

THE COVENANT  
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May 2016

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## Comment

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*Hauna Ondrey, editor, teaching fellow in church history,  
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Our May issue begins with a contribution by Bo Lim, university chaplain and associate professor of Old Testament at Seattle Pacific University and Seminary. Lim’s article, “Exile and Migration: Toward a Biblical Theology of Immigration and Displacement,” originated in the 2015 Nils W. Lund Memorial Lectureship at North Park Theological Seminary. Lim reads Jeremiah 29:1–7 through the lenses of migration studies, postcolonial theory, and the contemporary refugee crisis, highlighting pastoral implications that emerge from these readings. He argues that the church must attend to the great diversity of immigrant narratives—biblical and contemporary—in order to better understand the biblical text and more effectively minister in a time of increasing global migration.

Recent NPTS graduate Ramelia Williams then surveys points of Covenant engagement in the civil rights movement, 1963–1968, at the denominational level and through two congregational case studies: Community Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and North Park Covenant Church in Chicago, Illinois. Williams’s important research does not assume these congregations were representative; their stories stand beside others of active resistance to integration that also inhabit our denominational history. Yet, as Williams concludes, it is worth recognizing that “the pursuit of racial righteousness, is part of the ‘DNA’ of the Evangelical Covenant Church.” Moreover, the dedication of a small group within the Covenant during the years of Williams’s study laid the groundwork for the pursuit of racial justice to be integrated at the organizational level.

In her case study of North Park Covenant Church, Williams references a 1963 sermon by NPCC pastor Douglas Cedarleaf. The full

text of that powerful sermon follows her article, transcribed and with historical introduction and annotations. Clearly systemic racism is not simply of historical interest. In recognition of this, Cedarleaf's sermon is paired with a 2015 sermon preached by Catherine Gilliard, pastor of New Life Covenant Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Gilliard offered this sermon in the wake of protests to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, August 9, 2014. The list of names has compounded since her preaching, up to Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, among many less-well known victims.

Cedarleaf's allusion to "black men...shot in the back" echoes in Gilliard's lament that "a response, a look, a walk, or an action taken too quickly could cost a black or brown woman or man their life." That this echo reverberates over half a century later, should convict and embolden the church. This past January, the United Nations declared escalating state violence against African Americans a human rights crisis: "Contemporary police killings and the trauma it creates are reminiscent of the racial terror lynching of the past. Impunity for state violence has resulted in the current human rights crisis and must be addressed as a matter of urgency."<sup>1</sup>

Two questions posed to the Covenant in 1963 remain as relevant and urgent fifty years later: "Is it possible for us simply to sit here and hope somehow that maybe we will still be able, double-tongued as we are, to talk about the will of God while we have nothing to say about...a shot in the back?"<sup>2</sup> asked Cedarleaf; and from a pastoral letter to Covenant congregations, adopted two days later at the 1963 Ministerial meeting: "In this Gethsemane of the church, shall we simply say, 'Let this cup pass,' without also adding 'nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt'? Or shall we cast all our care on him and take council with our faith instead of our fears?"<sup>3</sup> And perhaps a third is in order: will these questions remain as relevant and urgent fifty years from now?

The issue closes with a "Statement on Race and the Justice System" by North Park Seminary faculty, released February 2015.

1. [Preliminary report](#) of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on Peoples of African Descent following a visit to the United States, January 19–29, 2016. The full report of the United Nations Human Rights Council is scheduled to be issued September 2016.

2. Douglas Cedarleaf, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done Sermon," (June 16, 1963), Covenant Archives and Historical Library.

3. "A Pastoral Letter to the Churches of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America," *Covenant Yearbook 1962*, p. 208.

