom in Christ, though they themselves did not have personal freedom. Moravians preached the gospel emphasizing the atoning blood of Christ and saw many Native Americans and African slaves turn to Christ. "Before the nineteenth century, it is difficult to find any African American referring to Jesus as white, or of any particular color. When eighteenth-century missionaries brought the message of Christ to slaves, they did so largely without visual images, and churches catering to slaves had no iconography."⁸

During the 1700's, converts to Christianity from all races claimed to have had visions and dreams of Jesus.⁹ Those who described their experience did not describe Jesus in terms of being white; they described him as one who radiated light. The color of Jesus did not become a divisive issue until the nineteenth century.

Visual imagery of Jesus during the eighteenth century was few and far between. Nevertheless, when they appeared, Jesus was not explicitly depicted as white. A fraudulent letter, known as the *Publius Lentulus*, created

7 Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 71, Kindle Edition.

8 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 68.

9 The races referenced above include White (primarily English), African, and Native American.

during the dark ages (1000 to 1400) and supposedly written by the first-century governor of Judea, describes Jesus Christ's physical characteristics as those of a white European male with shoulder -length brown hair and a beard parted on his chin.

His European physical qualities were associated with purity, beauty and high moral character. Colonial Christians rejected claims concerning the physical appearance of Jesus as false. "Puritans read their Bibles, and they knew that the gospels said nothing about Christ's physical appearance. They knew that what Jesus actually looked like was unknown and had been unknown for centuries."¹⁰ The reality at the time was that it did not matter what color Jesus was because it was not yet a point of racial tension.

Although the Publius Lentulus Letter was proven to be a fraud, some English clergy saw it as a basis for advocating an all-white America. A young minister named Ezra Stiles, who would later become the president of Yale University, gave credibility to the document despite its questionability. "... Stiles was drawn to the description: 'I see nothing in it but what would be natural for an observant Proconsul to write; and it seems to be in the free epistolary way.' Just as Stiles wanted a white Jesus, he also wanted an all-white America. Shortly after the American Revolution, Stiles prophesied that there would be neither blacks nor Indians in the new nation..."¹¹

By the time the eighteenth century rolled around, the notion of a white American Jesus had begun to take root in the American psyche. This opened the door to portray a white Jesus as the normative narrative for all races and classes of people who lived in America. Surprisingly, the normalization of white Jesus imagery did not prevent the African slave from embracing Jesus as Savior. The Gospel message of grace and redemption provided hope to enslaved Africans, giving them the strength to survive the horrors of slavery. During the early part of the 1800's, literature and imagery depicting a white European Jesus were mass-produced and distributed throughout the

10 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 41.

11 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 41, 69.

country by Protestant denominations. “By the middle of the nineteenth century, it was easy for many Americans to assume that Jesus was white. There he was in almanacs, Bibles, and tracts. Maybe the Publius Lentulus letter was not a fraud after all... whiteness meant power and privilege, and who was more empowered or privileged than God’s only Son?”¹²

In his 2015 article titled, “My Name is Legion’: Sources and Forces of White Supremacy in the U.S.” Dr. R. Drew Smith observed a connection between explicit white supremacy beliefs and implicit and undetectable racial bias.¹³ He discusses the notion that well before the southern plantation system thrived, building the world’s strongest economy on the backs of African slaves, assumptions of white supremacy over blacks and Indians were already prevalent amongst English colonialists in the early 1700’s.¹⁴

During this time of mass distribution of white Jesus imagery, African American, Native American, and White artists, alongside abolitionists, authors, and reformers began challenging the assertion of a white American Jesus. To them, a white Jesus was out of the question. “They came to believe that a ‘higher law’ and a nonwhite Christ stood against the racial privileges

12 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 100-101.

13 “Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And he replied, ‘My name is Legion because there are many of us inside this man.’ (Mark 5:9). Dr. R. Drew Smith debunks the mythical notion that white supremacy exists mainly within extremist factions of American culture by exposing the systemic pervasiveness of white supremacy within and among American society. R. D. Smith, *My Name is Legion: Sources and Forces of White Supremacy in the U.S.* (Religion Dispatches, 2015), 9.

14 Dr. Smith makes two crucial observations of concerning white supremacist culture in American history and society, “By exposing connections between explicit white supremacist views and what have been broader and often cloaked white essentialist narratives, a fuller picture emerges of white supremacist mindscapes and landscapes within the U.S. According to 19th century pro-slavery advocates of this position, whites, on their part, were divinely entrusted with superior qualities necessary for carrying out a range of Godly purposes, with the purpose most often cited being that of Christianizing and civilizing the benighted slaves. Typical of this genre were views expressed by a Methodist minister in North Carolina, Washington S. Chaffin who asserted, nature has ‘drawn lines of demarcation between (blacks) and (whites) that no physical, mental or religious cultivation can obliterate.’” R. D. Smith, *My Name is Legion*, 6.

whiteness offered in this world and allegedly in the next. ... An array of white Americans joined the attack. With the Bible in one hand and a pen in the other, white abolitionists assaulted the idea that God's Son sided with masters and overseers. To these radicals, if the spirit of Christ was anywhere in this land, it was in the experiences of slaves."¹⁵

Toward the middle of the 1800s, the white Jesus imagery shifted from being a symbol of white supremacy to a symbol of the marginalized. It would now identify with the sufferings of blacks to give them otherworldly hope for freedom from oppression and injustice in heaven. Although many Africans embraced otherworldly theology, voices of black nationalism began to emerge with a prophetic call for justice in the present time of suffering. Robert Alexander Young imagined a mixed-race Jesus, white in appearance, born of a black woman, and rallying Africans to wage war against the racist South.¹⁶ David Walker also spoke in Black Nationalist language advocating violence and stating that whites were, "Pretenders to

15 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 101-102.

16 Robert Alexander Young wrote: "In the Ethiopian Manifesto (1829), Young attacked slaveholders as 'monsters incarnate' and quoted the biblical God as saying, 'Surely hath the cries of the black, a most persecuted people, ascended to my throne and craved my mercy; now, behold! I will stretch forth my hand and gather them to the palm, that they become unto me a people, and I unto them their God.' The Lord had sent a new savior in the form of a mixed-race messiah. He would have "long and flowing hair" and would appear to be a 'white man.' But he was 'born of a black woman.' The new messiah would 'call together the black people as a nation in themselves,' and they would wreak havoc on the South." Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 109-110, Kindle Edition. Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 36- 37; Robert Alexander Young, *The Ethiopian Manifesto: Issued in Defense of the Black Man's Rights in the Scale of Universal Freedom* (New York: Robert Alexander Young, 1829).

Christianity... unjust, jealous, unmerciful, avaricious and blood-thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority.”¹⁷

The early twentieth century saw the great migration of blacks fleeing the South for better opportunities only to find themselves in segregated ghettos of large cities with limited prospects for employment. It was also a time when, approximately, two thousand black men were lynched by angry white mobs. The times made it particularly repulsive for many African Americans to stomach white Jesus imagery. Everything in America from photographs, statues, biblical illustrations, Sunday school material, and motion pictures seemed to represent the white American Jesus. In frustration, Charles Jenkins wrote a letter to then-President Franklin Roosevelt, “If there is such a thing as God, he must be a white person, according to the conditions we colored people are in.”¹⁸

Dr. Albert Cleage argues that the only reason the illusion of a white Jesus was so pervasive throughout the world for the last 500 years, was because Europeans superimposed their culture over the Christianity and presented it to non-Europeans as absolute truth. Dr. Cleage correctly states that it is a historical fact that Jesus of Nazareth was anything but white European. “The nation of Israel was a mixture of Chaldeans, Egyptians, Midianites, Ethiopians, Kushites, Babylonians and other dark-skinned peoples, all of whom were already mixed with the black people of central Africa.”¹⁹ Within that framework, the white Jesus narrative was crafted, refined, and marketed to America, then exported to the world.

17 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 109-110.

18 Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 17– 18; John Morton Blum, *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 184. Quoted in Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 180, Kindle Edition.

19 Albert B. Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 3.

He asserts that American society uses white religious imagery to reinforce their belief in the high value and superiority of whiteness despite historical proof that affirms Jesus was not white. Black churches and clergy also share in the culpability of perpetuating the American white Jesus deception by allowing it to continue uncontested. He makes the compelling point that African Americans will not be free from the chains of spiritual and psychological slavery to the white man until they understand that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was a person of dark complexion.²⁰ Cleage argues, “We must put down the white Jesus which the white man gave us in slavery and which has been tearing us to pieces.”²¹ The effectiveness of this categorically convinces African Americans to accept an oppressed and lower societal status here on earth, in the hope of a greater reward in heaven.

In his book, *Black Christian Nationalism*, Dr. Cleage explains how slave owners used imagery to reduce the self-image of African slaves to ensure continued submission to their masters.

The religion which the master gave to his slave was designed for pacification and to support the authority of white supremacy. He said, ‘This is a picture of God. This is a picture of Jesus. They are both white as you can plainly see. Here are the biblical characters. They are all white. But they love you in spite of your evil Blackness and they offer you salvation in the great beyond!’²²

Cleage describes dominant culture’s use of imagery as a critical component in the deliberate programming of African Americans viewing themselves as inferior to whites. Every aspect of the African slave existence, down to the minutest detail, was defined and authorized by white slave owners. Additionally, pictures representing the white Jesus not only promoted the inferiority of Blacks, but it also affected the white psyche

20 Cleage, *The Black Messiah*, 3. Cleage speaks of the psychological bondage in terms of African Americans needing to believe and understand for themselves that they have a legitimate right to “first-class citizenship in Christ’s Kingdom on Earth.”

21 Ibid., 3.

22 Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, xxviii.

giving them a greater sense of goodness, virtue, and favor as a divine blessing and benefit of their whiteness. The African slave had no choice but to accept and live with the slave owner's proclamation of his or her Black inferiority and self-hatred simply to survive.²³

Similarly, James Cone laments that slavery of the African was much more than physical captivity and forced servitude. He describes a "psychological slavery" that demanded the African forget his heritage and history, in order to appropriate and internalize the Eurocentric values of the slave owner, and denying "our true African identity"²⁴.

Dr. Cleage unapologetically argues African Americans must reject all Eurocentric biblical imagery because it is a tool of racial oppression used to reinforce white superiority and black inferiority.²⁵ He strongly encourages African Americans to break completely free from individualistic and self-serving behaviors that are cultural norms of white American society.²⁶ If our society protects white privilege, white America will never allow the black man to become his equal.²⁷ Cleage encourages African Americans to center their lives on caring for each other and strengthening the community for the good of everyone.²⁸

RELIGIOUS IMAGERY USED TO REINFORCE THE NORMALCY OF WHITENESS

For nearly 500 years the illusion that Jesus was white dominated the world only because white Europeans dominated the world. Now,

23 Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, xxvii.

24 James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*. Rev Ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 107.

25 Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, xxviii, xxx, xxxi.

26 Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, 67. Throughout the book, Dr. Cleage speaks of salvations in terms of group and community. He repeatedly describes individualism as a product of white society and detrimental to the freedom and self-determination of Black people.

27 Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, xxvii.

28 Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, xxvii.

with the emergence of the nationalist movements of the world's colored majority, the historic truth is finally beginning to emerge that Jesus was the non-white leader of a non-white people struggling for national liberation against the rule of a white nation, Rome.²⁹

Despite clear historical evidence to the contrary, America's majority population continues to promote and market a white Christ as the theological normative narrative. Jesus has appeared in the image of a white flaxen-haired European beginning as early as the middle ages. During the eighth and ninth centuries, Europe art depicted Jesus as white, to represent all that is good, holy, righteous and just while the Jews were presented with dark skin representing evil.³⁰ Although the inclination of most cultures throughout the world would depict Jesus to resemble someone who looks like them in their art, Americans continue to hold the belief that Jesus is a white man.

In *Quest for the Historical Jesus*, Dr. Albert Schweitzer evaluated the work of theologians who were attempting to gain insight on the historical Jesus. He concluded that those who claim to have uncovered the historical Jesus invariably find a Jesus who looks like them. "The scholars who earnestly look down the well of history in order to see Jesus, in fact, saw the reflection of their own faces staring up at them."³¹ Based on historical demographic information the whitewashing of biblical characters, early church fathers, and other historical figures fit a palatable narrative to the colonialist mindset.

The white Jesus Pandora Box opened wider with the invention of motion picture technology where the All-American Jesus would be etched into the consciousness of the world in the form of leisure entertainment. Initially, many Christians were outspoken against movies portraying Jesus in

29 Cleage, *The Black Messiah*, 3.

30 Matthew Phillips. "Art: Whitewashing Jesus," *Newsweek*, December 8, 2006, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/art-whitewashing-jesus-105409>.

31 David Wenham and Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospel & Acts*. 2nd ed. Vol. I. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 140.

any form, but it soon became an acceptable genre with its mass distribution to the world. Missionary societies were successfully using movies as part of their missional strategy since 1916.³² Their insertion of film to missional imperialism allowed them to introduce an animated life-like white Jesus to the imagination of indigenous cultures across the globe. This was not only important for evangelism but also for the enculturation of native people groups into modern civilization.³³ Missionaries visually preached the gospel throughout the world using Cecil B. DeMille's 1927 *King of Kings* with great success. "This Christ was both familiar and unfamiliar. He had white skin, was tall, and had a full beard. Yet his hair was distinct. It clung closely to Christ's head and barely reached his shoulders."³⁴ Although *King of Kings* was never a box office hit, DeMille described the near thirty year run of the movie in the following manner, "Its statistical history can be summed up in the fact that it has been playing steadily somewhere in the world, I believe without a day's interruption, ever since."³⁵

RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL WHITEWASHING

To appreciate the whitewashing of Christ, it is important to examine the whitewashing of history and the Bible by European leaders and scholars. African history from a European scholarly lens is very much a dismissed

32 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 185.

33 "Missionaries assumed the superiority of Western culture and were very much influenced by the spirit of colonialism and imperialism. Most understood 'civilizing' and 'evangelizing' to go hand in hand, which led to a holistic approach in missions, and that their missionary work contributed substantially to their national interests." Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), Kindle Locations 5611-5613. Kindle Edition.

34 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 186-187.

35 Terry Lindvall, *Sanctuary Cinema: Origins of the Christian Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 193; Cecil B. DeMille and Donald Hayne. *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1959), 281. Quoted in Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 188, Kindle Edition.

afterthought of complete irrelevance. When considering the possibility of Jesus resembling a brown to a dark-skinned man with his hair textured like that of a black person, scholars will immediately dismiss such a notion as impossible. However, because Jesus can no longer be depicted as a Nordic, straight haired, blue-eyed European, most mainstream scholars will concede to the idea that he is olive complexioned, with physical features resembling those of a modern-day Arab.³⁶ However, not black! Dr. Mark Goodacre Professor of Religious Studies at Duke University commented, "We do seem to have a relatively dark skinned Jesus. In contemporary parlance I think the safest thing is to talk about Jesus as a man of colour. This probably means olive-coloured."³⁷ Additionally, "Professor Vincent Wimbush, of California's Claremont Graduate University, who is an expert on ethnic interpretations of the Bible, says the matter of the historical colour of Jesus seems to him a 'flat, dead-end issue.' He's of Mediterranean stock, and it's quite clear what that means. We see people like that in the world today, and that should end the matter."³⁸

Keith Augustine Burton uses a term "Biblical Africa" to visualize the landscape prior to the rape of Africa by Imperial Europe.³⁹ He applies the terminology, "the biblical land of Ham and his descendants" to geographic areas of land that American and European scholars do not acknowledge as being connected to Africa. Based on the table of nations, and other biblical

36 Because of these and other scholars, I conclude that western educated theologians will concede to a non-European (white), Mediterranean, or olive-skinned Jesus, but reject any possibility of a dark-skinned, or negroid looking Jesus. See note 32.

37 Giles Wilson. "So what Colour was Jesus?" *BBC News Online Magazine*, October 27, 2004, accessed February 7, 2017, http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3958241.stm.

38 Ibid., 4.

39 Keith Augustus Burton, *The Blessing of Africa: The Bible and African Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2007), 69-70. Kindle Edition. Working under the assumption that the author of the "Table of Nations" in Genesis 10 intended for it to convey an accurate geographical picture of Ham's descendants, this book defines "biblical Africa" as a territory that transcends our modern understanding of the continent and includes large portions of the Middle East.

references, Burton approaches his thesis from both a geographic and ethnic standpoint. He explains, “‘Africa’ (the land of Ham and his descendants) swells beyond its contemporary boundaries to include Saudi Arabia and the countries that share its peninsula; the western regions of the Middle East, including Israel, Iraq, and Lebanon; and possibly the southernmost parts of modern Turkey... The term Africa not only includes an expanded land mass but also a variety of people groups.”⁴⁰ The current national boundaries on the continent of Africa are not the historical borders native to the land we know as Africa. Africa’s present-day maps were created during the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference negotiations. The continent was divided among European countries to exploit Africa’s resources and people strictly for profit.⁴¹

“The Old Testament scholar Randall Bailey even extends this ethnocentric and politically influenced perception into what he calls a strategy of geographical de-Africanization among mainline biblical scholars, who insist on focusing on Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), the Syria-Palestine region, the Arabian Peninsula, and Egypt, which they separate

⁴⁰ Ibid., (Kindle Locations 152-154). Kindle Edition. See Appendix for tables Descendants of Ham and the Modern Location of Their Assigned Territories.

⁴¹ Robert E. Hood, *Begrimed, and Black: Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), Kindle Location 536. Kindle Edition.

from Africa.”⁴² Moreover, the name Africa did not exist until after Rome defeated Hannibal’s Army in the Punic Wars and applied the name Africa to the province they established and nowhere else.⁴³

Examining the Bible from a Eurocentric western lens gives a distorted picture of what Biblical Africa may have looked like during antiquity. However, if we think about it in terms of the map of eastern Europe (the former Soviet Union) prior to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, we clearly see how borders and nations radically change from what we have grown accustomed to. “The Bible refers to Egypt, Cush (Kush), Ethiopia, and Put (Punt), which was located in Libya, the ancient generic name for Africa. Ethiopia and Cush were also generic terms for Africa in the ancient world and the Old Testament. The New Testament, in addition to references to Ethiopia, contains more oblique references to ‘Africa’ and blacks.”⁴⁴ Scholars assume dark-skinned people may plausibly have inhabited much of the land occupied by Mediterranean people.

42 “Old Testament references to African countries and Africans have been documented in an excellent study by David Adamo: (1) the exodus and the wilderness-Num. 12:1- 2; (2) the United Monarchy (1020-922 B.C.E.)-2 Sam. 18:21, 22, 31-32; 1 Kings 10:1- 13; 2 Chron. 9:1-12; (3) the divided monarchy and the fall of Jerusalem (922-587 B.C.E.)-1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Chron. 12:2-3, 14:9; Amos 9:7-8; Isa. 11:11, 20:1-6; Jer. 13:23, 36:14, 21, 23; (4) the exilic period-Ezek. 29:10. 30:4-5; Isa. 43:3, 45:14; and (5) the writings-Psalm 68:31, 87:4; Esther 1:1, 8:9; Dan. 11:43.” David Tuesday Adamo, “The Place of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament and its Environment,” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1986), 33-34; Robert A. Bennett, Jr., “Africa and the Biblical World,” *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971): 501-524; Charles B. Copher, “The Bible and the African Experience,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 16 (Fall 1988/Spring 1989): 32-50; Charles B. Copher, “The Black Presence in the Old Testament,” *In Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain H. Felder, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 146-164. Quoted in Robert E. Hood, *Begrimed, and Black: Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), Kindle Locations 2254-2259. Kindle Edition.

43 Burton., *The Blessing of Africa*, Kindle Location 146.

44 Hood, Kindle Locations 540-542.

THE SYSTEMATIC ERASING AND REFRAMING OF AFRICAN HISTORY BY EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM

Since the day of Pentecost, men of color have played a vital role in the spread of Christianity throughout the world. Many western scholars, however, downplay or ignore this altogether. “The Acts of the Apostles speaks of natives from ‘Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene’ (2:10) assembled together with other foreigners in Jerusalem on Pentecost, and of a ‘Simeon who was called Niger [Lat.: black], and Lucius of Cyrene [capital (?) of Cyrenaica, which is modern Libya]’ (13:1).”⁴⁵ Though the land of Ham was not known as Africa then, the places represented at Pentecost were predominantly dark skinned societies that played a significant role in the spread of the gospel. The consensus among European scholarship, however, is that black voices are noticeably quiet in both the Old and the New Testaments.

The history of black exclusion from the Bible and early Christian history plays a role in the overall perception and culture of European Christianity toward people of color. Perceptions of white supremacy and black inferiority shape their theology and justify their attitudes and behaviors towards blacks. These evolving perceptions of have presented themselves for centuries in Christian imagery, beginning in Europe and then in the United States proclaiming the virtue, goodness, and superiority of whiteness.

THE BLACK CHURCH RESPONSE TO WHITE JESUS IMAGERY: IS IT EVEN AN ISSUE?