# Exile and Migration: Toward a Biblical Theology of Immigration and Displacement<sup>1</sup>

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*Bo H. Lim, university chaplain and associate professor of Old Testament, Seattle Pacific University and Seminary, Seattle, Washington*

The Evangelical Covenant Church is an immigrant church, founded by Swedish immigrants in 1885. At its centennial celebration in 1985, Krister Stendahl exhorted the denomination to maintain its immigrant identity as it moved into its second century. Twenty-five years later, marking its 125th anniversary celebration, the denomination yet again affirmed its character as an immigration church as central to its identity.<sup>2</sup> The Covenant's 2014 resolution on immigration opens with a summary of this identity, providing the foundation for the ethical discussion and exhortation that follow.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this paper is to provide a better understanding of the biblical phenomenon of exile as it relates to immigrant communities so that church leaders might better appropriate this biblical motif for ministry. After providing an overview of the biblical category of exile and related terminology, I examine Jeremiah 29:1–7, a popular exilic text, through the lenses of various recent methodologies.

Why do I choose “exile” in order to understand immigration? First, simply because I cannot do otherwise: I am an immigrant, and this is the

1. This paper is a revision of the lecture “Prophetic Ministry among Exiles: The Contribution of Asian and Latino/a American Biblical Interpretation” given on September 23, 2015, as part of the 2015 Nils W. Lund Memorial Lectureship at North Park Theological Seminary.

2. “Now, as Then, We Are an Immigrant Church,” accessed at <http://covchurch.tv/am2010-immigrant-church/>.

3. “2014 Resolution on Immigration,” accessed at <http://www.covchurch.org/resolutions/2013-immigration>.

context in which I do theology. Exile provides a biblical and theological motif to understand my own identity and vocation. The late Ada María Isasi-Díaz expressed this sentiment beautifully: “And I often continue to turn to Psalm 137 not to try to understand what exile meant for the Israelites and to learn from them, but to find someone who understands me!”<sup>4</sup> It is not a coincidence that I chose to specialize in exilic and post-exilic prophetic literature. I have found these texts to speak profoundly to my own immigrant experience.

Second, the lived experience of immigrant populations makes them particularly well-situated to read exilic texts for the church since they share common characteristics with ancient Israel’s experience of migration, as well as the metaphorical and theological meanings of exile. Finally, immigration poses tremendous contemporary challenges to our society and the church, and exile constitutes a prominent theme in theological and pastoral reflection today. Engaging the topic of immigration through the lens of exilic biblical texts provides an opportunity for Christians who are deeply committed to the Scriptures to engage in the most pressing issues of our day. For a denomination that self-identifies as an immigrant, Scriptural, and missional people, an understanding of the biblical exile is fundamental to living into its mission.

## **The Exile in Biblical Studies**

In the last three decades, two movements have dramatically reconfigured the landscape of exilic studies. First, scholars have begun to question the historicity of exilic events. For much of the latter half of the twentieth century, there was a scholarly consensus that the exile referred to the Babylonian exile that began with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE and ended with Cyrus’s decree in 539. Scholars focused exclusively on life in Babylon since, according to the Chronicler in 2 Chronicles 36:21, the land of Israel was desolate during this period. In 1910, C.C. Torrey made the provocative but largely ignored suggestion that, “The Babylonian exile of the Judean Hebrews, which was in reality a small and relatively insignificant affair, has been made, partly through mistake and partly by the compulsion of a theory, to play a very important part in the history of the Old Testament.”<sup>5</sup> In the mid-1990s, a number of

4. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “‘By the Rivers of Babylon’: Exile as a Way of Life,” in *Readings from This Place Vol. 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 150.

5. Charles C. Torrey, *Ezra Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), 285.

predominantly Continental scholars began to write on the topic of the “myth of the empty land.” Most notable is Hans Barstad whose 1996 monograph bears this name.<sup>6</sup> According to this view, the Babylonian exile never occurred in the manner described by the biblical texts, and life in Palestine did not undergo drastic change in the sixth century BCE.