For the most part, it appears that African American churches over the years have not been proactive in addressing the abundance of the American white Jesus imagery as a problem. For whites, it is the norm and therefore not an issue with them. I submit that it gives them a sense of confidence

⁴⁵ Hood, *Kindle Locations* 542-545.

because, in all their imagery and literature, Jesus and God look like them. For blacks, however, the imagery is subconsciously internalized and accepted as the norm. Since every bit of imagery representing Jesus is white, a sense of inadequacy and being on the periphery looking in is the result.

Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier discovered that racialized imagery in Sunday school material has contributed negatively to a poor self-image and low self-esteem of black children. He did a study asking a sample of black youth: 'Is God a White man?'... Dr. Frazier was disturbed by the answers he received. 'The answer of one twenty-one-year-old was indicative of how most answered the question of Jesus' race. I've never heard of Him being a Negro,' the young man maintained, 'so He must have been a white man. People would think you were crazy if you told them He was a Negro, especially white people.'"⁴⁶

Dr. Frazier believed that along with the white Jesus imagery and Sunday school cards, the institution and leadership of the black church were to blame. He said the black church, "does little to give Negroes a sense of personal worth and dignity in a world where everything tends to disparage the Negro...The religious ideology of the Negro church tends to perpetuate such notions as a white God and white angels, conceptions which tend toward the disparagement of things black."⁴⁷

Cleage believes that the black church must change its focus to liberating African Americans versus preaching and teaching only on otherworldliness. He laments using Sunday school literature from white publishers because it only exacerbates the problem oppressing blacks. He criticizes black literature created by white publishers as no better because, other than the pictures being black, nothing else is different. He argues that black

46 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 181-182.

47 Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 182. Quoted from E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Youth at the Crossways: Their Personality Development in the Middle States* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 115– 16.

literature should promote black liberation as its main emphasis and that all white Jesus imagery must be purged from the black church.⁴⁸

Simply exchanging the Eurocentric Christian imagery of a white Jesus for more Afrocentric images to mount on our sanctuary and office walls will not erase the damage it has inflicted upon the collective consciousness of black people who continue to be unaccepted by white America as equals. As an African American pastor in a marginalized community, I see the need for reimagining a Jesus of color who unconditionally loves and accepts all people equally, and without prejudice. African Americans who bear the scars of 400 years of black inferiority programming, must begin healing as a people by embracing the rich heritage of the African Ancestors by not only receiving God's unconditional love but by loving oneself unconditionally. It is this author's opinion that in order to dismantle the psychological chains of inferiority overshadow African Americans, we must see Jesus the Messiah through lenses untainted by White Christian Imagery. Katie Geneva Cannon aptly expresses the need for African Americans to reimage not only Jesus but Christianity as well.

Reflecting on my heritage, which was passed on by black preachers, parents, and grandparents who worked and prayed in the segregated South where conservative, white Christians lynched innocent black Christians, I realized that black Christians in the United States have always been forced to reimage the Christian religion. Our reimagining of Christianity is necessary in order to redeem it from the desecrated imagery of white Christians who snatched black Africans from Africa in slave ships named Jesus, Mary, Liberty, John the Baptist, and Justice. Almost two million blacks died in the middle passages of those ships due to the cruel, inhumane treatment they received from white, male Christians. As a result, we blacks (who became Christians with historical memory) reimagined Jesus, Mary, John the Baptist, justice, and liberty.

48 Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, xxxiv – xxxv.

From this centuries-long reimagining of Jesus emerged a beautiful, redemptive, black liberation theology.⁴⁹

By taking ownership of our identity and heritage as descendants of Africans forcefully taken from their homeland to a hostile and unfamiliar space, surviving unspeakable physical and mental abuse yet, we will be able to give future generations a hope for freedom.

In his article, "Prophet Nat and God's Children of Darkness," Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar argues the power of reimagining while juxtaposing integrationist Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and separatist Marcus Garvey. He writes, "God speaks to them as His chosen ones and leads them toward liberation by the creation of a spiritual—if not physical—black nation. When God or Heavenly deities are imagined in anthropomorphic terms, they are invariably black, reflecting the phenotype of God's chosen ones."⁵⁰

Research by Laura A. Reese, Ronald E. Brown, and James David Ivers uncovered positive effects of belief in a black Christ. Their research showed that belief in a black Jesus is indicative of a rejection of white Jesus imagery, and reveals a greater propensity to be proactive in the fight for racial equality and social justice. "Believing in a black Christ may be the means by which some individuals, particularly men, think about the sacred and historical memory of the racial group and challenged perceptions that membership in the group denotes subordination and powerlessness."⁵¹

49 Katie Geneva Cannon. "Christian Imperialism and the Transatlantic Slave Trade." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no. 1 (2008): 127-34. From: Delores S. Williams, "Reimagining Truth: Traversing the Feminist Christian Backlash," *The Other Side Magazine* (May-June 1994): 53-54.

50 Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar. "Prophet Nat and God's Children of Darkness: Black Religious Nationalism." *The Journal of Religious Thought* 53-54, no. 2-1 (1997, 1997): 51-71. From William Van Deburg, *A New Day in Babylon: Black Power and American Culture: 1966-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 76.

51 Paraphrased from the section titled, "Imagining A Black Christ." Laura A. Reese, Ronald E. Brown, and David Ivers James. "'Some Children See Him...': Political Participation and the Black Christ." *Political Behavior* 29, no. 4 (2007): 523.

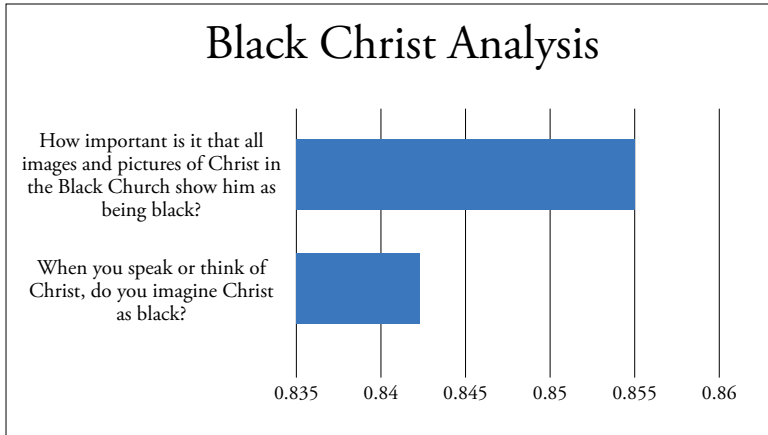


Figure 1: Percentage responding Positively to Black Christ Survey Questions⁵²

The results of our recent presidential elections bear witness to a high level of anxiety and fear from, mainly, white men who perceive themselves as losing their cultural dominance and white privilege, after enduring eight years of governance by an African American president. According to Cleage, the fears of white male America losing its institutional authority and explicit dominance over African American people are real and they will do anything to preserve and protect their dominance and privilege.⁵³ “The white man’s declaration of black inferiority is basic to all American life.”⁵⁴ The Christian imagery of a white Eurocentric Jesus has been used to promote white supremacy in America and continues to be a challenge for African Americans to overcome.

White American society continues to promote white supremacy and black inferiority through white religious imagery. Therefore, it is vital for African Americans to internalize black Jesus imagery as the normative

⁵² Ibid., 532-533.

⁵³ Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, xxv.

⁵⁴ Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, xxv.

narrative and replace all white Jesus imagery with black Jesus imagery. The black Church can no longer be complicit by ignoring psychologically oppressive white Christian imagery to remain unchallenged within walls of the black church. African Americans must reject all religious imagery that continues to marginalize and reduce its people into a second-class society. Within the sacred walls of the Black Church, Jesus Christ must be represented with Black Christian imagery to create a positive self-image and self-worth for the people of God.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Descendants of Ham and the Modern Location of Their Assigned Territories.

CUSH (GEN 10:7-12)	MODERN LOCATION
Ethiopia (41x)	Eritrea, Ehtiopia, Sudan
Seba	Yemen/Saudi Arabia
Havilah (Gen 2:11; 25:18; 1 Sam15:7; 1 Chron 1:9	Saudi Arabia
Sabtah	Saudi Arabia (?)
Raamah ^a (Ezek 27:22)	Yemen
a. Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chron 9:1-12; Job 6:19; Ps 72:10, 15; Is 60:6; Jer 6:20; Ezek 27:22-23; 38:13	Yemen
b. Dedan (Jer 25:23; 49:8; Ezek 25:13; 27:20; 38:13)	Saudi Arabia
Sabteca	Saudi Arabia (?)
Nimrod (Mic 5:6)	Iraq (Nimrud)
a. Babylon (284)	Iraq (Babylon)
b. Erech (Ezra 4:9)	Iraq (Warks)
c. Akkad	Iraq (near Baghdad
d. Calneh (in Shinar) (Amos 6:2)	Iraq
e. Assyria (123x)	Iraq
I. Nineveh (2 Kings 19:31; Is 37:37; Jonah; Nahum; Zeph 2:13; Mt 12:41; Lk 11:32)	Iraq (Nineveh)
II. Rehonoth Ir	Iraq (near Mosul)
III. Calah	Iraq (near Mosul)
IV. Resen	Iraq (near Mosul)

^a Joksha, a descendant of Shem, also has two sons named Sheba and Dedan (Gen 25:3). They could possibly be the same people who either intermarried or occupied the same geographical area.

Table 2: Descendants of Ham and the Modern Location of Their Assigned Territories.

MISRAYIM (Gen 10:13-14)	Modern Location
Egypt (614x)	Egypt, Sudan
Ludites (Jer 46:9)	North Africa
Anamites	North Africa (?)
Lehabites/Libya (Nahum 3:9; Acts 3:10)	Libya
Naphathites	Egypt/North Africa
Pathrushites (Is 11:11; Jer 44:1, 15; Exek 29:14; 30:14)	Egypt (?)
Casluhites (Ancestor of Philistines [285x])	Egypt
a. Philistines	Israel, Palestine
Caphtorites (Deut 2:23; Jer 47:4; Amos 9:7)	Crete

Table 3: Descendants of Ham and the Modern Location of Their Assigned Territories.

CANAAN (Gen 10:15-19)	Modern Location
Canaan (163x)	Israel/Palestine
Sidon (49x)	Lebanon
Hittites (61x)	Turkey (south-central), Syria
Jebusites (45x)	Israel/Palestine
Amorites (86x)	Jordan
Girgashites (Gen 15:21; Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10; 24:11; Neh9:8)	Israel (?)
Hivites (25x)	Lebanon
Arkites (Josh 16:2; 2 Sam 15:32; 16"16; 17:5, 14; 1 Chron 1:15; 1 Chron 27:33)	Lebanon (Tell 'Arqa)
Sinites	Egypt
Arvadites (Ezek 27:8,11)	Syria
Zemarites (Josh 18:22; 2 Chron 13:4)	Israel/Palestine
Hamathites (39x)	Israel

Stigma, Gender and Visibility: A Journey through India, Zambia, and South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on what I experienced in my two plus month mission trip last summer in India, Zambia and South Africa. I engage simultaneously in a hermeneutical and a spiritual pursuit in this paper. Therefore I have tried to organize the material roughly into two segments. The larger of the two, the first, is largely analytical, i.e. applying theoretical constructs from different disciplines to the phenomenon and experience of stigmatized individuals and groups as that was the population, along with those Christians ministering to them, that was the focus of my entire trip. I shall be buttressing the

hermeneutics of stigma with some of my own observations from the field as well, being the anthropologist that I am. I shall present a theological analysis among the other perspectives included in the first section but I shall focus on my own theological reflections in the second section of my paper and relate the phenomenon of stigma to what I believe should be the Christian response. I am expecting that none of this will rise anywhere near to the perfection I often delude myself I might achieve but please know that this is a heartfelt attempt to share what I learned about God and His presence in the world as I experienced it last summer.

AN ANALYSIS OF AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ABOUT STIGMA, COMMUNITY, AND HEALING

Since stigma is a seemingly universal phenomenon and causes much suffering in the world, I strongly hold that Christians are called to respond to stigmatization. In the face of the victimization of the stigmatized, I argue the theological principals of *imago dei*, radical hospitality, and embrace of the stranger call Christians to turn from judgment and even revulsion to the other (in our equating certain bodily conditions such as HIV/AIDS with impurity and sin) to lead the world in providing a loving community regardless of any person's embodied stigma.¹

THE PHENOMENON OF STIGMA IN HUMAN SOCIETY: FOUR PERSPECTIVES

In my travels, I witnessed firsthand ministry addressed to the needs of stigmatized peoples including women with HIV/AIDS, their children, disabled children, and young people who had been forcibly made part of

¹ When I refer to 'embodied stigma' I am using the term in a sense very similar to but not exactly the same as how it is used by the British theologian Louise J. Lawrence in her book, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters*. We both are concerned with stigma embedded in the body, but she focuses on those stigmatized by disability, whereas I am focusing on those stigmatized by what is in their body, such as HIV/AIDS. I also am taking into consideration the stigma, or shall I say the oppression, of women, based on a simple fact of their biology.

the sex trade. One of the remarkable things I noticed was how similar the dynamics of stigmatization are in different cultural settings such as India versus the two countries I visited in southern Africa. In order to illuminate the power and scope of the process of stigmatization and how the stigmatized must try to cope with a stigmatized identity, I am turning to four different approaches to understanding this phenomenon, a sociological perspective first, one presented in a systematic form by the sociologist Erving Goffman, a cultural/anthropological analysis by the noted British anthropologist, Mary Douglas, author of *Purity and Danger*, a notable work. Douglas' work underlines the psychology of disgust and contamination and theological perspectives put forth by a number of Western and non-Western theologians. In some cases, the perspective generally applies to the stigmatized as a whole. In the theological perspectives, not only is a stigma in general set forth, stigmatization in respect to those afflicted with HIV/AIDS is specifically mentioned.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF STIGMA

Erving Goffman wrote perhaps the most important book about stigma in the field of sociology in 1963, appropriately enough called *Stigma*. However, it is the subtitle of this book, *Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, which perhaps resonates more fully when considering people who are being stigmatized. In this subtitle, we begin to appreciate the magnitude of what it means to be stigmatized in any social setting. A stigmatized person has a *spoiled* (my emphasis) identity that must be managed. If we add to that burden - ones of poverty, gender, caste, color, religion or any other marker that, in a particular society, may cause one to be marginalized or even despised - we begin to appreciate the magnitude of the responsibility of Christians to respond to it, wherever in the world we encounter it. When we delve more deeply into Goffman's conceptualization of stigma, we see that he intended it to go beyond its social-psychological formulation to one that "bear[s] on 'social information' the individual directly conveys about

himself.”² His conceptualization draws on the etymology of the English word stigma in ancient Greek which referred to “bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.”³ There is a parallelism with signs of sickness such as leprosy or HIV/AIDS. In these cases, the stigma is embodied physically but serves as a metaphoric brand that others use to characterize a stigmatized person, the one avoided.

Leper colonies in Jesus’ time may have existed, and leper colonies and HIV/AIDS hospices in India today do exist to avoid contagion. It is easy to imagine how others then or now would conflate physical blemish with moral blemish and physical contamination with moral contamination. As Goffman goes on to say, “Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these [socio-cultural] categories. Social settings establish the categories of persons likely to be encountered there.”⁴ We begin to see that the socio-cultural milieu creates both a sense of the prototype of ‘ordinary’ and ‘natural’ attributes of its members, that is, straight/heterosexual, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, middle or upper socio-economic class, and male gender, as well as what symbolized those without some or any of these attributes. The individual who is not seen as having these attributes then begins to be seen and certainly sees themselves as having a ‘spoiled’ identity.

Each society/culture may have a different set of preferred or privileged characteristics, but no society has none; even in the most acephalous societies studied by anthropologists exist these characteristics. Interestingly

2 Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster A Touchstone Book, 1963), Location 22 of 2741 in Kindle edition.

3 Ibid, 1.

4 Goffman, 1.

gender-based preference is perhaps the most commonly occurring one in human societies, often alongside age. Goffman is interested in how we apply our set of preferred attributes in our expectations of others whom we encounter in social spaces and “the demands we make [upon these strangers as well as] the character we impute to the individual...an imputation made in potential retrospect...a virtual social identity.”⁵ After our initial encounter then we go on to determine the individual’s “actual social identity.” The further the individual is from encompassing our (often unconscious) preferred attributes the more likely he or she is to fall into a stigmatized and spoiled social identity.

In terms of the way stigma seemed to be operating among the people I encountered on my sojourn, many of them were marked obviously as having a spoiled identity either because they were of the female gender in highly patriarchal societies, they were poor or of a lower caste, or they were infected with HIV/AIDS. Of course, some of them had stigmatized statuses that were not visible (an HIV/AIDS infected person who was maintaining good health), but they still knew if, for example, their HIV status was revealed their actual social identity would be one of marginalization if not outright disgust. One way for them to avoid the visibility of their stigmatized status of being HIV positive was not going to a place to get their meds or not taking them. In a small scale compact social world in which most of the people I met live everyone “knows everyone else’s business” so it is extremely hard to hide one’s HIV status. Of course, the need to hide only increases the sufferers’ sense of shame further debilitating them. Their social world was a very wrought place for them to inhabit, and it was often Christian caregivers who were providing them with the only social space where they felt accepted, normal, even loved. This served as a healing antidote to their stigmatized status, a status that as Goffman puts it “[consists of] an attribute that is deeply discrediting.”⁶ However, although the Christian ministries I

5 Ibid., 2.

6 Goffman, 2.

walked alongside were dedicated to dissipating discrediting that people with HIV/AIDS were experiencing, I was also made aware that not all church members were necessarily supportive of their efforts. Again, the set of social relations in all three countries served to alienate what Goffman refers to as the “normals” from the discredited “other”, “an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse [who] possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him...[as] he possesses a stigma, an undesired differentness... [whereby] we believe that the person with a stigma is not quite human.”⁷ That is why a major campaign was built around the slogan, namely, “The church has AIDS,” so that church members might be persuaded not to turn away from people with HIV/AIDS. We will next examine stigma in anthropological terms which stress the implicit cultural rules about what is normatively pure (or clean) and what is polluting (or dirty).

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF STIGMA, A CULTURAL HERMENEUTIC

The British social anthropologist Mary Douglas made many contributions to anthropology and also used anthropological concepts to explain passages in the Bible, and in particular, the book of Leviticus. Her major opus, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, examines how societies create categories of purity and pollution whereby crossing a proscribed socio-cultural boundary results in one becoming social-culturally polluted. This is a very close analogy to Goffman's concept of stigma but with additional attention given to its meaning in the belief system of a culture. In her fieldwork in what now is known as the Republic of the Congo, Douglas noticed that among the Lele there were categories of ‘unclean things’ that must be avoided so as not to become polluted. These things were those considered dirty, and as she defined it, dirt was

⁷ Ibid., 3.

“compounded of two things, care for hygiene and respect for conventions.”⁸ (Another way she thought of dirt was as “matter out of place.”) Among the Lele, Douglas saw a preoccupation with pollution, and in a survey of other anthropologists’ field work, that ritual uncleanness always implies not only physical dirt but moral impurity. This we can see in Jesus’ time when lepers were not only seen as unclean in body but unclean in spirit, which made Jesus’ close contact with them questionable since uncleanness spreads. Still, Christ transcended cultural categories and in so doing made His followers question their own cultural norms.⁹

Mary Douglas makes a point that the conceptual purity boundaries of societies serve to prevent contact between what the historian Mircea Eliade in his religious studies called the sacred and profane, that is, between the spiritual realm, which holds all value and mystery (mysterious tremendum), and the worldly, natural realm.¹⁰ Another way to apply Douglas’ concept of purity and danger (and that of Eliade’s concept of sacred space) is to look at the Temple in Hebrew belief where the centermost point, the Holy of Holies, is the most sacred, the place where the priest can access the divine and is protected by the layers of the temple that surround it. The Holy of Holies can only be entered by the purest, the most holy high priests. If the profane or the worldly were to penetrate it without inter-mediation, the result would be cataclysmic. In the conceptual field of ritual uncleanness, we must do all we can to keep the unclean, the stigmatized away, lest we become polluted. Just as there are rituals to keep disease out, such as the one Eliade describes: “In Northern India, during epidemics, a circle is

8 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 7.

9 As an interesting aside, the French philosopher Michel Foucault posits the theory that in Western Europe, as the threat of leprosy faded, the identity of lepers as social pariahs increasingly accrued to people who were seen as insane and that leper colonies were replaced by asylums to warehouse those who were seen as morally polluting.

10 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. A Harvest Book, 1959), 10.

drawn around the village to keep the demons of sickness from entering the enclosure.”¹¹ Europe was no different.

European cities were built with walls to keep all sorts of “evils” out, such as lepers, the fear of contagion becomes easily transformed into denigrating those, such as people with HIV/AIDS, whom we deem as unclean. As we saw in our own country when HIV first emerged among gay men, there were Christian voices calling it punishment from God against sinners, defilers of the “sacred” order of heterosexuality, otherwise characterized as their assault against ‘the family.’ It is not too far a move from the term healthy applying to the physical body to healthy applying to the moral body as we see when GLBTQ people are referred to as “sick.” In my travels last summer, I saw how the same generalization is at play in the Indian and southern African cultures I visited, the physically sick judged as morally sick and to be avoided at all costs. Still, Christian ministries of largely lay people were able to transcend the boundary between the two statuses and provide shelter, care, and community to and with people with HIV/AIDS. And these ministries, I significantly believe, were largely being provided by women, the lesser valued of the genders, a group which itself is denigrated in patriarchal societies such as those in India and southern Africa and in our own nation. We shall return to an examination of how patriarchy and the denigration of the feminine is an important dynamic for Christians to confront if we are to be of service worldwide to the populations most affected by HIV/AIDS.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DISGUST AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIAL STIGMA

The psychologist Paul Rozin, who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, is described as “the world expert on the psychology of disgust

¹¹ Eliade, 49.

and contamination”¹² by the psychologist Richard Beck in his book, *Unclean*, which can only be described as a theological disquisition on the tension in Christian belief between mercy and sacrifice. Beck introduces his thesis by examining how Rozin’s formulation of the human emotion of disgust serves as “a boundary psychology... [where] disgust marks objects as exterior and alien... [as the] Other.”¹³ Beck goes on to write the following:

...the same psychological dynamic [is] at the heart of the conflict in Matthew 9:13 [‘Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’] Specifically how are we to draw the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion in the life of the church? Sacrifice-the purity impulse-marks off a zone of holiness, admitting the ‘clean’ and expelling the ‘unclean.’ Mercy, by contrast, crosses those purity boundaries. Mercy blurs the distinction, bringing clean and unclean into contact. Thus the tension. One impulse-holiness and purity- erects boundaries, while the other impulse-mercy and hospitality-crosses and ignores those boundaries.¹⁴

Beck shows how the emotion of disgust may have emerged in human evolution in responses based first on sensory data our brains receive and how present it still is in everyday life. Beck notes, “In the morning I rise, brush my teeth, shower, and apply deodorant. I don’t want to smell bad to others. I don’t clean clothing and will worry later if my fly is down during my lectures. I eat with my mouth closed.”¹⁵ Et cetera. Et cetera. From our initial responses to noxious stimuli in our environment, the psychology of disgust theorizes that we generalized that disgust to any phenomenon, even people who did not conform to our norms. Beck points out that its ubiquity must have applied to human life in biblical times so that we must read scripture with an understanding of how the psychology of disgust is

12 Richard Beck, *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 1.

13 Ibid., 2.

14 Ibid., 2-3.

15 Ibid., 13.

reflected in its passages in the treatment of the other. This leads us into our next section on theological perspectives on stigma, purity and danger, and contamination. Specifically underlined will be how these apply to the Christian response to the other and how we are called to minister to people with HIV/AIDS, women, and other marginalized groups. The theological voices we shall be reflecting on are both Western and non-Western, with one theological voice being African and the other Indian. They too have thought deeply about that passage from Matthew 25 describing a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples where Jesus starts by saying: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me...Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord...when was it that we saw you as a stranger and welcomed you...?’ And the king will answer them. ‘Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON STIGMA AND THE MARGINALIZED AND HOW THEY INFORM OUR CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE OTHER

The Doctrine of Imago Dei

Africa is the continent most devastated by HIV/AIDS. In statistics gathered by the World Health Organization, although Africa has only a little over 15% of the world’s population, it has approximately 70% of the people in the world living with HIV/AIDS. As a result, African theologians have been among the most active in developing theological perspectives on how to address and minister to this population. One of the leading African theologians who has written about the Church and its response to HIV/AIDS is Elias K. Bongmba, who teaches at Rice University in their Religious Studies Department. Over ten years ago, Bongmba wrote a book on the African Church and AIDS called *Facing a Pandemic*. In it, amongst other topics, he proposes using the doctrine of imago dei in formulating a Christian response to those with the disease. He says, “The imago dei... offers a perspective on the human body battered by HIV/AIDS, inviting

us in the midst of the pandemic to honor each human being that bears the imago dei...The imago dei compels a loving and compassionate response to HIV/AIDS”¹⁶ He goes on to describe how the Christian community is called to live out this doctrine by explaining the following: “The imago dei offers one window into the divine relationship between divinity and humanity...by which to highlight the Christian community’s obligation to love and care for those [infected with] HIV/AIDS.”¹⁷ This loving response is what I saw at work not only in Zambia and South Africa but in India as well where the Christians I walked with were ministering to those with HIV/AIDS or other marginalized, stigmatized people. The sense I got was that they believed we were all part of the body of Christ and made in his image no matter we were male or female, sick or well, rich or poor, able bodied or disabled. In one example I saw how this applied to children with disabilities for whom one faithful Christian woman in Zambia had started a school using her own funds and whatever donations she could get in order to give these children a chance at a better future. I learned of another response in India, where Christians have built residences for the young women and men who had been sold into, but eventually escaped from, the sex trade and who were rejected by their own families as being impure and dirty and deserving of the fate in Hindu doctrine of karma. In these residences, they are trying to teach these young people how to make a living instead of having to go back to prostituting themselves just to survive.

Another example was the orphanage for children outside Capetown which took care of children orphaned because of their parents dying from HIV/AIDS or simply unable to care for them due to the disease or accompanying addiction. Also, in South Africa, I spent time with women with HIV/AIDS who were not only part of an Anglican run support group but also engaged in group activities, such as sewing bags and scarves, where

16 Elias K. Bongmba, *Facing a Pandemic: The African Church and the Crisis of AIDS* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 41.

17 Bongmba, 42.

they did not have to talk about AIDS but could enjoy the fellowship of others like themselves. All of these instances were providing a sense of community where people were not treated the way lepers were in Jesus' time (and still are in places I traveled through) and like Jesus, were engaged with those stigmatized still in their societies. Returning to Bongmba's description of how the Church needs to apply the doctrine of *imago dei* to people with HIV/AIDS we also see his insight as to how Christians need to apply that same doctrine to the treatment of women and how that dovetails with a comprehensive response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As he introduces it, this call to the Church is seen in:

...the image of God... expressed concretely as female and male. The priestly passage in genesis claims explicitly that God created both female and male in the image of God...human existence and destiny are linked to the proposition that male and female share one thing in common-the *imago dei*. In the struggle against HIV/AIDS such a position is important because it invites the Christian community to rethink and combat violence against women: such violence which compromises the security of many women and makes them vulnerable to the HIV virus also violates the *imago dei*.¹⁸

This observation about the effects of the status of women was the same one that I heard from Christians in India as well as Africa. It relates to that locale just as Bongmba describes it in Africa saying, "African women experience various forms of discrimination...Many of them share one thing in common: they also experience gender-based discrimination. Many people in Africa argue that they do not practice gender discrimination... Studies consistently demonstrate...that in many areas of social and family life, men have a stronger position and play a dominant role, often at the expense of women."¹⁹ In both Africa and India, I heard from my hosts that one way male dominance plays out is in the absolute right the man has

18 Bongmba, 47.

19 Ibid.

to sexual access to his wife. She cannot say no or demand that he wear a condom if he wants to have sex with her. As her husband, he controls her body; she does not. Additionally, if she were to ask him to wear a condom, it would imply that he was “dirty” and would be a terrible offense, one likely to result in her being beaten by him. When her husband has already been infected with the AIDS virus, she has no protection, and this is how most women in Africa and India become infected.

My speculation as to why men are concealing their HIV statuses dates back to the fact that when HIV/AIDS hit the United States, it was considered a disease of gay men, “the gay cancer” or the “gay plague.” That was how it hit the headlines not only in the U.S. but around the world; therefore, to this day, any man in places like South Africa, Zambia, India, or the U.S. for that matter, who comes down with HIV/AIDS is suspected of engaging in homosexual contact. Here we see the insidious effects of male dominance or patriarchy, coupled with homophobia, on the spread of HIV/AIDS. On my travels, mostly women were ministering to people infected with or affected by the HIV virus, not men, and most of the people they were ministering to were women or children, not men. I asked why and heard that many men would rather die than be known as HIV infected and that their deaths are attributed to other causes. This is a deadly legacy of patriarchy and homophobia that Christians in Africa and India are trying to push back against. In India, the subjugation of women is ubiquitous including the continuing existence of female infanticide, the denigration of women in both private and public spheres, and the prevalence of violence and rape of women. Thankfully, the Christian voices I heard and the discourses I became aware of in said places gives me some reason for hope. One example comes from the Indian theologian M. Maisuandibou who, in a book devoted to exploring how to share the gospel with tribal groups in India, writes, “Theological hermeneutics from classical time to present do not change much in its attitude toward women. Sexism and patriarchy

are still re-inforced in theological interpretations.”²⁰ He makes the point that contemporary Christian theologians in India must not perpetuate this bias in bringing the gospel to tribal groups and also makes the connection between how the church ministers to women, people with HIV/AIDS, and other marginalized groups by noting the following:

Today the church is living in the midst of various groups of people and issues; the poor, the oppressed, women, people with HIV/AIDS...is God the God of people suffering from HIV/AIDS? The answer is God is the God of everything, He created everyone, therefore He is the God... for those who are suffering with [HIV/AIDS], ...the oppressed, ...the weak, ...the alienated... [the] voiceless and also ...the unsaved.²¹

Although this Indian theologian does not directly refer to the Christian doctrines of radical hospitality/embracing the stranger, the formulation he uses in this passage of his book would come under that overarching theological rubric which I shall turn to now.

RADICAL HOSPITALITY/EMBRACE AS A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO OTHERNESS

These two related doctrines lead us to the ways our understanding of Christ would have us respond to the other, the marginalized, and stigmatized. Both are of recent formulation and have become part of Christian theological discourse in our own country and throughout the world. The doctrine of radical hospitality draws upon, among other sources of inspiration, Henri Nouwen’s urging: “If there is any concept worth restoring to its original and evocative potential it is the concept of hospitality.”²² For a definition of radical hospitality, I turn to one from

20 M. Maisuangdibou, *Tribal Theological Hermeneutics: Methodological Issues in Interpretation* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), 2014), 11.

21 Ibid., 16-17.

22 Henri J M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1986), 64.

Ministry Matters, an online journal, “Christian hospitality is the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers... Radical means ‘drastically different from ordinary practice, outside the norm’ so it provokes practices that exceed expectations...Jesus’ example of hospitality demands an unceasingly invitational posture.”²³

In this paradigm, Christians are meant to extend themselves and care for the stranger and particularly those, like lepers in Jesus’ time, those whom people shun out of judgment and disgust. Another interpretation of radical hospitality comes from the book of the same name and notes: “Hospitality is the heart of Christianity. No one has ever been more radically welcoming than Jesus, who was always accused of associating with the wrong kind of people—people we wouldn’t want in our living rooms...*radical hospitality* refers to the activities...that inspire individuals and communities to welcome those who are unlike themselves.”²⁴ These authors draw their inspiration from The Rule of St. Benedict 53:1, that is, “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’”²⁵ Again, this comes from Matthew 25.

Closely related to the doctrine of radical hospitality is that of “embracing the stranger” as put forth in the theologian Miroslav Volf’s book, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, although Volf himself does not make that connection. Volf notes that this book came about as a result of his reflections on what had occurred in his native Croatia upon the breakup of Yugoslavia where there were horrendous instances of ethnic cleansing, of wholesale slaughter largely

23 Robert Schnase, Bishop of the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, “Radical Hospitality: The First Practice of Fruitful Congregations,” excerpted with permission from *Five Practices: Radical Hospitality in Ministry Matters*, November 1st, 2008

24 Lonni Collins Pratt with Father Daniel Homan, OSB, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011), Location l61 of 3242 in Kindle edition.

25 Ibid.

based on religion. As a Christian theologian, he was grappling with the dilemma of loving the enemy, those who slaughtered others, and he calls his book an account of his “spiritual journey.” Volf explication of how otherness (being different) is still being seen as evilness resulting in hatred of the other relates closely to our demonization of the stigmatized other as well, as in the case of people with HIV/AIDS as well as women. Volf’s call to embrace the feared, even hated other is a metaphor that applies to how Christians need to respond to any person or population that has been stigmatized. His description of what he means by embrace serves to illustrate that point. He states that “the most basic thought that [the metaphor of the embrace] seeks to express is...the will to give ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them.”²⁶ He goes on to explain how that will “transcends the moral mapping of the social world into ‘good’ and ‘evil.’”²⁷ I see how that will is another way of formulating what is called radical hospitality and how both comprise a particularly relevant response of Christians to the stigmatized other. Thus, now I am going to try and encapsulate my own spiritual journey through India and Africa and how it has affected my personal theology and the conviction it solidified in me as to what the Christian response to stigma should be.

MY PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THIS SOJOURN THROUGH THE GLOBAL SOUTH

I am going to do my best to open up my soul in this reflection from the antecedents that led me to the focus of my proposal, how I changed while I was away, and how it calls to me now. My interest in ministry to the stigmatized, and particularly to people with HIV/AIDS, unsurprisingly grew out of my own experience of being a person living with HIV/AIDS for more than thirty years. That has given me both the appreciation of the

²⁶ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), Location 384 of 6630 in Kindle edition.

²⁷ Ibid.

blessing of the long life God has given me but also a great deal of time to ponder what it means to be a Christian with this stigmatized condition and how I could serve others living with the disease as well, especially people who do not have the privilege of being a white, middle-class Protestant man living in the United States over the last half of the twentieth century and the first half of the twenty first. My proposal was meant to enable me to see how God was leading Christians to minister to those with HIV/AIDS living in much harsher settings than my own and, truthfully, for me to see how I could serve them myself.

Along the way, I had experiences that led to my greater empathy with my brothers and sisters among the infected. In India, I got deathly sick and had to trust God and rely on Christian care, in the person of a young Indian missionary I had interviewed, in order to recover my health. In the course of this episode, I got to experience an Indian hospital (albeit a rather modern one) and witness the hordes of people waiting hours to see a doctor, as well as experiencing my foreign privilege of seeing an emergency room doctor with very little wait. Even though I was privileged, the three days I spent becoming increasingly ill without knowing where to turn gave me a clear experience of vulnerability that many of the people I met in India, whether they have HIV/AIDS or not, experience throughout their lives. And later when I visited a TB ward in an Indian “hospital”, one poor dying people are warehoused in while they suffer and die, served in great contrast to the hospital I had had access to. Later, in South Africa, when my backpack was stolen with all my HIV meds in it and I had to scramble to try and replace them, I got a mini-version of what it must be like there or anywhere that someone with the disease has to struggle to obtain those life-saving medications. Both these experiences made me feel much closer to the people I met, most of whom, although very vulnerable, were (thankfully) being ministered to in light of their condition. It also made clear to me that the only appropriate Christian response to anyone stigmatized by any bodily condition or disability or any despised aspect

of their person in the eyes of others is to see the *imago dei*, to show them hospitality, and to embrace them. There is no way we can justify judging or simply turning away from the marginalized including those whose gender or gender identity are looked down upon or patronized. It made evident to me that we as Christians must fight misogyny in our own countries or when encountering it in others as it still is pervasive and the root of much evil. We have no excuse for allowing it to continue or be relegated to being just “locker room” talk, and therefore somehow acceptable. There is a not so subtle connection between demeaning women or grabbing them, not respecting their control over their own bodies and the even more extreme varieties of violence against women I encountered tales of in my travels. We as Christians are called to stand against it here or anywhere and never to excuse it. We have a mission to care for all but it is particularly needed in the care of the marginalized. All of this was brought home to me in my mission as to what is required of Christian witness right here and now, everywhere we are.

One final note as to what I learned about where God may be leading me. In India, I had the experience of sharing my story of my own HIV status (and how I have been able to live healthily with it thanks to the medications I take) with a young woman who had only been diagnosed with it in the last year. She had been infected by her husband who was a pastor and concealed his condition from everyone, including his wife, almost up to the day he died. She was taking her meds but was living with her in-laws who still were reluctant to acknowledge that their son had died of AIDS. She had to fight against the shame she might feel taking her meds while living with them and trying to raise her young son, one born before his father and mother were infected. Just before I left with my hosts and in the absence of her in-laws, I was afforded the chance to implore her to continue to take her meds so she, like me, could have a long life and see her son grow up and be there for him. She smiled and I knew why God had led

me there, to be of service to this woman. When I was finished telling her this, we did what Jesus would have wanted us to do. We embraced.

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There Can Only Be One: Canaanite Influences On Psalm 82

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ABSTRACT

Despite the variety of approaches toward Psalm 82, scholars reach similar conclusions about its theological content and liturgical purpose. God's presence in liturgical, cultic, and cultural contexts reveal all competitors as incompetent, mortal, and false caricatures. There can only be one true God amidst many pretenders.

INTRODUCTION

Liturgical and cultic expressions of God's unique supremacy in history involve God confronting, caricaturing, and transcending the powers of surrounding cultures. Some ancient images depict El, the chief figure of

the Canaanite pantheon, sitting amidst the standing kings and deities of the Near East. This artistic portrayal of El's authority in an ancient context parallels the scene on a modern coffee mug which comically depicts God's overwhelming performance on a popular television quiz show. Both the ancient image and the coffee mug establish how cultural settings are used to provide imaginative commentary about true divinity. Such is the case in Psalm 82. Asaph draws upon Canaanite texts to deliver a message against their gods in his sole exaltation of Yahweh. This essay is structured by a consideration of how Asaph draws upon Canaanite influences to describe (1) the "divine council," (2) Yahweh's actions in this assembly, (3) complaints against it, (4) the judgment upon it, and (5) monotheistic supremacy despite it. The resulting conclusions support this essay's thesis: Psalm 82 shows a caricature, overruling, and absorption of the Canaanite pantheon of deities into Yahweh, the God of Israel. This essay illustrates H.W. Wolff's declaration: "Yahweh is the one beside whom no other is god, and before whom all others are shown to be no gods."¹

PSALM 82'S AUTHOR AND SETTING

Wolff's conclusion speaks to the life and intentions of Psalm 82's author. Asaph was a worship leader (1 Chronicles 16) and prophet (Psalm 78) to whom Psalms 50 and 73-83 are attributed.² Albert Hudson recognizes how all of Asaph's psalms are linked by several themes: rulers unable to accomplish justice in human contexts, Yahweh's ability to achieve justice despite injustice, and applying the days and/or "sayings of old" to the current situation.³ In *Mythopoetic Language of the Psalms*, Elmer Smick describes Asaph's method for expressing these themes. Asaph uses Canaanite

1 H.W. Wolff, "The Hermeneutics of the Old Testament." In *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, Edited by C. Westermann (Atlanta: John Knox, 1963), 167.

2 All Scripture references are from the NRSV.

3 Albert O. Hudson, "A Man Who Made Melody to the Lord: Asaph the Chief Musician," *The Herald of Christ's Kingdom*, last modified July-August 1999, http://www.heraldmag.org/1999/99ja_9.htm

language as a vehicle to devalue Canaanite myth and exalt Yahweh. Smick points to Psalm 74 and explains, “the mythopoetic language about the many-headed Leviathan is historicized and used metaphorically to describe Yahweh's great victory in history, at the Red Sea.”⁴ Asaph's method of using old sayings to declare Yahweh's supremacy in a new way seems indicative of liturgy between the reigns of David and Josiah, according to Hugh Rowland Page, Jr.⁵ Across these eras, Psalm 82 features the theme of justice found in Yahweh alone.

The motif of Yahweh's justice helps readers understand the contexts of Asaph's psalms. Frank Moore Cross observes how the form of Psalm 82 parallels Canaanite texts. In Psalm 82:1, he recognizes the form used to address the divine council. It is “introduced by a plural imperative, often with repeated imperatives,” such as in the Genesis 11:7 phrase, “Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there,” and the CTA⁶, 4.4.41-44 phrase “Our king is 'Al'iyān Ba'l.”⁷ Cross also sees the form used for covenant lawsuits. It resembles old treaties calling on human and non-human witnesses to testify about covenant violations.⁸ Here, Asaph illustrates a setting where the “gods” of these forms are on trial. Page, Jr.

4 Elmer B. Smick, “Mythopoetic Language in the Psalms,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 44 (1982): 90.

5 Hugh Rowland Page, Jr. *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 158. There is a wide range of opinions regarding the date of Psalm 82's composition. In *The Anchor Bible: Psalms II 51-100*, Mitchell Dahood believes in an earlier date, due to the “archaic quality” of the text (269). Page Jr. points to studies by Ackermann and Morgenstern, among others, as further resources to consider the origins of Psalm 82. These studies go beyond the scope of this essay.

6 CTA stands for Corpus Tablettes Alphabetiques, which is a collection of Ugaritic texts organized by Andree Herdner in *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques, découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939*. Two Volumes (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963).

7 F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973), 187, n.176.

8 Cross, 188.

connects this mention of “gods” in Psalm 82:1 with the Canaanite pantheon of deities known as the divine council.⁹ Additionally, Mark Smith compares the Hebrew word *elohim* in 82:1b with the phrase *phr ilm*, which refers to the assembly of gods in the *Epic of Kirta*.¹⁰ This linguistic connection shows Asaph’s appropriation of the divine council concept.

Asaph’s use of the divine council represents an Israelite adaptation of the Canaanite assembly of the gods. It is used to express Yahweh’s supremacy and the incompetence of other deities. Scholars try to describe Asaph’s divine council as angels, a pantheon, national gods, and national guardians.