While many reject the extreme position of Barstad, his proposal has led to a closer examination of the differences between the biblical record and actual historical conditions, as well as a shift in focus from Babylon to those who remained in the land during this period of exile. Barstad argues that if the exile did take place, only the political elites were taken to Babylon. Second Kings 25:12 provides warrant for this view when it states that the captain of the Babylonian army “left some of the poorest people of the land to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil.” The second movement impacting exilic studies is the increased contribution of social-scientific and post-colonial approaches. Increasingly the biblical texts are interpreted through the lenses of refugees, immigrants, and victims of trauma and hegemonic oppression.<sup>7</sup>

This recent research has made sufficiently clear that there was no singular exilic experience. To assume that all Israelites were weeping by the rivers of Babylon under duress from foreign captors is simply inaccurate. Neither should one assume that every Israelite was able to climb the Babylonian social ladder and influence the royal court in the manner of Daniel and his friends. What these approaches reveal is that migration, while impacting groups, affects people differently at an individual and family level. In addition, generations within families may have experienced the exile in markedly different ways. For the poor peasant, exile may not have meant geographical relocation but rather colonization by the Babylonian economic empire. For a Judean youth from a class of social elites, exile may have meant living in a Jewish enclave in Babylon and exercising a relatively free existence. These differences are expressed

6. Hans M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the “Exilic” Period* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996).

7. Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989); Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); John J. Ahn, *Exile As Forced Migrations: A Sociological, Literary, and Theological Approach on the Displacement and Resettlement of the Southern Kingdom of Judah*, BZAW 417 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); John J. Ahn and Jill Middlemas, eds., *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of Exile*, LHBOTS 526 (London: T&T Clark, 2012); Mark J. Boda, Frank Ritzel Ames, John Ahn, and Mark Leuchter, eds., *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015).

in the biblical literature. Some texts possess a deeply anti-Babylonian stance, such as Psalm 137, while other texts possess a pro-Babylonian agenda, such as Jeremiah 29:1–7.

Because of the wide range of Israel's migratory experiences, biblical scholars have deemed the term "exile" too general to accurately describe these events. The Old Testament's eschatological hope is not merely a return from Babylon but rather a worldwide ingathering of Israel. If one works backward and begins with this eschatological vision, then exile includes every Jew scattered among the nations outside of Israel. Viewed in this manner, the "exile" began with the Assyrian annexation of the Northern Kingdom in the eighth century, culminating with the conquest of Samaria in 722 BCE.<sup>8</sup> The term "exile" (*galah*) is used eight times in 2 Kings 17–18 (17:6, 11, 23, 26, 27, 28, 33; 18:11) to describe the Assyrian king's deporting Israelites to various regions of the Assyrian Empire and resettling Samaria with people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim. Neo-Assyrian political strategy was cross-deportation, the practice of replacing populations in one area with that of another in order to establish economically productive provinces across the empire.

This same word *galah* is used again in 2 Kings (24:14 [twice], 15; 25:11, 21) to describe the Babylonian exile of Judeans. Unlike the Assyrians, it appears the Babylonians did not employ cross-deportation. When Babylon did engage in mass deportations, it was centralized to the heart of the empire in Babylon. They kept local populations intact on conquered lands in order to secure tribute for the capital. If exile refers to the condition of Jews living outside of the land of Israel, it certainly did not end with Cyrus's decree for the Jews to return home in 539 BCE. Scripture and history testify to the fact that Jews continued to live outside of the Promised Land. In the minds of many who did return, the exile was ongoing because so many Jews continued to live in the diaspora among the nations, and those living in the land continued to live under the oppressive rule of foreign kings.<sup>9</sup>

This variation among the migrations of ancient Israel mirrors the

8. According to 4QMMT, the exile was initiated by the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and brought to completion by the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity of Zedekiah (4QMMT C 18–24, Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: the Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 2:801–803).