DIVINE COUNCIL AS ANGELS

W.F. Albright’s and Bart Ehrman’s “angel view” is notable, because it does not address the influence of Canaanite texts. Albright describes this perspective as “the angels, as elsewhere in Hebrew, and not the gods as in Ugaritic.”¹¹ Ehrman writes, “these are angelic beings with whom God consults, as happens elsewhere in the Bible—most famously in Job 1.”¹² Although the angel view does not explain the closeness of Hebrew and Canaanite language, it does begin to distinguish the Israelites’ monotheism from Canaanite polytheism.

DIVINE COUNCIL AS PANTHEON

James Trotter’s “pantheon view” fully claims the Canaanite influence. In his view, the divine council refers to a pantheon of deities, “in light of the similarities between the terminology and characters depicted here

9 Page, Jr., 159.

10 Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University, 2001), 41.

11 W.F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London: Athlone, 1968), 167.

12 Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (Australia: HarperOne, 2014), 70.

and in divine council scenes from Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Deir 'Alla."¹³ These are depicted in illustrations similar to figure 1.

DIVINE COUNCIL AS NATIONAL GODS

John Day and W. O. E. Oesterley make a more specific claim about this pantheon with the "national god view." Here, every nation has its own deity. Day sees how this pantheon, described in the Baal myth of the "seventy sons of Asherah," is similar to the Israelite idea of the seventy "sons of God," who are assigned to maintain seventy nations (Genesis 10), which is a full representation of the earth.¹⁴ Oesterley observes, "Yahweh is the supreme ruler of the universe, but deposes his authority to inferior gods."¹⁵ Mark Smith sees Asaph using this view deliberately. This psalm "presupposes, even as it disputes, an older worldview of the nations headed by its own national god."¹⁶

DIVINE COUNCIL AS NATIONAL GUARDIANS

Neither the pantheon or national god view quite agree with Asaph's human focus. In the "national guardian view," Smick defines the divine council as "that hierarchy of intelligent beings, human and super-human, over whom Yahweh is Creator and Lord."¹⁷ Thus, each view about the divine council is useful, so long as it illustrates what Asaph conveys when he adapts Canaanite concepts into Israel's liturgy. Yet, scholars wonder if this casts Yahweh as the leader of his own assembly or a member of El's council.

13 James M. Trotter, "Death of the מִיִּהְלָא in Psalm 82." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 2 (2012): 224.

14 John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield Academic, 2000), 23-24.

15 W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Psalms: Translated with Text-Critical and Exegetical Notes* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1962), 373.

16 Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010), 139.

17 Smick, *Mythopoetic Language in the Psalms*, 96.

WHAT DOES YAHWEH DO IN PSALM 82:1?

Asaph depicts Yahweh setting himself in the divine council, revealing all other ideas of gods as non-existent and incapable of acting. Psalm 82:1's *nissab* conveys what Yahweh does. This word can mean to “preside” or to “take a stand.”¹⁸ Cross connects it to the Hebrew phrase *ʾadat ʾĒl*, and points out this can be traced back to the Ugaritic expression *ʾadatu ʾIli-ma*.¹⁹ However, this leads Cross to doubt the idea of Yahweh “taking a stand” as a member of a different god's council. He concludes, “El is rarely if ever used in the Bible as the proper name of a non-Israelite, Canaanite deity in the full consciousness of a distinction between ‘El and Yahweh, god of Israel.”²⁰ Yet, there is evidence that people did recognize Israel's God in a Canaanite context, such as the prophet Balaam (Numbers 22). Further, historians Charles Aling and Clyde Billington detail the Egyptian references to a group of nomads in Edom called “the Shashu of Yahweh” in their investigation of references to Israel's God in a non-Israelite context.²¹ The biblical concept of Yahweh in the council of El must be measured against its biblical and extra-biblical context in order to appreciate Asaph's imaginative expression fully.

When *nissab* is read as “taking a stand,” Asaph's subversive message is uncovered. Smith starts to do this by connecting Psalm 82 with the *Deir ʿAlla* inscription, “the gods gather together and the šdyn-gods take their stand (*nšbw*), in /as a council (*mwʾd*).”²² Archaeological evidence from Near Eastern cultures depicts this hierarchy in scenes such as figure 1. The

18 Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette, Indiana: Book Publishers' Press, 1981), 662. To be sure, both definitions are mentioned in this entry.

19 Cross, 44-45.

20 Cross, 44.

21 Charles Aling and Clyde Billington, “The Name Yahweh in Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts,” Associates for Biblical Research, Last Modified March 8, 2010, <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/03/08/The-Name-Yahweh-in-Egyptian-Hieroglyphic-Texts.aspx#Article>.

22 Smith, *God in Translation*, 133, n.4.

highest deity sits in authority, while lesser deities stand in service to him. Here, Asaph draws on an older Canaanite tradition to say something about Yahweh. Page Jr. shows how Yahweh was not thought to be a weaker deity, but “the governing force in the assembly.”²³ In this way, Asaph uses *nissab* to express Yahweh’s agency independent of El, and His ability to enter and lead El’s council without having to submit to the Canaanite tier system that elevates sitting figures and demotes standing deities. Yahweh’s authority is not tied to a posture.

As an Israelite worship leader, Asaph had to confront the idea of the pantheon with the sole supremacy of Yahweh. Therefore, he chooses to depict Yahweh as setting himself in the council of El. This serves as a caricature because his psalm absorbs the form of Canaanite expression in order to critique it. Patrick Miller illustrates this by contrasting the standing Yahweh with the other gods who “are unnamed and do not speak.”²⁴ These deities are shown not to exist, because they are not seen or heard, in comparison to the naming and action of Yahweh in their midst. Trotter describes how the psalm’s opening, filled with familiar divine council language, lulls readers into a sense of a routine meeting of the gods. This sets up a contextual reversal. He writes about the “extraordinary event” of Yahweh standing, which acknowledged and defied the expected Canaanite posture of seated authority, in order to judge the assembly.²⁵ When he considers Asaph’s use of *nissab* and Canaanite context, he concludes, “God is not here presiding over the divine assembly as judge, but rather stands among the gods to pronounce a charge of injustice.”²⁶

23 Page, Jr., 159.

24 Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 28.

25 Trotter, 226.

26 Trotter, 227. Here, James Trotter quotes from Simon Parker, “The Beginning of the Reign of God: Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy,” *Revue Biblique* 102 no. 4 (1995): 538.

WHO IS CHARGED WITH INJUSTICE IN PSALM 82:2-5?

In verses 2-5, Asaph voices vivid complaints of injustice against an unnamed oppressor. Asaph directs these charges toward anything or anyone who claims a divine status without achieving the true justice and order in the universe that is only possible through true divinity. While Asaph caricatures the concept of divinity held by Canaanite orthodoxy and orthopraxy, scholars are divided over whether his complaint addresses deities or human rulers. Both interpretations build their arguments on considerations about the literary traditions shared between Hebrew and Canaanite texts.

A CHARGE AGAINST DEITIES?

Scholars who believe Asaph is indicting the Canaanite pantheon are concerned with how Canaanite and Hebrew texts describe the role of divine beings in the human world. They read Psalm 82:2-3 and see gods who “show partiality to the wicked” while failing “the lowly and destitute.” Keel connects this injustice and wickedness with cosmic chaos and death. He observes how Near Eastern cultures were concerned with “the problem of how the inhabited earth is kept from sinking into the Chaos-waters.”²⁷ Chaos and death were considered problems for a true god to handle. The Baal cycle attempts to provide such a deity. The Ugaritic text shows the divine assembly lowering their heads to the sea deity, until Baal, the text’s example of true divinity, rebukes them and goes forth to defeat Yam.²⁸

In Psalm 82:2-3, Asaph could be caricaturing the Canaanite pantheon’s cowardice and inability to handle the forces of chaos. Verses 4-5 could be understood as Asaph caricaturing Baal’s victories in the divine realm, by showing their failure to translate into the human world. Asaph alludes to

27 Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Translated by Timothy J. Hallett (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 39.

28 C.H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1949), 13.

Baal's victory over Yam and the deity of death with the ideal command to "give justice." However, he also shows how the weak and needy are still in the grip of wicked forces. Dahood provides connections to the accusations expressed in Ugaritic texts. Linguistically, he compares the Hebrew *dal* with the phrase *dal w'yātōm* in UT 127:47-50, which says, "you do not drive out those who prey on the weak, you do not feed the fatherless before you."²⁹ Dahood also reminds readers how Canaanite deities "are often accompanied by two attendants," which allows the imperatives of "rescue" and "deliver" actually to refer to gods in the Canaanite pantheon.³⁰ Asaph could be reducing such deities to empty entities that are unable to rescue and deliver like a "real" god.

The expectations of true gods carry over into verses 5-6, where divinity is associated with "knowledge" and "understanding." Dahood's reminder may apply here as well; knowledge and understanding could be two attendants. However, he shows how the parallel Hebrew verbs *yād'û* and *yābīnū* also appear together in 'nt:III:23-24, which read, "Thunderbolts which the heavens do not know, thunder which men do not know, nor the multitudes of the nether world understand."³¹ Additionally, Page Jr. connects these verses with KTU³² 1.6's Athar, who "knows and understands (*yadi' yilhan*)."³³ If these verses are read as charges against gods, then Asaph draws on Canaanite practices to caricature their pantheon as unjust, unfit, and unworthy of worship or acknowledgment.

29 Mitchell Dahood, *The Anchor Bible: Psalms II 51-100* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1968), 269, n.3.

30 Dahood, 51.

31 Dahood, 269, n.5.

32 KTU stands for *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, which is a collection of Ugaritic texts organized by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin in *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2nd ed. 1997). First edition published as *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit: Einschließlich der keilalphabetischen Texte ausserhalb Ugars* (Köln: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1976).

33 Page, Jr., 164.

A CHARGE AGAINST HUMAN KINGS?

If, however, one reads Psalm 82:2-5 as a complaint against a deity, one has to explain why Asaph's accusations of injustice in the human world are applied to supposedly non-existent deities, rather than the human rulers he usually deals with in his other psalms. For this reason, scholars such as Trotter read these verses as a complaint against human kings who were considered divine. He holds to the pantheon view of the divine council. However, Trotter suggests, "gods were not viewed as the source of these social values; deities were the authorizing power behind the values."³⁴

Trotter demonstrates his claim by establishing, once again, a parallel between Hebrew and Canaanite texts. He compares the birth of the royal heir in Isaiah 9:2-7 with the birth of Danel's heir in the *Epic of Aqhat* to show deities commissioning human rulers to maintain justice and righteousness in the world.³⁵ He also points to KTU 1.16.VI.45-50. Here, as Kirta faces consequences for failing to protect the weak and needy, Yassib tells him "Step down—and I'll be king."³⁶ Trotter uses another passage in the *Epic of Kirta* to show how Ugaritic texts share an idea of divine kingship with Psalm 82. Kirta's son asks him, "how can you, Father, die like a mortal . . . Gods, after all, do they die?"³⁷ This connection between Hebrew and Ugaritic texts is evidence that points toward the existence of a concept of divine human kingship during this time period. Johannes De Moor extends the idea to prophets and human worshipers. He recalls how Numbers 27:17, Deuteronomy 33:4, Psalm 25:14, and Proverbs 3:22 feature humans participating in the divine council, similar to King Kirta.³⁸ If Psalm 82:2-5 is read as a complaint against human kings, then Asaph

³⁴ Trotter, 234.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 235.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Johannes C. De Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (Leuven University, 1997), 358-359.

draws on Canaanite and Hebrew beliefs to caricature the kings' divine authority as unjust, unfit, and unreal.

Trotter's divine kingship argument is helpful and well-argued, but it does not adequately address why Asaph chooses not to use the word "king" explicitly.³⁹ In addition, no explanation is provided on how human kings, even with a divine commission, could shake the foundations of the earth. Perhaps, these two ideas are reconciled in Smick's suggestion that "such 'gods' rule on earth by proxy through kings whose wills they dominate."⁴⁰ This too is a view found in parallel Canaanite and Israelite texts. E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. looks at both Psalm 82 and Ugaritic texts and notes, "So long as the gods of the nations maintained the proclaimed justice, the cosmos was firm. Once they failed in this function... the cosmic order was in danger of collapse."⁴¹ However, Smick goes further than saying these divine beings failed; he calls them evil. He connects the story of Anat hiring an assassin to kill Aqhat in order to get his bow with the Bible's account of Jezebel coordinating the death of Naboth to gain his field.⁴² Mullen seems to agree when he concludes, "The host of the heights and the kings of the earth are to be punished for some misdeed or misuse of their power."⁴³ This notion fits well with Asaph's motif. Thus, this essay concludes that Asaph condemns the Canaanite pantheon through caricature.

39 Trotter addresses the question about the use of the word "king/god," by saying that in Psalm 45:7, king is addressed as *elohim* in a "vocative sense," and as "Mighty God" in Isaiah 9:6 (Trotter 2012: 239). However, he does not address why Asaph, who usually deals on the human level, does not use "king" in Psalm 82. Also, Psalm 82 represents a genre different from the royal and prophetic psalms. Trotter himself points this out when making his own case for Psalm 82's "presiding" vs. "standing," but does not apply that logic here (Trotter 2012: 226).

40 Smick, 97.

41 E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (California: Scholars Press, 1980), 237.

42 Smick, 97.

43 Mullen, 233.

WHAT IS THE NATURE AND IMPLICATION OF THE JUDGMENT AGAINST THE “GODS” IN PSALM 82:6-7?

While Psalm 82:2-5 establishes failed divinity, verses 6-7 renders its judgment. These verses refer to certain “tiers” of divinity, which are illustrated in figure 2’s “divinity cone.”⁴⁴ This is a cosmic adaptation of Ron E. Tappy’s “kinship cone,” depicting the governance of Hebrew family life.⁴⁵ The divinity cone illustrates Oesterley’s description of the judgment, where “the other gods are first relegated to a lower rank, in which they are subject to mortality . . . and then, finally, disappear altogether.”⁴⁶ This descent down the divinity cone starts with the phrase “children of the Most High” in Psalm 82:6. Smith sees Asaph saying this to recall the role of El as the “father of the gods.”⁴⁷ Since this is in context of the pantheon’s failure to uphold order and justice, *bene elyon* initiates a progressively demoting caricature. Thus, Psalm 82:2-5 proves the “gods” of verse 6 as failed deities. This leads to the removal of their expected mark of divinity, immortality, through verse 7’s phrase, “you shall die like mortals.” Page, Jr. also sees how the gods’ dying by “mortalization” in *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* parallels Psalm 82, but these accounts also involve a “marvelous creative event” afterward.⁴⁸ Asaph caricatures and rejects this thinking, because nothing comes from the descent of the gods. Yahweh’s ascent to the top of the cone is an independent event.

Page, Jr. connects the falls of the “Shining One” (Psalm 82:7), *mt wšr* (KTU 1.23.8-11), and *np̄lym* (Genesis 6:1-4) by considering them “threats

⁴⁴ The divinity cone combines several scholars’ shared ideas about different levels of divinity in the pantheon (Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 45-47; Page, Jr., 162-163; Wright, 33). Ascending the divinity cone illustrates Israel’s exaltation of Yahweh. Descending the divinity cone represents Israel’s devaluation of the Canaanite pantheon.

⁴⁵ The illustration of Professor R.E. Tappy’s “Kinship Cone” is found in the syllabus for the “Historical Books of the Old Testament” course at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA, 2014, 17.

⁴⁶ Oesterley, 375.

⁴⁷ Smith, 21.

⁴⁸ Page, Jr., 162.

to cosmic order.”⁴⁹ When the pantheon descends into non-existence, Yahweh, the singularly competent God, assumes the office of the many incompetent deities. To be sure, Yahweh does not become interchangeable with El or Baal. Yet, possessing all the features of true divinity, such as immortality, understanding, and rescuing, Yahweh is able to absorb the divine responsibilities of maintaining order and justice. Asaph expects Yahweh to succeed alone, where the entire collection of Canaanite deities failed. This expectation leads into Asaph’s bold exaltation of one God, instead of a pantheon.

CAN ISRAEL’S RELIGION STILL BE CONSIDERED MONOTHEISTIC AMIDST CANAANITE INFLUENCE?

Psalm 82:8 issues a prayer declaring, “Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you.” Gordon describes a parallel Ugaritic text as “a benediction for peace and abundance in a message of Baal.”⁵⁰ Here, G. E. Wright asks an insightful question: “What is the precise difference between an assembly of divine beings presided over by Yahweh and that head by Baal or Marduk?”⁵¹ When Psalm 82 is understood as Asaph’s caricature of the pantheon and exaltation of the one true God, this question becomes, how does Hebrew monotheism succeed where Canaanite polytheism fails? Wright starts to answer his own question when he says, “the God of Israel so transcends all things in heaven and earth that he is conceived as their sole creator.”⁵²

Asaph’s sole exaltation of Yahweh in Psalm 82:8 can be considered an imaginative depiction of Hebrew monotheism absorbing and overruling

49 Page, Jr., 163. For more information about the “Shining One(s)” that extends well beyond the scope of this essay, please see *Karel van der Torn et al., Dictionary of Deities and Demons in Bible* (Leiden: Brill and Eerdmans, 1999).

50 Gordon, 11.

51 G.E. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (Naperville: Student Christian Movement, 1957), 36.

52 Wright, 38.

polytheism.⁵³ In this way, Asaph does not incorporate Yahweh into the Canaanite pantheon. Instead, Yahweh is, imaginatively inserted in the assembly. This carries the result of caricaturing and overshadowing these deities as inadequate through their direct comparison to Yahweh's overwhelming divinity and competence. Wright concludes, "The members of his assembly . . . possess no independent authority or even existence of worship. Their being and authority are derived, not primary. The believer is led by them to the worship of their source, Yahweh; *they* are thoroughly devaluated while *he* is exalted."⁵⁴ When Asaph shows God "taking his place" in the assembly, the divine council's members are shown to not possess deity, and the Canaanite pantheon is shown to be a false caricature of the one, true God.

Despite the variety of approaches toward Psalm 82, scholars reach similar conclusions about its theological content and liturgical purpose. H. Wheeler Robinson expressed this when he wrote, "Worship depends, for most men, on the texture of its imagination, next to its moral earnestness . . . [Yahweh] is much more than the God of 'ethical monotheism'"⁵⁵ In order to fully understand what Asaph expresses about Yahweh and the method he uses to do it, scholars consider how he adapts Canaanite concepts. Miller expertly summarizes Asaph's caricature when he says, "The God of Israel, who came out of the gods and in whom the world of the gods can be discerned, stood over against all other gods, claiming a unity and exclusiveness that ruled them out."⁵⁶ God's presence in liturgical, cultic,

53 Some scholars claim Psalm 82 is "monolatrous" (Oesterley, *The Psalms*). Helpfully, Wright points out that this term is limited to "liturgical practice" (Wright, 37-38, n. 54). Wright also provides a helpful link to the New Testament. He writes, "Following the lead of W.F. Albright, I still prefer the word 'monotheism,' because it has always been used to define Judaism and Christianity in which the angelic host has survived and has even been elaborated" (Wright, 37).

54 Wright, 38.

55 H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh." *Journal of Theological Studies*, 45 (1944): 156.

56 Miller, 28.

and cultural contexts reveals all competitors as incompetent, mortal, and false caricatures. This is true whether He assumes total control over the universe in an ancient Canaanite image, or kicks serious butt on a modern coffee mug depicting a game show. According to Psalm 82, there can only be one true God amidst many pretenders.



Fig. 1: Boehmer, R.M. Plate 286. *Cylinder seal, Akkadian Period (2350-2150 B.C.)*. In Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Translated by Timothy J. Hallett (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 208.

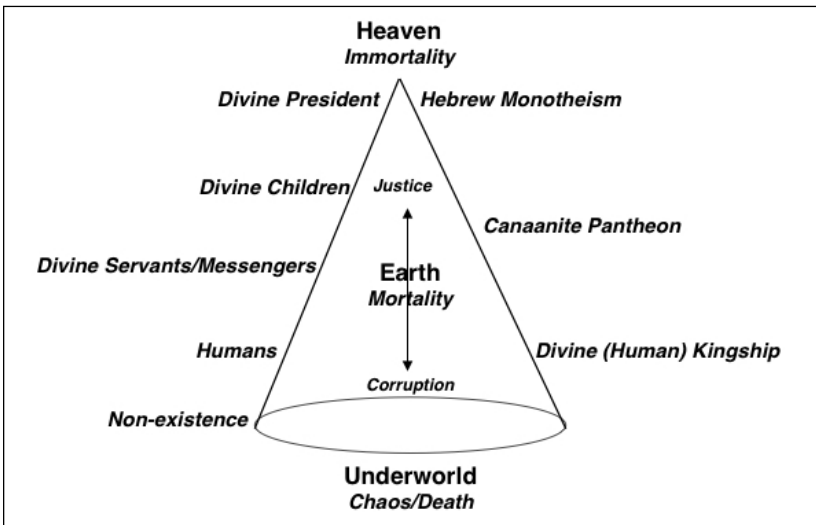


Fig. 2: Jones, G.D. *Divinity Cone*. February 17, 2016.
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EXPLORATION OF A BIBLICAL TOWN ON THE BORDER OF JUDAH

A Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Project

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INTRODUCTION

The outset of the twentieth century was a momentous period for both world events and the fledging discipline of archaeology in Syria-Palestine. World empires lay in transition. Across Europe, political entities were defined or redefined as national identities gathered shape under the portent and then the shadow of World War I. Maps of the eastern Mediterranean littoral and hinterlands, from the Great Sea to the Persian Gulf, would

soon be redrawn to the satisfaction of the great powers. The long period of Ottoman rule, including over Palestine, entered its closing decade as the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 sought to establish a new ruling structure in Constantinople, a city that had served as political center and capital of the Late Roman/Byzantine, Latin, and Ottoman empires since the time of Constantine the Great. The world of archaeology witnessed the launching of the first major field expeditions in Palestine (e.g., the Harvard Excavations at Samaria from 1908 to 1910), the founding of new museums (sometimes for political purposes) in which to preserve and house the discoveries, and the creation of professional societies dedicated to studying and discussing the findings.