9. N.T. Wright has argued that the Babylonian exile was still in effect for the Jewish community living in the land of Palestine into the first century CE, and Jesus's kingdom preaching announced its end. His proposal has been met with much discussion, both critical and supportive. See N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Min-

diverse experiences of migrants today. Just as reading prophetic literature requires attention to the exegetical nuances of myriad migratory experiences of ancient Israel, Christian ministry demands that the church address the diverse experience of migrants and minority populations. It would be no less irresponsible of me to say that the experiences of all immigrants to the United States are the same—even those experiences within a single ethnic group—than to assume that the exilic experiences addressed in Jeremiah, Isaiah, Psalm 137, Daniel, and Esther are all the same. The experience of Swedish immigrants to the U.S. in the late nineteenth century cannot be equated to the contemporary plight of undocumented Latino/a populations in the U.S. or to the global Syrian refugee crisis. Faithfulness requires knowing the particularities of each biblical text as well as the particularities of each individual experiencing migration. To flatten the experiences and texts of migration into one uniform category is not merely an act of intellectual dishonesty; it is an unwillingness to listen to the distinct message of particular texts and a disregard for the unique ways people are impacted by migration. If the Covenant at its core is an immigrant church, we need to get beyond the kind of gross generalizations made about immigrants in U.S. political discourse and gain literacy on what actual migrants experience.

Migrations are typically categorized as voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary migration is often labor migration by which people seek better economic conditions. Forced migration, by contrast, is the result of war or enslavement. John Ahn has employed categories from migration studies to distinguish between the various exilic experiences of ancient Israel.<sup>10</sup>

*Derivative forced migration* results from geopolitical rearrangement. The conquest of Judah by Babylon in 597 BCE would be considered this form of migration (2 Kings 24:10–17). In this case there is no geographical movement; Israel remained in the land but lost their home due to foreign conquest. The post-exilic period, when Israel was allowed

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neapolis: Fortress, 2013) 1:139–63; idem, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 268–72; idem, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), xvii–xviii, 126–27, 203–209, 248–50.

10. John J. Ahn, “Forced Migrations Guiding the Exile: Demarcating 597, 587, and 582 BCE,” in *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of Exile*, ed. J.J. Ahn and J. A. Middlemas; LHBOTS 525 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 173–89; idem, “Exile,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J.G. McConville (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 196–204. Ahn goes on to provide the following categories of displaced persons: (1) development-induced displaced persons, (2) internally displaced persons, (3) refugees.

limited autonomy in their homeland by Persian authorities, may also be considered this form of migration (Nehemiah 5:1–19).

*Purposive forced migration* refers to people being forced to relocate physically at the hands of a dominant power. The events of 587 BCE when Jerusalem was destroyed and Judeans were transported to Babylon would fall under this category of migration (2 Kings 25:8–21).

*Responsive forced migration* describes people fleeing voluntarily to escape tyranny, oppression, poverty, and other threats to their security. Jeremiah's flight to Egypt with a group of Judeans in 582 BCE is an example of this form of migration (Jeremiah 41:16–43:7).

Ahn highlights significant differences in the social, cultural, and political aspects among Ancient Israel's experiences of exile. Exile and forced migration studies reveal that in ancient and modern times, people who experience migration may have to deal with varying challenges: maintaining one's religious commitments, particularly those that are practiced publicly; preserving one's first language while having to learn the language of the dominant culture; limitations on economic success in a foreign economy and political environment; challenges of inter-ethnic marriage and raising children who will be acculturated in foreign customs; preserving a concept of home; and limitations of food and diet in a foreign land.

In the remainder of this article, I will examine readings of a popular exilic text, Jeremiah 29:1–7, through the lens of migration, postcolonial, and refugee studies. This passage is well known for its instructions regarding how Judeans ought to live as exiles in the foreign land of Babylon. From each of these readings I will draw analogies to populations that are experiencing migration today, providing pastoral reflections on exile and migration. It is precisely through reading the biblical texts with and for migrant communities that the church can develop a biblical theology of immigration and displacement.