Following the establishment of open-ended, far-reaching collections in world-class museums such as the British Museum (1753), the Louvre (1793), and eventually the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1870), various academic institutions in the United States (and elsewhere) established significant new museums around the turn of the nineteenth century that specialized in the archaeology of Syria-Palestine. These venerable organizations included the Semitic Museum at Harvard University (1889), The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (1899), The Lowie Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley (1901; renamed The Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology in 1991), and the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago (1919), among others. After a moderately successful attempt by Safvet Pasha, Minister of Education in Turkey, to establish a national archaeological museum there in 1869, artist and archaeologist Hamdi Bey successfully orchestrated the founding of the İmparatorluk Müzesi ("Imperial Museum"), which opened in 1891, and became its first curator. The bulk of archaeological policy governing contemporary field work in Palestine emanated from this institution. The rise of professional societies around the world augmented the initiatives listed above. The American School of Oriental Study and Research in Palestine was founded in 1900 (and renamed The American

Schools of Oriental Research in 1921). Under the capable leadership of its first director, Charles C. Torrey, the new society acquired permanent quarters in Jerusalem, collected and maintained a credible library, and established positive working relations with other similar international institutions, such as the Palestine Exploration Fund (London) and the École Biblique (Jerusalem).

Amid this flurry of archaeological activity, the parent institutions of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary took an active leadership role. One of these schools, Xenia Theological Seminary, became the first Protestant seminary in the USA to appoint a professor of biblical archaeology: the Reverend Melvin Grove Kyle became a lecturer in the subject in 1908 and, eventually, president of Xenia in 1922. In that same year (1922), James L. Kelso—president and professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Literature at our other parent institution, Western Theological Seminary (which ultimately merged with Xenia to become PTS in 1959)—became director of The American Schools in Jerusalem and also president of the trustees of the nearby Palestine Archaeological Museum. Kelso also served on the faculty of Xenia, Pittsburgh-Xenia, and then PTS from 1923 to 1963. Kyle and Kelso held a mutual commitment to deepening, broadening, and refining our knowledge of the biblical world through the retrieval and study of *realia* left behind by the inhabitants of that world—endeavors suited to a Christian educational institution espousing a theology of incarnation, which, by definition, implies an historical and cultural context.

Both Kyle and Kelso approached their tasks ecumenically. Working with Jewish, Catholic, and other Protestant institutions, one of our parent schools (Xenia) set out on a series of excavations that would take it and, eventually, us (i.e., today's PTS) from Moab and the so-called Cities of the Dead Sea Plain (in the area of Sodom and Gomorrah) to Tell Beit Mirsim, Bethel, Tulul el-'Alayiq (Herodian Jericho), Ashdod, Tel el-Fûl (Gibeah of Saul), Tell er-Rumeith and Bab edh-Dhra' in Jordan, Idalion on Cyprus, and back again to the Dead Sea area of Jordan for multiple seasons at Bab

edh-Dhra', Numeirah, Feifa, and Khanazir. The diligent commitment to the exploration of such major sites stretched from 1924 into the 1990s. Near the beginning of this work, in 1926, Kyle established our own museum of archaeology, which became the James L. Kelso Bible Lands Museum in 1975 (now the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology), and a succession of highly qualified scholars in the field of archaeology joined the faculty at PTS (including David Noel Freedman, Howard Jamieson, and Paul and Nancy Lapp) or affiliated their field work with the Seminary's well-established program (R. Thomas Schaub and Walter Rast). When Donald G. Miller became president of PTS in 1961, he further advanced the school's strong commitment to research and teaching in the discipline of archaeology, as have the presidents who succeeded him: Carnegie Samuel Calian, William J. Carl III, and David Esterline.

When joining the faculty of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1997, then, I stepped into not only the oldest Presbyterian seminary in the United States but also into a very long and distinguished tradition of field archaeology. During the preceding summer, in 1996, I had visited for the first time an ancient site situated in the foothills between what was biblical Judah in the highlands to the east and the land of the Philistines along the southern coast. I learned the site's modern-day name: Tel Zayit (a "tel" or "tell" being a mound of ancient ruins, and "Zayit" [Hebrew] or "Zeitah" [Arabic] relating to an olive tree). Soon after arriving in Pittsburgh, I assembled a small team to survey the site and its surroundings in 1998 and a larger team, including students from PTS and around the world, to begin a long-term project of field exploration in 1999 (**Fig. 1**). After many years of excavation, I now focus on publishing the results of our work. The following essay provides a glimpse into the successive cultural groups who inhabited Tel Zayit over its almost 4,000-year history by reviewing some of the material culture they left behind.

THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONS

The nearly 30-dunam/7.4-acre site of Tel Zayit (**Fig. 2**) lies in the Shephelah region of ancient Judah—roughly halfway between Lachish to the south and Tell eṣ-Şâfi (Gath of the Philistines) to the north and ca. 27 km east of Ashkelon. In regional terms, the location of Tel Zayit along the sometimes contentious border between Judah and Philistia presents the principal contributing factor to its political (and cultural) significance. Its strategic position allowed the town to guard access from the southern coastal plain via the Naḥal Guvrin to the highlands of Judah (a *naḥal* is a wadi, stream, or small river which, in this case, formed a valley).

In Josh 15:33–44, the district list for Judah covers four distinct regions: the Negev or “south” (one district; vv. 21–32), the Shephelah or “lowlands” (three districts; vv. 33–44), the hill country/highlands (seven districts, including some southern Benjaminite towns; vv. 48–60), and the wilderness (one district; v. 61). The ancient biblical town at Tel Zayit lay in District 4 of the lowlands area. As regional survey data have shown, at least three principal north–south and three east–west roadways either converged at or ran by Tel Zayit during various phases of the biblical period. The longitudinal roads connected Egypt and the northern Sinai Peninsula with the southernmost Philistine capital at Gaza and the lowland area of Judah. Three laterally oriented routes linked coastal centers such as Ashkelon (Philistine) with the interior hill country (Judah) by way of the principal valley systems that drain the southern highlands. These passageways include: (1) a route running east from Ashkelon and its southern flank through the Lachish area to the hill country situated around and south of Hebron; (2) a road through Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath and Azekah to the northern Judahite highlands from Bethlehem to Mizpeh; and (3) a central corridor that ran almost due east through Tel Zayit, Tell Goded, and Adullam on its ascent to Khirbet Jedur (biblical Gedor) south of Bethlehem. The outline presented in Josh 15:33–44 of the political districts located specifically in the Shephelah of Judah correlates well with the distribution of settlements

in the Elah (vv. 33–36), Lachish (vv. 37–41), and Libnah/Guvrin (42–44) valleys. In other words, the natural landscape in this area (in this case, a series of water basins) wielded considerable influence over the organization of political districts. The ancient borderland site of Tel Zayit, then, lay at the center of a liminal communication network that connected the Israelite urban centers of the Judahite highlands to the Canaanite and Philistine city-states resting in the hilly western flanks, along or near the Mediterranean seaboard, and near the principal gateways into Egypt.

The ancient identification of Tel Zayit undoubtedly relates in some way to the list of sites in the Libnah district of Josh 15:42–44, where Libnah introduces the Naḥal Guvrin group in District 4. Tel Zayit may, in fact, represent Libnah itself, but at the very least it lay so close to Libnah that it would have followed this important local center (even over Lachish) in most regional matters. Moreover, since Tel Zayit represents the most westerly site in the Naḥal Guvrin, it is not surprising that our field work has shown the town's inhabitants to have maintained clear affinities with the highland culture in certain periods and coastal culture in other periods. For the site's location at the mouth of Naḥal Guvrin, at an important topographical and cultural interface, afforded the town certain advantages but also situated the inhabitants in a somewhat complicated position. Their home was betwixt and between at least two competing political and social cores: Judah to the east and Philistia to the west. Along with certain other sites (such as Tell el-Ḥesi and Tell el-'Areini to the south, Tel Batash/Timnah and even, in certain ways, Tell eṣ-Ṣāfi/Philistine Gath to the north), Tel Zayit lay in the liminal zone straddling the cultural boundaries of both polities.

THE PTS FIELD PROJECT: STRATEGY AND FINDINGS

Since 1998, exploration at Tel Zayit has proceeded under my direction and the sponsorship of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Field work has focused on three key areas (**Fig. 3**): Area A, comprising the summit of the mound above the 172-meter level; Area L, the lower settlement, which

spread north and probably east of the mound; and Area T, the steep eastern slope of the tell. To tie these three areas together, the field strategy called for excavation along two groups of master sections (presented in bold lines on **Fig. 3**), with one group following a longitudinal line and the other group a latitudinal course.

Thus far, excavation has exposed occupational levels ranging from the Late Bronze Age I (ca. 1550–1400 BCE) to the Late Ottoman period (1516–1917 CE). The overall town planning remained constant in each successive building phase—architectural elements, regardless of their date, followed the same northwest-to-southeast orientation. As a result, they now run diagonally to the edges of the existing tell, where they were cut off as a result of late disturbances and erosion. No trace of a city wall has appeared; moreover, monumental architecture from the LBA lies at the eastern foot of the preserved tell. Thus the ancient town limits likely extended much farther to the east than the current size and shape of the mound suggest—a fact confirmed by probes yielding plentiful stratified pottery as much as 80 m east of the existing tell. It appears that substantial quantities of nutrient-rich soil have been harvested by modern farmers from this side of the mound, thereby producing a present-day slope that reflects neither the original contours nor the larger parameters of the ancient site. This circumstance dramatically alters the overall portrait of Tel Zayit from that of a very small village to one of a sizeable town of much greater political and economic significance.

The relatively recent removal of much of the tell's eastern half makes understanding nature's impact on the remaining mound crucial to any analysis of the town's depositional history. The cutting of a very steep grade on the tell's eastern side allowed subsequent runoff activity to wash away significant portions of the occupational levels once situated there. Thus, with respect to the biblical periods, the deeper, tenth-century levels are preserved across the entire breadth of the area, while higher layers from the ninth and eighth centuries BCE have eroded away as they approach the

current eastern shoulder of the summit. With these facts in mind, a visit to the principal historical periods brought to light at Tel Zayit by the PTS field project will nicely demonstrate the site's status as a once-sizeable town caught in the interplay between coastal and highland cultures.

I. Late Bronze Age and Earlier Deposits (Area T)

A 300-m² step trench (**Fig. 4**) down the eastern slope of the mound combines with an additional 500-m² exposure on the eastern shoulder of the site to reveal a series of direct stratigraphic connections from the LBA I period (1550–1400 BCE; perhaps even the Middle Bronze Age IIB-C, from 1750 to 1550 BCE) through the seventh century BCE. During this span of time, five major conflagrations occurred (two in the pre-biblical period and three during the biblical era). More than six vertical meters of LBA remains, representing at least four major periods of occupation, emerged on the eastern slope. The unexpected thickness of LBA strata at Tel Zayit attests to the town's importance in the general region during this time, including in the pre-Amarna Age (early-to-mid fourteenth century BCE, when Egypt maintained loose control over Canaan, as attested in hundreds of diplomatic letters recovered from the Pharaoh's palace at Tell el-Amarna).

Late Bronze Age I. Well-preserved walls from two small rooms (**Fig. 5**, Walls 2028 and 2030) appeared near the foot of the Area T step trench. The mudbricks of the western room measured 45 x 22 cm and were laid as headers (i.e., with their short ends facing out), two bricks deep. The room's northern wall was severely damaged, and roughly 30 cm of burnt-orange brick detritus and destruction debris covered its floor. A mudbrick installation (two courses in height) that probably served as a table stood near the southeastern corner of the room. A doorway led directly from this room toward the east and into an incompletely preserved second room, whose light-gray floor again lay beneath more than 25 cm of collapsed brick fragments, burnt-orange destruction debris, carbonized wood fragments, and ash. Just west of these rooms, a partially revealed plaster-lined installation, whose original function remains unclear, appeared roughly 33

cm beneath the subsequent LBA IIA (1400–1300 BCE) remains and at the same elevation as the walls of these domestic LBA I rooms. The plaster itself seems no thicker than 1 cm, and the stone frame around it displays a rather poor construction of small-to-medium-sized fieldstones.

Judging from the masonry, construction technique, pottery, and material culture recovered from these rooms, the overall structure likely served a domestic function during the pre-Amarna, LBA I period. While this building appears to have been destroyed by fire, the conflagration which brought the stratum's end was not as intense as later ones. But the limited archaeological exposure of this area urges caution in assessing both the extent and agent of the destruction.

Late Bronze Age IIA. The most significant level from this period revealed a monumental, public structure located at the foot of the present-day eastern slope (outlined in **Fig. 5**). Two adjacent, massive buildings, constructed of mudbricks set on foundations of large-sized boulders, were separated only by a narrow gap—too narrow for human passage—that contained traces of a carbonized wooden beam. Both structures suffered complete destruction as a result of the same violent event, perhaps during regional conflicts in the Amarna Age (during the reigns in Egypt of Amenhotep III and Amenhotep IV/Akhnaten, ca. 1386–1334 BCE) or slightly later in the fourteenth century BCE. The collapsed remains accumulated to an impressive depth of 2.04 m. Both the scale and construction techniques of the overall complex point to a large, multi-storied, public building serving an official function, possibly as a fortress or palace.

Remains of the more westerly building continued into the heart of the tell, beyond the current excavation area. The width of the structure's northernmost exposed wall (2.10 m = 4 royal cubits) suggests that it represents an exterior, load-bearing wall and that at least one more story existed above this ground level. A thick, white-plaster floor covered the room's interior. Above the walls' stone foundations, the *in situ* ("in position") mudbrick superstructure remained visible in section (on interior

Wall 2021 in **Fig. 5**) to a height of 70 cm. (A “section” refers to the view of soil layers that results from making a vertical cut through them—like the view of a cake’s layers after removing a slice.) The face of the wall was coated with a whitish-gray plaster averaging 1 cm in thickness. Displaced fragments of this facing bore traces of red-painted designs that evidently once adorned the room. The easterly building showed a densely packed cobblestone floor framed by partially “robbed” walls (i.e., walls whose stones were dug out and removed, presumably for use elsewhere). Deep conflagration debris once again covered everything, and, as a result of the extremely high temperatures reached by the fire that destroyed both buildings, the foundation stones showed clear signs of dramatic cracking and flaking. Some of the stones were burned almost to lime.

During the devastation, a large quantity of carbonized wheat and barley grains fanned across the plaster floor in the western building. Radiocarbon testing of this material, the relative stratigraphic position of the buildings, and the identification of imported pottery from the island of Cyprus found under the destruction debris all indicate that the event occurred in the late fourteenth or early thirteenth century BCE, when the region fell under the heavy shadow of Egyptian Dynasty XVIII (1570–1293 BCE).

Late Bronze Age IIB. A thick, whitish floor covered and sealed the top of the LBA IIA destruction debris (**Fig. 6**). Two wide, parallel walls of a new structure appeared farther up the slope and may, upon further excavation, prove to be preserved to an appreciable height (up to 2.5 m). The bricks of the two walls were laid (sometimes on their narrow side) in a header-stretcher pattern (i.e., with one brick laid length-wise and the next brick laid with its short end exposed) and appear to have been formed in a mold based on the palm measurement (a hand-width equaling one-seventh of the Egyptian cubit, or 7.5 cm; compare the biblical *ṭephah/ṭōphah* in Exod 25:25, 37:12; 1 Kgs 7:26; 2 Chron 4:5; Ezek 40:43). Preliminary stratigraphic analysis suggests a date for this large, public building sometime during the Ramesside period in Egypt (either Dynasty XIX, 1293–1185

BCE, which included the reigns of Ramesses II/the Great and his son, Merneptah, or early Dynasty XX, 1185–1070 BCE, dominated by the reigns of Rameses III–XI).

A series of closely spaced, poorly preserved surfaces with clear LBA pottery reflects several short-lived phases of occupation by various squatter groups near the end of that period. A large pit, cut immediately to the south of one of the LBA IIB (ca. 1300–1200 BCE) walls and actually impinging on a portion of it, yielded a chronologically important scarab that appears to belong to the so-called “Early Palestinian Series” (**Fig. 7a**). (A scarab was a kind of amulet carved in the form of a scarab beetle and extremely popular in second-millennium-BCE Egypt.) Canaanite artisans carved this item probably during the MBA IIB (ca. 1750–1650 BCE) or early MBA IIC (ca. 1650–1550 BCE) period. Since it emerged from a much later pit, this artifact undoubtedly represents an heirloom passed on from that earlier time, for which yet undiscovered occupational levels must exist at Tel Zayit. A small, ivory duck’s head, once part of an elegant cosmetic box, also appeared among LBA layers (**Fig. 7b**) dating to the late thirteenth or possibly early twelfth century BCE. These and other ivory artifacts combine with a full series of imported ceramic styles (especially the so-called “milk bowls” from Cyprus) to suggest that Tel Zayit enjoyed a respectable socio-economic status within a large trade network during most of the LBA.

II. Iron Age Deposits (Areas A–T)

After the disappearance of the squatters’ settlements near the close of the LBA, the town at Tel Zayit was not reestablished until sometime in the early-to-mid tenth century BCE—the time of David and Solomon. Despite the recovery of some scattered pottery fragments showing Philistine traditions, no intact architectural remains or occupational levels have emerged from the Iron Age I period (ca. 1200–1000 BCE)—a situation that parallels closely the one at nearby Lachish. Instead, an uninterrupted series of deposits lying directly above the LBA levels extends from the tenth century through the

late eighth and even into the seventh century BCE. These strata represent a continuous, 300(+)-year settlement history during the Iron Age IIA (ca. 1000–900 BCE), IIB (ca. 900–700 BCE), and IIC (700–586 BCE) periods, with three major destruction events along the way.

Tenth Century BCE. Starting around the mid tenth century BCE, in the days of King Solomon, a series of well-built rooms (**Fig. 8**) formed a chain of houses or small buildings enclosing the upper part of the town at Tel Zayit (**Fig. 9**) in a manner comparable to the Stratum XII enclosure at Arad, an important biblical city in the Negev desert west of the Dead Sea (see Num 21:1; 33:40; Josh 12:14; 15:21; Judg 4:11; et passim). (In Fig. 9, the arrow indicates the location of the monolith seen in Fig. 10. Other, similar standing stones were visible in Tel Zayit's lower settlement, situated northwest of the summit.) On the eastern shoulder of the mound, where erosion cut off the continuation of the structure, excavations have exposed two rooms belonging to this design (**Fig. 10**). The eastern room had a beaten-earth surface, which was cut off by erosion, while the more westerly room included a well-built flagstone floor. The latter feature, together with the walls of the rooms, incorporated a number of discarded mortars—items that likely come from destroyed or dismantled ruins of an earlier tenth-century occupational phase. The interior wall separating these two rooms included a huge, standing monolith (1.60 m in exposed height; 2.25 m in circumference), one of at least nine other such elements regularly spaced around the summit at a common elevation of 172 m. These stone pillars not only provided better support for upper floor levels but also strengthened the overall structure against damage from human (military assaults) and natural (earthquakes) events.

The rooms' most interesting element appeared in the interior face of their westernmost wall. The builders of this wall incorporated into it a 38-pound limestone boulder with two lines of letters clearly incised on one side and a large, bowl-shaped hollow ground into the other side (**Fig. 11**). The mid-tenth-century-BCE inscription shows a complete, 22-letter

alphabet whose letter forms represent a transitional stage from Phoenician to the Hebrew national script of the ninth century BCE (**Fig. 12**). The importance of this discovery derives not only from its archaic alphabetic inscription (an “abecedary”) but also from its secure, undisturbed archaeological context. No principle of investigation (stratigraphic or ceramic analysis, radiocarbon dating, historical reckoning, palaeographic study) undermines the clear dating of the inscription’s findspot.

Sometime late in the tenth century, the building that incorporated the stone artifact suffered complete destruction by fire. A 75-cm-thick accumulation of heavily burnt debris smothered the entire structure. During this event, a large segment of the first-floor ceiling and second-story floor, together with their wood-beam frame, collapsed straight down into the flagstone-floored chamber (**Fig. 13**). The upstairs floor lifted off cleanly from the ceiling makeup beneath it (**Fig. 13a**), which itself showed multiple resurfacings, alternating between red-fired clay and grayish-colored ash, and a rounded, blackened area representing a burned-out beam near the western edge of the debris (**Fig. 13b-c**). With the collapse of the building’s internal support system, the exterior walls of the structure fell inward. A tumble of large, heavily burnt brick fragments covered the entire complex (**Fig. 13d**, in which No. 1 = collapsed bricks; No. 2 = upstairs floor; No. 3 = first floor ceiling makeup). The vessel types and surface treatments shown on the pottery recovered from this level reflect ceramic industries well attested in Lachish Levels V–IV, from the late tenth and ninth centuries BCE.

Ninth Century BCE. The town at Tel Zayit rebounded quickly after the late-tenth-century crisis. In the early ninth century BCE, two successive phases of flooring covered and sealed the destruction debris of the previous phase and the findspot of the abecedary. The covering provided by these floors establishes a firm *terminus ante quem* (latest possible date) for the functional life of the tenth-century rooms and thus for the inscription they contained. Judging from the stance of the inscribed stone as it lay

embedded in the wall, the incising of the abecedary must have occurred sometime prior to the construction of the building; thus the carving of the inscription itself likely dates no later than the mid-tenth century BCE, a date that agrees with the palaeography of the script.

Occupational debris from the early ninth-century rooms yielded a collection of more than 1,240 identifiable ceramic fragments. Preliminary comparative analysis dates this horizon almost exclusively (98.87%) to the early Iron Age IIB period (shortly after 900 BCE). Importantly, coastal traditions that are well attested at Tel Zayit later in the ninth century do not appear in these deposits, even though some forms (such as Ashdod Ware, one-handled cooking jars, and short-necked coastal amphorae with sharp shoulder breaks) might easily have done so had Tel Zayit already established strong ties with coastal cultures (**Fig. 14**, with coastal forms framed in white; an amphora is a large jar with two or more handles, used to transport various commodities such as oil or wine).

Slightly later, during the mid ninth century, two successive stone pavings were laid across at least portions of these rooms, with the earliest paving resting 20 cm above the early-ninth-century floors and 70–90 cm above the floor of the tenth-century rooms. The occupational debris collected from this level yielded numerous fragments of the coastal-style amphorae that are well attested in the late-ninth-century levels at Tel Zayit. It appears, then, that the inhabitants had by now sought out a connection to the coast.

Sometime during the second half of the ninth century, Tel Zayit entered a new phase of occupation. The resulting stratum spanned the entire excavation area on the eastern shoulder the tell, but this level once again lasted only a short time, as the entire structure suffered destruction by fire in the late ninth century. A thick blanket of destruction debris (from 50 to 66 cm in depth) smothered the whole area. Floors from this period lapped down inside two pits, or cellars, whose contents produced not only rich ceramic assemblages drawn from both inland and coastal

industries, but also several radiocarbon samples from secure, undisturbed contexts (**Fig. 15**). A contemporaneous, closely striated floor, covered with heavy accumulations of white ash, lay to the south of these rooms and appears to have functioned as an outdoor industrial area. Both the broad floor and the occupational debris lying on it yielded numerous fragments of metal slag, a fact that suggests metallurgical activities similar to those seen in contemporaneous levels at Beth Shemesh (a biblical site located approximately 20 km northeast of Tel Zayit and well known in the Bible as the place where the Philistines returned the Ark of the Covenant to the Israelites [1 Sam 6]).

The fiery destruction of the ninth-century town at Tel Zayit correlates well with the demolition of Stratum A3 at nearby Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath. The events at both sites likely occurred at the hands of Hazael, king of Damascus, sometime after the 830s BCE. It was only then that Assyrian pressure on the west (including Israel and Judah) lessened, thus allowing regional kingdoms to become more aggressive locally. The text of 2 Kgs 12:17–18, the only biblical record of an international event during the reign of Jehoash, preserves notice of this incursion, which constituted part of a broader campaign by Damascus through the north and down into the Shephelah of Judah (cf. the Tel Dan Stele). The coastal ceramic traditions that appeared at Tel Zayit sometime around or just after the mid-ninth-century reign of Jehoshaphat indicate that the town now fostered stronger connections to—or even a more formal realignment with—coastal-plain culture and had perhaps even become a satellite of Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath. Five large, late-ninth- or early-eighth-century BCE coastal-style amphorae, designed to receive perforated clay fermentation stoppers (to control ventilation during the wine-making process) and dome-shaped lids, attest to the new commercial ties (see **Figs. 16–17**). Interestingly, this shift toward the coast began at a time when the biblical record says that Libnah revolted against Jerusalemite rule (2 Kgs 8:22; 2 Chron 21:10) and when

the archaeological record shows that Lachish (perhaps in response) assumed a premiere place among Judahite sites in the Shephelah.

Eighth Century BCE. The excavation of late-eighth-century levels at Tel Zayit has exposed a series of walls making up part of two adjacent rooms joined by a doorway with a stone threshold. The easternmost room contained a large *tabun* (“oven”; *tannur* in Hebrew) with flat-lying stones on its interior floor and shards from clay jars lining the upper walls. Some of these ceramic fragments were covered with charred mud. Burnt layers from yet another destruction level buried all these features. This substantial band of debris, which ran across the entire excavation area on the eastern shoulder of the site, consists in a thick (5–10 cm) deposit of black ash running directly beneath 50+ cm of collapsed brick material of reddish-orange color. Due to the aforementioned heavy erosion over this part of the tell, the top of this level reached to within ca. 80 cm of the denuded modern surface. But the longitudinal extent of the debris suggests that it represents a significant destruction event, not a localized accidental fire. Unless further ceramic analysis proves otherwise, it seems reasonable to assign this level to the third campaign of Sennacherib, when in 701 BCE the Assyrians entered the Shephelah and destroyed not only Lachish but also many towns and villages in the vicinity (see 2 Kgs 18–19; also the Lachish reliefs from Sennacherib’s “Palace Without a Rival” in Nineveh [Room XXXVI] and the so-called Chicago/Taylor Prism, ll. 18–49). Following a major attack against the royal city at Lachish, Sennacherib turned his attention to Judah’s political district No. 4 in the Naḥal Guvrin/Libnah area (2 Kgs 19:8), while his representative, the Rabshekah, taunted Hezekiah in Jerusalem. Excavations have recovered several store-jar handles with seal impressions bearing the royal LMLK stamp (“[Belonging] to the king”). (On these handles, this phrase is followed by the name of one of four cities that likely served either as military supply centers or royal storehouses for the collection of taxes during the reign of Judah’s King Hezekiah.)

Seventh Century BCE. Unfortunately, building activities from later periods and heavy erosion around the eastern and southern shoulders of the mound at Tel Zayit impinged significantly on the site's seventh-century levels. Still, signs of a continuous habitation during this period emerged. For example, excavation immediately to the west of the late-eighth-century rooms just mentioned revealed a number of stratigraphically later features that added a vital datum to our understanding of the depositional history of Tel Zayit during the late stages of the Iron Age. This band of remains, which included cobblestone floors with associated walls constructed of larger stones than in the previous building period, lay sandwiched between the destruction debris from the late eighth century BCE and the Persian-period floor levels exposed on the western side of the mound. It seems clear, then, that the townsfolk at Tel Zayit worked to rebuild their settlement in the decades following Sennacherib's brutal assault against the region. Despite nature's shearing-off of Iron Age IIB/C features in most of the excavation areas around the summit of the tell, these scattered traces of architecture point to a substantially rebuilt town sometime near or during the days of King Josiah (whose wife, according to biblical traditions, was "Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah" [2 Kgs 23:31; 24:18; Jer 52:1–2]).

The fact that Tel Zayit has revealed a continuous, 300- to 350-year occupational presence in the foothills of Judah during the days of the Hebrew kings, starting in the tenth and extending into the seventh century BCE, makes this site a very important one for reconstructing the history of the region in the biblical period. During this time the town suffered a distinct and major destruction event at the close of each of three centuries—the tenth, ninth, and eighth. Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt (possibly!; see 1 Kgs 11:40; 14:25; 2 Chron 12; = Shoshenq I, who ruled from 946–913 BCE), Hazael of Damascus (2 Kgs 12:17–18), and Sennacherib of Assyria (2 Kgs 18–19; Is 36–37) appear to represent, respectively, the agents behind these assaults.

III. A Late Roman Border Fortress

Following multi-phased levels spanning the Persian, Hellenistic, and Early Roman periods, a very prominent feature occupied the entire 200 m² of excavated area on Tel Zayit's western summit, the highest elevation of the mound in Area A (**Fig. 18**). This impressively built structure likely served as a fortress guarding the entrance to the strategic Guvrin Valley (**Fig. 19**). The Roman-period road passed through this area, as attested by several Roman milestones found in the general vicinity by modern local residents. Stratigraphically, the building belongs in the Late Roman period (second to fourth centuries CE), and preliminary analysis of the pottery found beneath the latest floor level seems to confirm this dating.

The building's thick walls, which became visible only 15 cm beneath the modern-day surface of the tell, included a wide entryway from the northwest, the location of the lower city. Two massive stone piers (2.20 m x 9.40 m) flanked the gateway, and the passageway running between them measured 5.10 m in width. Portions of at least three steps leading up to the gate have survived, with the uppermost step offering a relatively broad (9.6 x 1.7 m) landing on which users could gather immediately before the entrance. The landing was made of substantial quantities of small stones set in a mortar of light-gray lime plaster. Large dressed stones defined both the inner (eastern) and outer (western) edges of the landing.

The full extent of the building remains unknown, since its principal enclosure walls extended beyond the excavation area. Yet, given the striking scale of the architectural elements thus far revealed, the fortress likely covered a substantial portion of the western summit (if not the entire acropolis) during its serviceable life. It must certainly have constituted the dominant feature at the site, and its very size again suggests that the tell was then much larger than the present-day mound. Both the scale of the building and the strategic location of the site confirm that the fortress served as more than a mere guard post with watch tower. It provided a substantially fortified stronghold situated at a topographical, political, and cultural interface that

enjoyed a constant water source and offered unfettered surveillance of all traffic passing through this borderland area. That Emperor Hadrian himself would travel through this frontier during his tour of Palestine in 130/131 CE heightened the need for a strong Roman military presence here.

The fourth-century CE *Onomasticon* of Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea lists the city of Libnah (Λόβνα or Λοβάννα) as “a large village” in the district then headed by the city of Eleutheropolis/Beth Guvrin. The impressive architecture from this period at Tel Zayit suggests that the site did, in fact, constitute such a village or town during this time. The Jerusalem–Beth Guvrin–Libnah–Ashkelon route held clear strategic value within the Roman Empire, as attested in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a detailed but highly schematized ancient Roman road map (*itinerarium*) copied during medieval times from a second- or third-century CE forerunner (**Fig. 20**). The descent from Jerusalem (renamed *Aelia Capitolina* by Emperor Hadrian) to Beth Guvrin followed the old route through the Naḥal Elah and south to Beth Guvrin. From there, the road to Ashkelon and other points along the southern coastal plain passed directly by Tel Zayit, through the former Libnah/Guvrin District 4 of Josh 15:42. Since Tel Zayit represented the westernmost town in this east-west valley and lay squarely at the topographical transition from the Shephelah to the coastal plain, it provided the first point of protection against any incursion from the coast. It is not surprising, then, that the Romans chose this site for their imposing fortress that commanded a view of the coast ranging from Ashdod to Gaza.

IV. The Turkish-Ottoman Period

At the close of the sixteenth century CE, 165 residents of a small *qarya* (Arabic for a permanently settled “village”) known as Khirbet Zayta al-Kharab continued to dwell at this ancient mound in the liminal zone between Hebron in the highlands and Gaza in the coastal plain. Their hamlet survived along the southern edge of the Naḥal Guvrin through the nineteenth century, as confirmed by the work of Claude Reignier Conder and Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener, who conducted mapping-surveys of

the Holy Land/Western Palestine in the 1870s on behalf of the Palestine Exploration Fund in London. Remains from this village emerged in our excavation of a lower settlement (Area L), situated immediately to the northwest of the main tell. Several rooms and a semi-circular arrangement of standing stones belonging to a Late Ottoman farmhouse were discovered here. Because the water in the Naḥal Guvrin grew stagnant during the British Mandate period (following the close of the Ottoman period in 1917 CE), the inhabitants of Khirbet Zayta moved their site 1 km to the north, away from the wadi, thus bringing to an end some 4,000 years of occupation at Tel Zayit.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the sweep of history, the borderlands around Tel Zayit served important purposes, sometimes as a buffer zone, sometimes as a melting pot of ethnic groups and cultures. Before, throughout, and even beyond the biblical periods, the habitation area at Tel Zayit itself may well have been significantly larger than the present-day mound suggests. The monumental architecture, extraordinarily deep deposits, and two significant destruction events brought to light in Area T undoubtedly lay near the center of the Late Bronze Age town, not outside of it and along an exposed eastern flat. After a subsequent 200-year occupational gap, the settlement history of Iron Age Tel Zayit resumed with multiple occupational phases spanning the tenth through the seventh centuries BCE. Major conflagrations at the end of the tenth, ninth, and eighth centuries again speak both to the importance of the town itself and to its strategic but vulnerable location. To date, our excavation has not exposed enough of the seventh-century levels to determine how that period ended. But after poor, provincial settlements in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, the site once more proved a tactical one for the Romans, who erected a substantial fortress to guard access to the highlands via the Naḥal Guvrin.

The archaeological record at Tel Zayit highlights the concept of liminality throughout the site's settlement history and cultural development. Lying in the borderlands between ancient Judah and Philistia, in the mid tenth century BCE the town helped to open the southwestern frontier of an embryonic, patrimonial kingdom in the Judean highlands, only to realign itself more openly with the Philistine coast about a century later, probably following and perhaps in response to the centralizing reforms of King Jehoshaphat. From then on, the town maintained contacts both with political centers to its east and with the more open, international markets and ports to its west.

Across the *longue durée*, for nearly four millennia, the inhabitants of Tel Zayit enjoyed the benefits but also faced the challenges that resulted from calling a borderland community home. Doubtless arriving from different and often opposing homeland cores, the town's residents learned to feel at home with the *familiar stranger*. As the process of cultural fusion unfolded over long, disparate historical periods, the inhabitants of this liminal area exercised their hard-earned autonomy even as they nurtured a continuing, symbiotic relationship with the cultural cores that surrounded and interacted with them.

The archaeology of Tel Zayit helps bring to light such self-expression in the borderlands between Judah and Philistia. Our project of field exploration has begun to recover not only the lost voices of those who lived and died at Tel Zayit when kings arose in the land and ruled with increasing authority from Jerusalem, but also the succession of townsfolk who through the ages found themselves pitched together in a borderland between different, sometimes opposing forces. While, in their narratives and prophecies, the biblical writers pursued a goal far beyond the mere telling of quotidian history, they ultimately produced a set of texts that incorporated, evaluated, and interpreted (theologically) numerous bits of historical information. As the tradition grew, it reflected their national history—at least as they saw it. Archaeology enables us to study and understand these ancient texts in

the light of their own cultural contexts, for the material remains left behind by the people the biblical writers addressed and portrayed have their own power to reclaim and reconstruct a credible view of the past. Appreciating the often subtle, complex message of the highly stratified biblical texts through the illuminating lens of these material remains is the closest we can come to speaking with kings Solomon and Hezekiah, Shishak of Egypt, Sennacherib of Assyria, Emperor Hadrian of Rome, or (and especially) the everyday people who lived under their sway.



Fig. 1 - Staff and Volunteers: Inaugural Season 1999

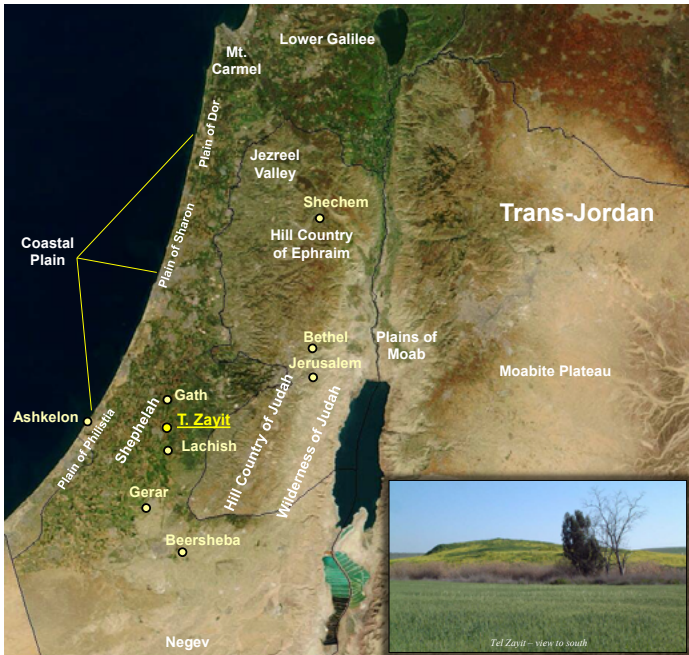


Fig. 2 - Map with Tel Zayit (view toward south)

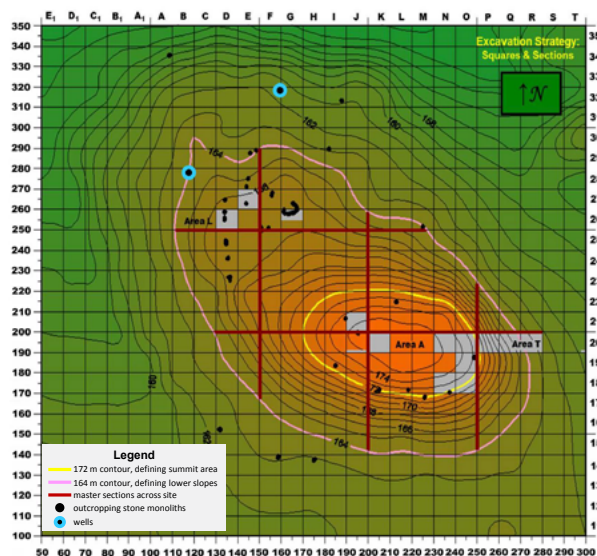


Fig. 3 - Excavation Strategy: squares and sections (actual excavation areas in gray)

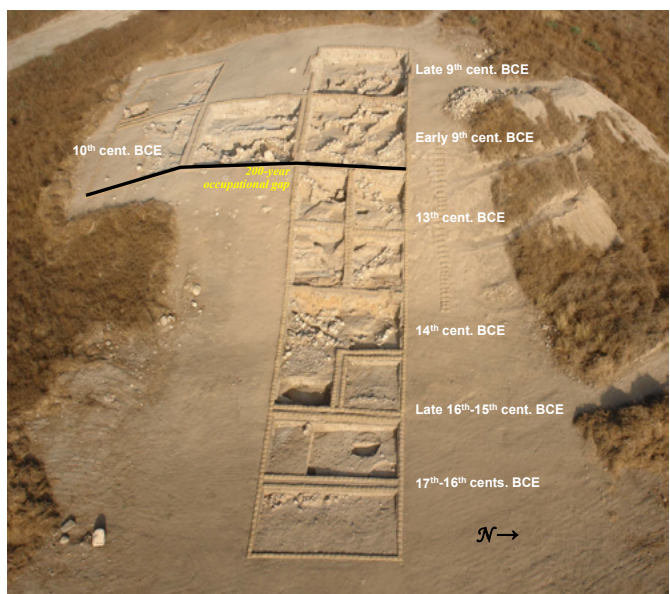


Fig. 4 - Aerial view of eastern shoulder of tel (Area A) and step-trench down steep eastern slope (Area T)

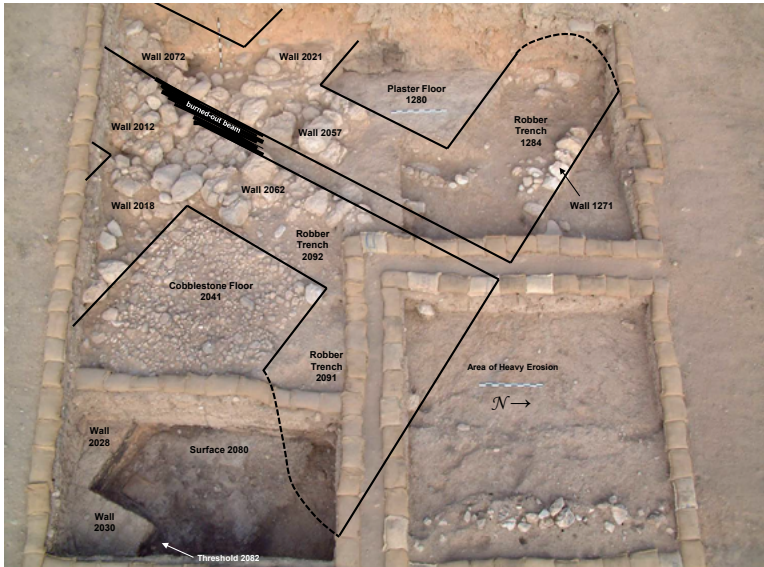


Fig. 5 - Square Q20: monumental architecture of LBA IIA overlying smaller rooms of LBA I



Fig. 6 - Madeleine Tappy cutting back thick floor that sealed LBA IIA destruction debris (2007 Season)