### **Jeremiah 29:1–7 and Migration Studies**

John Ahn reads Jeremiah 29:1–7 through the insights of migration studies and understands this text to be addressing the social context of 1.5 generation immigrants. Sociologists have observed that 1.5 generation immigrants are often deemed the forgotten generation because the focus is largely on the first generation, who immigrated as adults, or the second generation, who were born in the new land. In contrast to their parents, 1.5 generation immigrants are able to learn the language and adapt to

their new cultural surroundings. Those in the 1.5 generation typically immigrate in their early teen years and are often torn between self-images of their homeland and the culture of the new location. Viewed in this manner this letter is addressed to those who were able to make the trip to Babylon on foot as adolescents or pre-teens. Ahn believes Jeremiah 29:1–7 is the product of this generation who by 582 BCE would have reached their thirties and begun to serve in leadership capacities. As such, the text suggests a more positive experience of exile and represents a pro-Babylonian and pro-Judean sentiment, in contrast to other texts in the book that depict Babylon or Jerusalem in a more negative light.<sup>11</sup>

Ahn believes the letter instructs Judean exiles to create long-term ethnic enclaves in Babylon. He translates Jeremiah 29:4, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the *immigrants* whom I have sent into forced migration from Jerusalem to Babylon.”<sup>12</sup> In Jeremiah 29:5, the words “build” and “plant” suggest permanence, and the language in 29:6, to “take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there,” implies three generations of settlement in Babylon. Implied in this exhortation to marry is marriage within Jewish ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> Typically 1.5 and second-generation immigrants marry within the same ethnicity, whereas by the third and fourth generation, interethnic marriage is much more common.<sup>14</sup> Rather than a temporary stay or interim situation, Jeremiah 29:1–7 describes long-term projects: building houses, planting gardens, and benefiting from the land. Ahn surmises that the command in Jeremiah 29:7 to seek the welfare of the city would have been psychologically impossible for the first generation of exiles to obey since they experienced the trauma of the Babylonian conquest, the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and mass deportation as adults. He believes Psalm 137 reflects the sentiments of the first generation of exiles who weep for Zion and pray for vengeance upon the Edomites. Ahn argues that Jeremiah 29:1–7 does not directly address

11. In Jeremiah 2–20, Babylon is a place of exile and death, but in chapters 21–24 it is a place of hope and life. See Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile, a Theological Interpretation*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 44–68.

12. Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations*, 138, emphasis mine.

13. Ahn assumes the narrower definition of ethnicity as those persons sharing a common ancestry. See K.L. Sparks, “Ethnicity,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 268–72.

14. These observations would corroborate the circumstances described in Ezra 9–10.

this first generation; instead it is for their children who are more open to embracing a Babylonian existence. One-point-five generation exiles were to flourish as a people *within their own ethnic enclave* so that their children and grandchildren would be well-positioned to impact Babylonian society. In this regard, Daniel and his friends were the exception, not the rule for the 1.5 generation immigrant. Ahn believes Jeremiah 29:1–7 instructs 1.5 generation immigrants to operate largely within their own cultural confines and invest in their children so that they might impact society in a manner their parents were unable to accomplish.

I can vividly recall the response of a pastor of a large evangelical church when asked what he thought of all the ethnic congregations spread throughout Southern California. He replied, “Well, they’re not really biblical” because they targeted a particular population, and in his mind a “biblical ministry” ought to reach all peoples. I’ve spent a good part of my life working within immigrant congregations, engaged in conversations between first generation, 1.5 generation, and second and subsequent generation leaders on what it means to be faithful to the gospel in their context. I’ve often seen leaders from each of these generations frustrated with those of another generation because of differences in vision and purpose. Exilic texts such as Jeremiah 29:1–7 provide typologies for immigrant congregations to see that their ministries, whether they be ethnic specific or not, are certainly “biblical,” and that God’s people have always been an immigrant people, negotiating their identity and vocation in new cultural contexts.