Fig. 7 - Ivory Artifacts: MBA scarab and LBA duck head (from a cosmetic box)



Fig. 8 - Square O19: rooms with monolith in interior wall



Fig. 9 - Chain of Houses: volunteers standing on tops of exposed monoliths (arrow indicates location of monolith in Square O19)



Fig. 10 - Square O19: PTS student Bethany Wicker cleaning two tenth-century-BCE rooms (2005 Season; circle indicates location of Tel Zayit Abecedarary)

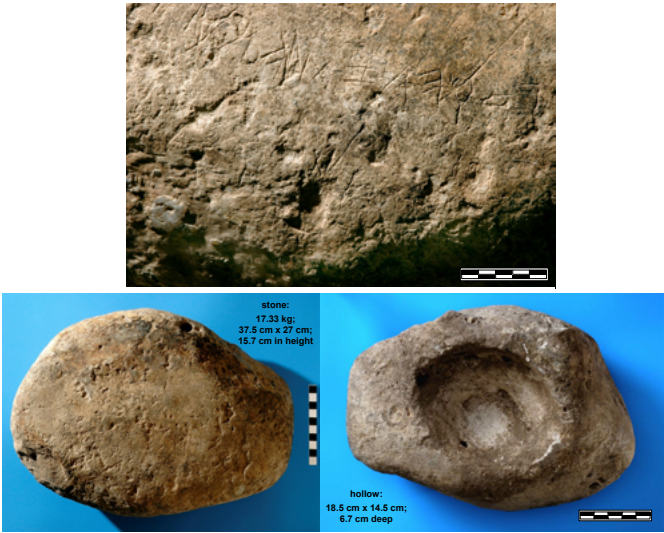


Fig. 11 - Tel Zayit Stone (obverse and reverse), with selected letters of incised abecedary

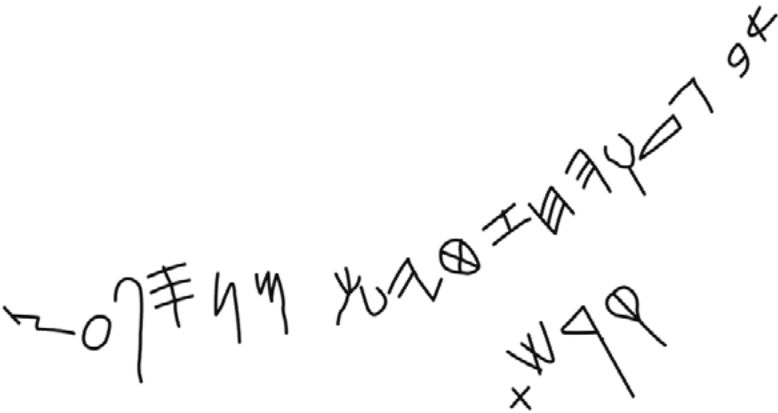


Fig. 12 - Tel Zayit Abecedary: a liminal script in a liminal location



Fig. 13a-d - Tenth-century BCE Destruction Debris: (a) supervisor Dale Swindell removing second-story floor (2005 Season); (b) striated ceiling remains; (c) debris with burned-out ceiling beam; (d) bricks from collapsed walls



Fig. 14 - Iron Age II pottery, with coastal forms framed in white



Fig. 15 - Late-ninth-century-BCE destruction debris, Squares N-O20



Fig. 16 - Amphorae with lid and fermentation stoppers



Fig. 17 - PTS student Kate Lockard carefully cleaning a 2,900-year-old jar lid (2004 Season)



Fig. 18 - Area A: Squares J21 and K20 (Late Roman period), with alumna and PTS administrator Carolyn Cranston cleaning an area near the Northern Gate Pier (1999 Season)

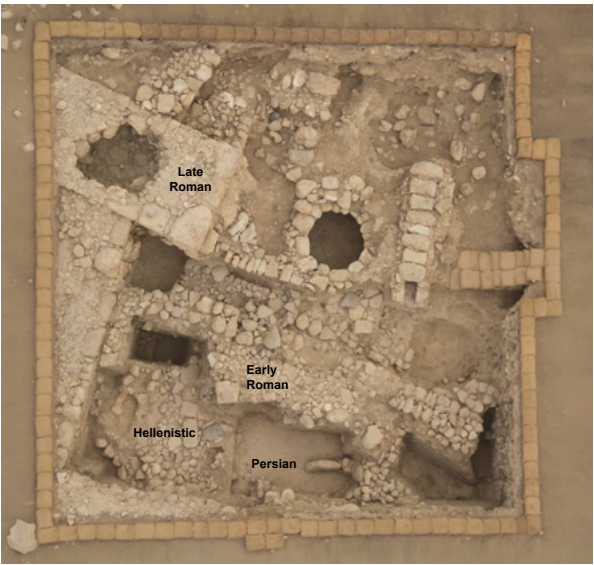


Fig. 19 - Square K20: from Persian floors to Late Roman fortress



Fig. 20 - Peutinger Map, showing the area from the Nile Delta to Antioch (above); Regional map showing the location of Tel Zayit (below)

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PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

ESSAYS

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The Augustinian Concept of the God-shaped Hole in Dumb and Dumber

Brandon A. Shaw

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon is now pursuing a Th.M. at Pittsburgh Seminary, after obtaining two bachelor's degrees, one from Wheaton College (IL) (2007) and another from the University of Pittsburgh (2017), and a master's degree from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (2012). Brandon enjoys volunteering with Pittsburgh Region International Student Ministries (P.R.I.S.M.) in his free time and seeks to contextualize the evangelical gospel to whoever will listen.

ABSTRACT

This piece is a work of gospel contextualization—the packaging of the Lord Jesus Christ's good news for people who would rather watch SNL on Sunday morning than attend church. Furthermore, it's intentionally somewhat erudite yet comedic to attract people who like that sort of jingle.

POP THEOLOGY IN AN EVANGELICAL CULTURE

If given an academic title, then this would be called: *The Augustinian Concept of the God-shaped Hole and Lloyd Christmas's Demonstration of its Reality in the 1990s Box Office Hit, Dumb and Dumber*. Before getting to the heart of the essay, be bored with some context mixed with some playful jabs. Melding things of divinity and popular culture may elicit frowns from those partial to either seriousness or facetiousness. Those non-compliant to wed church doctrine with pop culture (and thus keep Christian exposition void of any modern references which evoke merriment), the prudishly curmudgeon Bob-Jones-administrative-types, might see the latter as Mickey-Mousing around with sacred things. On the other hand, any pop culture enthusiasts who label themselves antagonists of theological inquiry may argue that suggesting sacred truth exists in such an iconic and beloved, numbskull-laden comedy blasphemes the laugh-inducing Farrelly brothers, the originators of the flick. Both stances need Sea Bass's boot.

As an undergrad at Wheaton College (IL), this writer applauds the notion that all truth is God's truth. (Thanks for the phraseology, Arthur F. Holmes, delivered to the college's evangelism class by faculty affiliate Jerry Root.) Instead of retreating from a culture like the 20th-century Fundamentalists, this writer unconditionally elects Evangelicalism. The proactive, gospel-centric religion of Billy Graham (the Asheville farm-boy turned preacher par excellence after "puffed"—or "promoted" rather than used stogie-style—at his Los Angeles Crusade in 1949 at the behest of none other than William Randolph Hearst, the media magnate seeking to make major Benjamins off of Christ himself by means of Billy the Graham)¹ shouts cultural engagement. Instead of cowering from popular culture, you bear-hugging Andrew Greeley, wizard extraordinaire of integrating popular culture and institutional religion, without letting go makes for good measure. The following attempts to enlighten the church-less addicted to

1 Please absolve the verbose parenthetical statement. Outside it lies a succinct sentence.

the culture of pop by demonstrating how God's truth proceeds forth from more than strictly a Holy Bible or a preacher's pulpit in a steeple-place on Sunday mornings but may be ubiquitously found in all corners of existence when examined with an examining eye (since God is omnipresent). This entails finding the Augustinian concept of the God-shaped hole in *Dumb and Dumber*.

THE HOLE IN THE SHAPE OF GOD.

For centuries, theologians have given attention to the God-shaped hole, a popularly-discussed notion, a thought worth examining. In one of his most oft-quoted lines from his *Confessions*, the early church father Augustine notes of an uneasy spirit that exists in a person prior to popping a holy anti-anxiety pill (namely, God himself). Claimed by both Calvinists and Catholics, the great Latin padre writes, "Thou awakes us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee."² One's ultimate soul satisfaction, his antithesis to restlessness, the Doctor of Grace proclaims, is intricately wound up in knowing God; therefore, Augustine alleges a God-space in every human heart. God made the pinnacle of creation for himself. In alternate words, God fashioned people to be in relation with him. To know not God is to know restlessness. To know God personally is to void the void.

Furthermore, shining a spotlight on an already lit Augustinian absolute and echoing his forefather in the faith, Jonathan Parnell suggests: "First, and most fundamental, no car can satisfy a God-shaped void. The quest for pleasure is really a quest for God. He created us to be happy in him."³ To provide contextual meat to Parnell's beat, Parnell, an evangelical, posits that as grand as the drool-inducing Lamborghini is, it does not inherently

² Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward Pusey (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1853), 1.

³ Jonathan Parnell, "Hedonism to the Extreme: Lamborghini and Our Souls," *DesiringGod.org* (blog), *Desiring God*, May 20, 2013, accessed February 9, 2017, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/hedonism-to-the-extreme-lamborghini-and-our-souls>.

possess the capability within all of its pleasantries to satisfy a person, in the ultimate sense, in the way God can and does in and through the person of Jesus Christ by means of gospel exaltation. With no further ado, Parnell's commentary serves as a perfect footbridge connecting the thought of Augustine to renowned comedian Jim Carrey's masterpiece, the character Lloyd Christmas in Motion Picture Corporation of America's cinematic production, *Dumb and Dumber*.

PROVIDENCE IN THE ROOM OF MEN AND OTHER ENCOUNTERS.

Discontent with a city assumingly named by Puritans, Lloyd [Carrey] persuades Harry [Jeff Daniels] to exit Providence, Rhode Island for Aspen, Colorado to deliver a "lost" item to Mary [Lauren Holly], an instant, client love-interest whom limousine-driving Lloyd assumes inadvertently left her suitcase at the airport. What a Lamborghini is to one man, Mary Swanson is to Lloyd. Two things compel Loyd to attempt a no-mere-ski-trip cross-country to Colorado in Harry's laughably assuming Shaggin' Wagon. Unrest with the mundaneness of Providence-living is further fuel to an already almost brimming oil-tanker of motivation created by the instantaneous and infatuated love Lloyd has for the "host of heaven" he delivers to the airport, one he knows virtually zero about. Desiring to make "Christmas" all year round for his immediate obsession, Lloyd does not mind chasing a pipe dream in the pursuit of the one he covets. Still, it never occurs to him that Mary might be married. With nothing to lose, Mr. Christmas laments to his friend, "You know what I'm sick and tired of, Harry? I'm sick and tired of having to eke my way through life. I'm sick and tired of bein' a nobody. But most of all, I'm sick and tired of havin' nobody."⁴ This sense of having nothing is nothing less than possessing the

⁴ *Dumb and Dumber*, directed by Peter Farrelly and Bobby Farrelly (MPCA, 1994), DVD (Warner Home Video, 1997).

vacuum which only God can satisfy to far beyond spillover. Being as loyal as Lassie, Harry accompanies Lloyd on the doltish adventure hoping to assist Lloyd in realizing and relishing in a relationship with a woman whom he desires to name call “Mary Christmas.” (One may imagine Carrey in hambone-mode gregariously guffawing like Clause at his peak of jubilation when he obtains his “gift.”) Since Providence is no heart filler to the brain-cell-deprived pair, “Little Rhodie” is virtually thought chiseled off from the motherland to Lloyd and Harry. As good as left drifting in the Atlantic as soon as the misfits venture into Connecticut, the Island of Rhode is lost to them, and Mary becomes the object of Lloyd’s devotion, that “thing” he looks to stuff the God-void with. The film takes viewers on a side-splitting adventure which showcases just how far Lloyd is willing to go to satiate his dehydrated soul. While attempting to return Mary’s briefcase left behind in his limo, Lloyd fantasizes winning the affection of his worship object, “Mrs.” Swanson.

How far will someone go to pack a God-space? One must see no further than Lloyd and the surrounding scenarios he places himself or, more fittingly, where the Divine places him. (After all, Lloyd is from Providence.) The providential hand does indeed guide Dee and Dum. Had shocking disbelief not consumed him upon consumption of the liquid in one of Lloyd’s formerly empty beer bottles, the Pennsylvanian motorcycle trooper (Harland Williams) may have arrested the two for open containers thus preventing Lloyd from his desired assumption of Mary. Also, for sticking Sea Bass (Cam Neely) with their tab instead of four Boilermakers as demanded, Sea Bass attempts to more than merely kick Lloydian keister as his elder red-necked drinking pal suggests be done to Harry during the diner scene. (Context speaking, Harry’s salt shaker accosts Sea Bass’s grease trough experience and kicks off the tiff.) Later in the film, the villainous Bass sinisterly seeks to overcome unsuspecting Lloyd with force after Lloyd, in the midst of micturating, reads a threatening statement on the stall wall. Lloyd is unfortunately right on time. Fortunately, unknowingly

the savior, Harry delivers Carrey's character to a happier place (or merely out of the captured compartment), while leaving Sea Bass, the one greeted inadvertently by Harry's fire-squelching aggression, comatose on the floor with unrealized desires, and Providence moves the dolts along while Providence floats along.

Simultaneously, while dealing with Sea Bass and other salty characters, Lloyd and Harry suppose "debt collectors" seek them. In actuality, two gangsters (Karen Duffy and Mike Starr) trail Lloyd and Harry and desire Mary's Samsonite case of cash (purposely left at the airport by Mary to ransom her husband from the mobsters), which the comedically-deranged duo, having thought she left the case without intention, eventually spend anyway on their way to return said item. Humorously, the pair team the case with IOUs, all the while living large and appearing as neon-suit-wearing, red-Lamborghini-Diablo-driving quasi-pimps in the Rockies. Interestingly, the thugs possessed their own God-shaped holes to layer, too. Along with his extravagant purchases, Lloyd, shown pampered and pedicured, cleaning out his nostrils with big bills while in luxury's lap, both figuratively and literally blew the criminals' hope for their own Lambo into the abyss of non-reality, thus demonstrating that Mammon is fleeting as well. The Omnipotent's chasm needs to be brimmed with something more than all the combined treasures in Scrooge McDuck's cavernous vault of bling.

SOME EBERT ANALYSIS.

Suggesting an element of the possession of the Divinely-shaped cavity perhaps unaware, Roger Ebert writes, "The relationship between the two guys creates a lot of the fun, as they discuss their grim lifestyle and their bizarre plans to improve it."⁵ Like Lloyd, innate desire to make the proverbial Joneses look akin to ragtag scalawags intrinsically exists in all. The intuition that a better reality, a something more, prevails is certainly

⁵ Roger Ebert, "*Dumb and Dumber*," RogerEbert.com, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/dumb-and-dumber-1994> (accessed February 9, 2017).

indicative of the existence of a God-shaped hole. Lloyd still sought to unhollow this God-gap even at the movie's closure after passing on a bus busting with bikini-baring bronze women, ones Lloyd and his accomplice in criminality realized they blundered on personally burnishing down with oil for a few months and for compensation. Neither found what he was looking for.

IF LOOKING ENDS, YOU CANNOT HONESTLY SING THAT ONE BONO SONG. THE END.

To take this home, even if Lloyd lost his nincompoop-ness for a moment, mentally processed the aforementioned opportunity hollering his nitwit name, and massaged tanning cream for one-hundred días on the archetype of women in the minds of some, his heart would still assume a restless posture. He found no “repose,” to use Augustine’s sugar, in God but sought his soul’s contentedness through carnal gratification. Truth, be told. Sex is not ultimate. A Diablo is not ultimate. Mary Swanson is not ultimate. You are not ultimate.

In Graham-esque style, this writer’s evangelistic, personal appeal follows: If you seek after stated things to find your life’s fulfillment, you are barking up the wrong dogwood. Like the protagonists, your search will only continue far beyond Aspen until you find rest, not in any mere finite thing, but in the infinite end of all things, God himself who reveals himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Out of love for what opposes him, this Ultimate Deliverer delivers the good news of the good, crucified, risen, and reigning Savior-God, Christ. Promised and prophesied to proceed to every people on the planet with a simple plea to repent and trust in Christ for the everlasting betterment/eternal redemption of the sinful (yet divine-image-bearing) seeker, the salvation message will inevitably take the entire world for Christ’s fame’s sake. When eternal life in Christ begins, the search is over, and Bono’s lyrics sung by you become your greatest lie. You will have found what you were looking for, that is, God himself, The End.

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Improving Relationships Within Congregations That Receive Cross- Racial and Cross-Cultural Itinerate Pastoral Appointments

Rev. D. Renee Mikell, D.Min

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Renee Mikell studied at PTS where she earned the M.Div. degree (class of 2010). She has served congregations in the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church for nearly a decade and currently serves in the Episcopal Office as Assistant to the Bishop.

ABSTRACT

A Project Paper Submitted to Beverly Eileen Mitchell, PhD, and Faculty of Wesley Theological Seminary in Completion of Requirements for the Doctor of Ministry Degree.

The author, using a qualitative approach, has researched the impact of demographics, cultural competency, social dynamics and a racialized society on cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments in the United Methodist Church. She shares her personal journey with cross-racial relationships. She also relies on insight from other pastors, church leaders, and cultural competency survey results, to discuss why it would be beneficial to “front-line” pastors across the denomination, and for all God’s people, to identify and address stumbling blocks that prevent the most fruitful and productive ministry from taking place under such conditions.

THE SUNDAY CHALLENGE

Many years have passed in our nation since congregations took their first steps toward cultural and racial inclusion. The past has revealed diverse groups of people attempting to unify for the sake of the Gospel. Consequentially, people in those same ecclesial settings experienced rejection, injustice, and emotional hurt. This happened to the extent that it caused religious leaders such as Richard Allen¹ to separate and seek to produce more welcoming worship environments for themselves. Sunday morning worship ultimately evolved into what Dr. Martin Luther King described as “The most segregated hour of the week.”

On December 18, 1963, during his interview with the school president at Western Michigan University, Dr. King was quoted as saying: “At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing in Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this. Now, I’m sure that if the church had taken a

¹ Founder of the first the national Black church in the United States, The African Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1816

stronger stand all along, we wouldn't have many of the problems that we have. The first way that the church can repent, the first way that it can move out into the arena of social reform is to remove the yoke of segregation from its own body.”²

I find it unfortunate that more than fifty-two years after he spoke these words, only a very small percentage of the institutional church Dr. King described, can say their membership is not comprised of less than eighty percent of any one ethnic group.

THE RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGE

Race has been described as a valid biological reason to divide human beings based on dissimilarity. However, the concept of race was designed hundreds of years ago. Today's people should know, race is not a valid problem between them. The issues they face with each other reside deep within. Some are shaped by historical social dynamics, others simply by a lack of cultural awareness.

If the relational focus was shifted to areas of similarity such as hope for the future, or concern for family, people might be better equipped to seek common ground. The relationship challenge is to appreciate differences and regard people solely for the level of humanity they share as human beings created in God's image.

In the book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Steven Colby,³ the author describes his seventh habit. “Seek first to understand then to be understood.” I believe the same is true when seeking ways to bring diverse people together, for effective relationships within in the church.

2 Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections and University Libraries Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 1963 WMU Speech Found Accessed August 25, 2015. <http://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/MLK.pdf>

3 Stephen R. Covey, Personal Bio, [stephencovey](http://stephencovey.com), Accessed November 23, 2015. <https://www.stephencovey.com/about/about.php>

THE HARMONIOUS LIVING CHALLENGE

There is a question there is a fight
about who is better black or white
There is no difference I always say
with all the problems we have today
starvation, war, poverty, and hate
just might day be our fate.
Who has time to think about color?
We all must learn to love one another⁴

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and pastor, made the following statement: Without Christ there is discord between God and humanity and between one human being and another... the more genuine and deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede, and the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is alive between us.⁵

Harmonious living can seem elusive as issues surrounding ethnic and cultural distinctions in the church and in the larger society have prevailed well into the twenty-first century. Bonhoeffer's thoughts about genuine faith communities, rooted in the knowledge and ways of Jesus Christ, present today's modern church with an ongoing challenge to live more amicably.

THE THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along! It's like costly anointing oil flowing down head and beard, flowing down Aaron's beard, flowing down the collar of his priestly robes. It's like the dew on Mount Hermon flowing down the slopes of Zion. Yes, that's where GOD commands the blessing, ordains eternal life. (Psalm 133, MSG)

⁴ Untitled Poem by D. Renee Smith (Mikell) 1972 after witnessing a childhood racially motivated incident .

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005).

The psalmist depicts stunning imagery of what happens when sisters and brothers come together for the purpose of communing peaceably as God's people. When the pastoral leader is appointed to a church, and the receiving congregation is supportive of him or her in ministry, everyone can become positioned to receive an anointing from God that leads to fruitful outcomes. Harmonious relationships can promote favorable conditions. They are capable, as the Psalmist implies, of producing an uninterrupted flow of God's blessing.

"Since Scripture clearly indicates that God has a heart for the nations, the biblical vision for reaching the nations mandates that the church develops a strong working theology of what it means to live in unity in the midst of diversity."⁶

CONCLUSION

The growing trend of sending ethnic pastors to cross-racial settings presents the chance for a paradigm shift to occur. It also contributes to points of contention that require increased cultural awareness and racial sensitivity for those involved on both sides of the issue. The need exists for church leaders, and members that receive newly appointed pastors in such settings, to learn about engaging ministry in ways that will yield fruitful results. Cross cultural pastors and laity must become more intentional about becoming more unified. When people of today's church accept the Sunday challenge, Relationship challenge, Harmonious living challenge, and Theological challenge, change might begin to take place in ways that can finally put an end to Sunday morning segregation, in Jesus' name Amen.

6 Rodney M. Woo, *Color of Church: a Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches*. (Nashville, Tenn. : B & H Academic, 2009), 158

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PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

SERMONS

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The Rock of Transfiguration

Rev. Brian Diebold

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Brian Diebold ('08) is an ordained teaching elder in the PC(USA) and is the pastor of the Verona Presbyterian Church in Verona, PA, where he has served since 2009.

ABSTRACT

In a sermon prepared for Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday based on Psalm 71:1-6, the Rev. Brian Diebold takes an imaginative journey up the side of a mountain, where more appears than first meets the eye. Using a word study of the Hebrew word *samak* (“to lean”) the sermon explores what it means to say to the Lord, “Upon you I have leaned from my birth” (Ps. 71:6).

SERMON

*Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.
(Psalm 71:6)*

Psalm 71 describes a relationship with God that spans the length of a whole life—one that goes from birth to old age, from the mother's womb to gray hairs on the head (v. 18). The word that the psalmist uses to capture the nature of that lifelong relationship is “leaning,” as in when the psalmist declares in verse 6: “Upon you I have leaned from my birth.” To “lean” gives a picture of relying on God and finding refuge there, having intimate fellowship and receiving God's provision and special care. Maybe you've had such a relationship in your life. Maybe you can say you have leaned on God from birth. Or maybe it's been more of a “sometimes” thing, in moments of need or growth, but not an “all the time” relationship. Or maybe you are at this moment wondering what it is like to lean on God at all. A lot is packed into this little word about our journey with God, and that is what we intend to explore: “Upon you I have leaned from my birth.”

This morning is “Transfiguration of the Lord” Sunday—the Sunday on the church calendar that marks the time that Jesus led three of his chosen disciples up a mountain and, while at the top, was transfigured with light before them. In his transfiguration, Jesus revealed his true nature for a brief moment, and in this way, began to spiritually prepare his disciples for what was to come later—namely, his crucifixion and death, and ultimately his resurrection. Transfiguration is about things being more than they might first appear. So in the spirit of the Transfiguration, what I want to do in this moment is to go on a spiritual journey together up a mountain, not unlike the one Jesus took with his three disciples. I want to travel together on the Mount of Transfiguration.

If you've ever hiked a mountain, you know it is exhausting. My family and I used to occasionally take a hike up a trail in the Sandia Mountains in New Mexico. It's a long hike that typically lasts all day, beginning down in the foothills and taking you all the way up to the crest, where you get a great view of the city of Albuquerque spreading out on the plain down below. When we would start out, we knew that we had a long hike ahead of us, but we would be fresh and full of energy and enjoy the walk. But as we got higher, and the air got thinner, and the trail became steeper, we found ourselves taking breaks much more often. Hiking a mountain is essentially one long uphill climb, and it takes a toll on the body. I remember one time in particular when we had reached the last fifth of the hike and we had become exhausted. The trail had become all switchbacks at this point, and we could go for only maybe a minute at a time before needing a break. We'd rest for five or ten minutes, only to need another break a minute later. We were spending more time stopping than actually hiking! To this day, I am convinced that the only reason we all made it to the crest that afternoon is that it was too late to turn around—that, and the fact that our ride was waiting for us at the top.

So I want you to picture that full-body exhaustion as we make our journey up the mountain. You are tired. The path is long and winding back and forth. The crest is still a ways up above you, and your lungs are wheezing, your muscles are burning, and your legs feel weak. Feeling a little wobbly and light-headed, you instinctively stop and reach out to lean your hand against a rock. It is cool and solid and steady, and for a while, you remain there letting it hold up your weight.

This is one of the basic meanings of the word “to lean” that is used in Psalm 71:6, “Upon you I have leaned from my birth.” It is the Hebrew word “*samak*” (סמך), and it can have the meaning of putting your weight on something to hold you up.¹ Sometimes in our life, when we are too exhausted or too beaten down to keep going, we need to just lean.

1 Brown, Driver, Briggs, 701-702.

Sometimes we don't have the strength anymore, and we need to be held. It is often said that in this life, "you win some and you lose some." But sometimes it can feel like you are doing a lot more losing than winning—times when the bad news all piles up at once. Maybe you are smiling on the outside and trying to keep a brave face in public, but on the inside, privately, you are breaking down or crying out. In those moments, the scripture witnesses that we can lean on God, for God is a rock. The psalm says: "You are my rock and fortress... For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth" (71:3, 5). God is someone we can turn to in our times of need and know we won't be turned away. God is someone who can help us and support us, someone who is not overwhelmed by what overwhelms us. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." So when you find yourself exhausted on the journey up the mountain, lean on Christ, like a rock beside the path.

When my sisters and I were kids, there was a big granite boulder at the bottom of a gravel drive near our house. The boulder was about the size of a kitchen table, and my sisters and I used to love going down there to climb and play, crawling all over the rock and sitting on its top. It held a certain magnetism to us kids, its great big stillness inviting our wonder and imagination. I suppose this is what comes to my mind when I picture God as our rock. It is an image that speaks of God being dependable, strong, true, and reliable. It speaks of God's character and substance as being solid and right. A rock can handle whatever you bring to it without being moved or shaken. It remains the same. In our faith journeys, there are times when we need that rock when we need to simply lean against God, and there is no shame in doing so. It doesn't matter if you "haven't been going to church like you should," or if you "haven't been praying enough," or if you have never turned to God before in your life. The good news is that God is there, and that God does not turn us away. When we are walking along the path,

making the journey up the mountain, and needing a place to lean, God is our rock—so lean.

But this is the Mount of Transfiguration, and this is no ordinary rock. Because as you lean and begin to catch your breath and gradually become more aware of your surroundings on this path up the mountain, suddenly you realize that the rock is moving. The rock is alive. Compare it to one of those moments where your foot is bumping up against something under a table, and suddenly to your surprise, it turns out to be somebody's foot or leg. So it is with the rock. As you are resting there, you suddenly realize that the rock on which you are leaning is warm. Not hard and smooth, but wooly. The rock is the head of an animal. A lamb!

You see, the second way the word “to lean” from Psalm 71:6 is used in the Bible is as a special word for what you do when offering an animal sacrifice to the Lord. In the Old Testament, if you were bringing an animal to be sacrificed, you would stand out in front of the sanctuary and *lean* your hand upon its head while its life was given. The idea was that doing so would connect your life with the life of the animal being offered. One example comes from God's commands to the people through Moses in Leviticus 1:3-4 (emphasis mine):

If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before the Lord. You shall *lay your hand* (סמך) on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you.

The idea is that the animal's life is given in place of yours, and in Hebrew, this act is described by the same word we have been studying, *samak*. So this is a second meaning of what it is to lean upon God. When we connect with God—when we reach out to God for support, even if it is just for a moment of need—we find that our hand is also connected with the life of Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God. Jesus offers his life as a sacrifice on behalf of ours. God knows that whatever our need may be

in the moment, whatever our crisis of the week, whatever our tragedies or troubles, our deepest problem is sin. Our deepest need is salvation. And that is exactly what God gives us: redemption through the cross. God is happy to give us support, I believe, but God does not want to simply leave us that way, unchanged. When we connect ourselves to Jesus Christ, it is like we place our hand on his head during his sacrifice on the cross to connect our lives to his, and to participate in his death. We receive the benefits of his life poured out in atonement. Sin forgiven. Guilt and shame washed away. Salvation and purification. His life given for ours. A real, fresh start and a new beginning. Acceptance and peace with God. All of this is ours in Jesus Christ. You see, when we reach out to God, God does not push us away. Instead, God makes sure that our hand is resting on the head of the sacrificial lamb so that we can be redeemed. When you lean upon God, you are not left the same. The rock becomes the lamb.

But we are not done yet in our journey up the mountain, because this is the Mount of Transfiguration, and this is no ordinary rock... or lamb. You see, as you lean your hand on the rock, beside the path of life, something more begins to happen. There is, presently, a strange reversal. The rock on which you had been leaning is now beginning to lean back on you. The hand now rests on your head! That's the third manner in which this word "to lean" is used in the Bible: as a word for anointing or ordaining. In both the Old and New Testaments, when a person was to be ordained or set apart for service to God, it was often done by the laying on of hands. When doing so, somebody would "lean" (*samak*) their hands on the head of the person to be ordained. As Presbyterians, we do the very same thing when we ordain church members as elders or deacons. As an example from Scripture, when it is time for Moses to anoint his successor, the Lord commands him: "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay [*samak*] your hand upon him" (Numbers 27:18). This is the third meaning of the word "to lean."

You see, when you lean on God, God leans back. Whatever our situation or whoever we are, when we come to Christ, we are not left the same but recommissioned to be put back in service. We are sent out. We are given a new purpose and a new mission to serve as ambassadors of Jesus Christ in the world. In his book, *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis writes about how when he was a kid he would sometimes get toothaches.² He knew that if he went to his mom for help, she would give him aspirin to help with the pain. But he often would avoid going to her until he couldn't bear the pain anymore because he also knew that after giving him the aspirin, she would take him to the dentist and he didn't want to have to go. God is much the same way. You can come to God to get relief, to lean on Jesus in your time of hurt or pain, and God won't turn you away. Jesus says in John 6:37, "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away." But God also has a bigger agenda. God will begin to change your life and take things over, making you God's own. Part of what God does in our lives is to turn us into mini-Christis in the world. We are made a new creation, recreated for the purpose of service in the world. That's how it works. It doesn't matter who you are, or how qualified or unqualified you may be. God has a purpose and a plan for you. God will use you as a part of what God is doing in the world: bringing about love, justice, faith, and compassion. This is true of all of us when we are found in Christ. We are given a mission and are called to start living that mission out. If you lean on God, you will find in time that your life is no longer your own—God leans back. God places a hand on your head and sends you back out for service.

Of course, there is one last paradigm shift when it comes to our journey on the mountain. One final seismic readjustment. You see, as you stand there leaning on the rock—the rock that is the Lamb through whom you are saved, and the rock that leans back to give you a purpose—you suddenly become aware that the rock supporting you is not just this boulder

² Lewis, 201-202.

beside the path but in fact the entire mountain upon which you stand, the very ground beneath your feet. It turns out, in fact, that every step of this journey on the mountain, from the beginning until the end, from birth to old age, has been upon God the rock. As Paul says in Acts 17:28, God is the one in whom “we live, and move, and have our being.” God is the ground for our existence. Every moment that you and I are alive, we live solely because of the grace of God that sustains us. Everything around us that we see in creation, likewise, is only here because God makes it so. This is true in the moments when we are aware of God and are in a relationship with God, and it is equally true in the moments when we are oblivious or even turning away from God. If God is not just the rock beside the path but the mountain itself, then that means there is never a moment when we are not being held up by God. This is the fourth and final meaning of that word, “to lean”: It can also be used to mean “to support, or uphold, or sustain.” And this is what God does for us. In this manner, we can all truly look back through our lives and say of God, “upon you I have leaned from my birth.”

And here’s the beauty of it—having God as the rock beneath our feet leaves our hands free. Free to serve. Free to lift others up. Most of all, free to raise our hands up high in praise to the one who has done great things among us. So thanks be to God. It is upon you that we have leaned from birth!

—Delivered on February 26, 2017 at the Verona Presbyterian Church

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What It Means To Me To Be Latino

Felix Rivera-Merced

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Felix is entering his third year of seminary in the M. Div. program with hopes of pursuing a Ph. D. and possibly ordained ministry. He was born in Puerto Rico but grew up in Southern California and came to Pittsburgh from the San Francisco Bay Area where he had spent my undergrad years.

ABSTRACT

The below work is a sermon prepared for a Chapel service at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The service was planned by Joaquin Anabe, Anthony Rivera, and myself, and centered on Hispanic culture and our experiences of it and of PTS as Hispanics.

SERMON

I want to start with sharing a bit about myself and what I hope you understand about what it means to me to be Latino: I was born in Puerto Rico, but I grew up in Southern California, away from any Puerto Rican communities but surrounded by Mexican communities. And in California,

I learned English, and I don't speak it with an accent, in part because I didn't feel a draw towards Mexicans. Mexicans aren't Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricans aren't Mexicans—they cook with beef & corn, we cook with pork & plantains, they play soccer, we play baseball...Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico play baseball, I don't play baseball...they listen to Mariachi, we listen to merengue—you get my point. Latinos are an ethnic group with a common language and common culture, but not a shared culture or a shared language. You see every nationality not only puts its own spin on things but adds its own unique history and melding of groups to what we hold in common. To put it another way, I know less about Bolivia as most Americans know about Australia.

But even so, these Mexicans around me were Latinos—and I felt tied to them somehow.

Because even while finding religion among White Evangelicals, I still knew myself to have a different perspective on things; in part because I'm brown but more than that—I'm Latino (which, by the way, come in many different colors).

Now growing up Puerto Rican, there were two narratives that I picked up from my family—my father in particular—that help me understand, as a Puerto Rican, what it means to be Latino. The narratives are the narrative of struggle and the narrative of amalgamation. To illustrate what I mean: this past Christmas I visited Puerto Rico and one day my father and I were walking through San Juan, the capital and gem of Puerto Rico, the former protector of the Spanish holdings. As we're walking down, he points at some gold painted cobblestones that we're walking over in the plaza and he tells me the supposed story behind them—supposed, because my dad likes to tell stories. But anyways, in our language, Spanish—the language of the conquistadors—he tells me that each cobblestone represents so many of *our* people (I don't remember how many)—my father was clear to say *our* people—that is, the Taínos natives, who were killed as a result of the Spanish who enslaved them to work the gold mines. But shortly there after

my father explains to me what he's explained to me since I was a little kid: Puerto Ricans are Spanish, African, and Native.

To us, as I understand it, Spanish is not the language of our oppressors, because we were the oppressors who brought it. Yet *we* were also the ones who died in those gold mines. And *we* were also the ones who were enslaved from Africa to work the sugar-cane plantations. And *we* were the ones who left poor hills in Spain to find new life on the poor hills of Puerto Rico. Struggling to dominate, struggling to survive, struggling to make sense of the mess of peoples we are; this is our story. I share this with you all in part as a sort of case study of what might be going on in the minds behind the trilled “r”s you hear here and there.

To be sure not all Latinos would think like this—some hate the Spanish more than others, some love the Spanish more than others—and my dad's a nationalist, he romanticizes everything; but in seriousness, every nation builds on our commonality differently.

But I also share this to witness to my faith in Christ's return to judge the dead and the quick. I believe that at the end of the age all the injustices my people have committed as well as suffered under, all the oppressions that *I* continue to participate in, will be overthrown and sent to the abyss and things will be made right. I share this because I believe in the resurrection and the life of the world to come. That all the beauty God has wrought through the struggles of our common and individual life will not be forgotten. The churches, the icons, the rosaries, the poetry and music, the plantains and pork, and the hopes and aspirations of slaves and poor farmers struggling together; these God will not leave behind.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it,

nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:22-27; NRSV).

The celestial city may be a bit away but the Kingdom of God is breaking in among us now, and so I lay before you just a bit of the glory and honor of my nation to share with you all, and to all who call themselves servants of Christ: Search. Search for beauty God has wrought in yours and your people's struggles. Search for your nation's glory and honor and bring it into the kingdom. To deny the importance of inclusion is to deny the nature of Christ's multi-cultural kingdom.

But let's be real: it's one thing to talk of the celestial city that awaits us at Christ's return and another to talk about our school. In the celestial city the nations aren't worried. They're not worried about their gift being overshadowed by others. They're not worried about their gift being forgotten. They're not worried about not getting into the gates. The light of the lamb does shine here—but just as in a mirror dimly—because it shines in us, in those still on the way.

We all get that diversity is good, we all want to be inclusive and active in the community around us and in the lives of those among us; we at least say we do. We know there is work to be done, and we try and we try—and there's been progress. But still, we don't pay attention to what happens around our fences. I'll let you know, a lot of minority students don't always feel comfortable here, and I don't mean that as a white/non-white thing; Joaquin and I did this in part because no one knows what to do with us. Recently, I was at an Interfaith event on race where participants were split into their racial categories—white and black. God forbid there were any Asians or people of other groups in attendance; I was cordial enough to quietly join the black caucus. And among the student body, I sense distrust on a whole mess of levels—not just race. We can love each other, as long as we don't bring the gift of our whole selves.

So, how do we keep the gates open? How do we walk by the light of the lamb here where it shines dimly?

What might it look like for the people of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary to actually search for its gifts, to search for and celebrate the people and stories God has given us and the beauty God has wrought in us. In Luke's Gospel, Christ, talking to some Pharisees and speaking about the kingdom, tells of a man who gave a banquet: he invites all he thought would care, all he thought to be worthy of table fellowship, presumably his friends or people who owed him the honor. But they didn't come; they didn't see it as a big deal, a duty, or anything worth giving up an evening for. So, the man, Christ, invites the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame.

And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled (Luke 14:22-23; NRSV).

This is it, right here: it is not enough to say we're inclusive but if we are to heed the evangelical call to bring people into the kingdom, to bring their whole selves into the kingdom,

WE MUST GO OUT!

Out beyond the black fences. Out beyond our own tables in the dining room. And Out beyond our own defenses and walls. What would it look like for PTS to become more inclusive? It starts with realizing the gifts God has given each us. When we realize how much God has gifted us, we not only grow a desire to share those gifts, we stop assuming those gifts are normal. That everyone should just 'get it' from the get-go or that everything else is just an add-on to what we have. I hope that PTS remains a Presbyterian institution; I hope that everyone who comes here leaves with more than just a tidbit about Calvin. But I pray that while I'm here, I can give a bit of myself as I've tried to do here. And I don't expect you to just take what I've given, just that I can share it before the Lord, before all of you. But then we have to go out. We pray to God to give us eyes for those we have overlooked. We pray to God to give us hearts to listen and

understand one another. We pray for God to give us a thirst to fill his house with people.

I was gonna suggest we start with finding the overlooked in our dining room, but I have heard so many people complain about our dining room: if you see a pattern you don't like, ask "why, why is it that way?" and don't assume you know the answer. Like any good evangelist, if we're trying and the people aren't coming, we all have to ask, "are we doing something to get in the way?" If we are, confess.

For there is no shame, no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus—the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, we're all invited. Amen.

—Preached on October 19th, 2016 at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's Hicks Memorial Chapel.

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POETRY

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Simplicity (for Daniel)

David T. Averill

Son, someday the mantle falls to your hand.
I was once a child like you are now,
Marked by water of the baptismal vow.
Please don't rush to grow up; time sifts like sand.

Live with wonder, exploring God's green earth.
I long to perceive the world through your eyes,
Clasping each and every joy-filled surprise.
I learn as you teach the way to rebirth.

True words: "Child is father of the man."
You child, teacher, the kingdom at hand.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. David Averill is a Doctor of Ministry student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in the Parish Focus that meets on the campus of Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida; Pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church of Winter Haven, FL; husband to his better half, Alesia Kuliashova Averill; and father to small children, Daniel, 2, and Amelia, 2 months.

ABSTRACT

This poem comes from a cycle of 47 poems written for Lent. Each poem is an acrostic of the word “simplicity,” part of a word assigned to each day by a “Alive Now!” magazine photo contest for social media. The second to last line is a reference to Wordsworth’s poem “My Heart Leaps Up,” which is the origin of the popular quotation, “The Child is the father of the Man.” The last line refers to Jesus’ exhortation in Matthew 18:3, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

God Speaks

Joanne Spence

In the longing of my heart
Quiet, quiet
I hear the still small voice,
Gentle, strong
The warm desert breeze,
Cacti blooming
My heart opens to the voice,
Yahweh whispers
“I have known you before you were born,
You are enough
You are my precious child
I have loved you before the beginning of time,
Breathe my breath
I hold all beings in my arms,
You are my precious child
Rest in my very presence,
Abide, abide
I am your sanctuary”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joanne Spence is a recovering social worker, yoga therapist, and workshop presenter who is now a senior at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

ABSTRACT

This poem was written during a week-long, intense yoga training in Tucson, Arizona several years ago. The focus of the training was applying yogic breathing, movement, and sound to address acute and chronic mental health issues. Each morning, we would do our yoga practice and meditate while gazing at the majestic Catalina Mountains. It was January; the desert air was warm, and the cacti were in full bloom—in stark contrast with the snowy hills of Pennsylvania. I was touched by God in a new way, and this poem was the result of that inspiration.

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