### **Jeremiah 29:1–7 and Postcolonial Theory**

Steed Davidson is a Caribbean scholar who reads Jeremiah in light of postcolonial theory and interprets Jeremiah 29:1–7 as a letter encouraging resistance to imperial powers.<sup>15</sup> This mode of reading is attentive to the ways the Bible can function as a discourse of resistance or accommodation to the realities of empire. Davidson explores the possible political forces that bear upon the writing of the text and its ideological messages from a posture of marginalization. He believes that the term “exile” is a contested claim that is used in an ideological manner to evoke the inequities of geopolitical power and the resistance to hegemonic forces. According to Davidson, Jeremiah’s letter in chapter 29 functions at two levels of

15. Steed Vernyl Davidson, *Empire and Exile: Postcolonial Readings of the Book of Jeremiah*, LHBOTS 542 (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

discourse: one for the dominant power of the Babylonian Empire, and another for the subordinates, in this case the Judean community. This line of inquiry finds support in James Scott's observation that "hidden transcripts" are operative in power relations.<sup>16</sup> In these situations subordinates offer a performance of deference and consent before their power holders, all the while critiquing and resisting hegemonic forces behind closed doors or even in the same breath.

Davidson believes this phenomenon of dual discourses is found in Jeremiah 29:1–7. The letter directly addresses the displaced Judeans living in Babylon, yet according to verse 3 it is sent to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. So while the Jews were the direct audience of the letter, the empire was an indirect audience. According to Davidson, these dual discourses create an ambivalence regarding whose agenda the letter promotes. He then employs Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity of sameness and difference to negotiate the interplay of the multiple dialogues within the same text. According to Bhabha, hybridity can be a product of colonial domination and control, yet it can also serve as a strategic disruption of dominant power.<sup>17</sup> An example of this phenomenon in Jeremiah 29:1–7 is the manner in which home is redefined as Babylon for Judean exiles, and in so doing the letter encourages a colonization in reverse. Davidson interprets the language of building houses, living in them, planting gardens, and eating of its fruit in verse 5 as the creation of settlements. According to Jeremiah 29:1–7, those who have come under the domination of the imperial power are called to migrate to its very capital and, in so doing, destabilize it. Robin Cohen speaks of this migratory phenomenon as "to be in, but not necessarily of, the societies in which they settled."<sup>18</sup> According to Davidson, the exhortation to seek the welfare and pray for the city in verse 7, is couched in religious terms rather than nationalistic, and therefore functions as an act of destabilizing the totalizing forces of the empire.

I believe the same kind of political destabilization Jeremiah 29:1–7 encourages is presently occurring in the U.S. due to the increasing population of ethnic minorities, who soon will surpass whites as the majority.

16. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 3–4.

17. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 112, as cited in Davidson, *Empire and Exile*, 155.

18. Robin Cohen, "Diasporas and the Nation-State: From Victims to Challengers," *International Affairs* 72 (1996): 518, as cited in Davidson, *Empire and Exile*, 163. The

The popularity of political slogans such as “Let’s make America great *again*” demonstrates that the erosion of white supremacy in the United States is palpable. Just as the word “exile” is fraught with ideology, the terms “illegal alien” and “undocumented immigrant” reflect varying political and ideological commitments regarding migrants in the U.S. The continued growth and success of ethnic minority Christians and congregations in North America may be a faithful response to Jeremiah’s exhortation to settle in Babylon, destabilizing white power structures within the church.<sup>19</sup>

### **Jeremiah 29:1–7 and Refugee Crisis**

The late Frank Ames, who possessed a medical and health-science background, read Jeremiah 29:1–7 as a practical response to a refugee crisis. This approach places the focus on the physical and social trauma experienced by displaced persons due to war and political instability. Ezekiel 5:12 acknowledges that the majority of Jerusalem’s population will die due to their status as refugees: “One third of you shall die of pestilence or be consumed by famine among you; one third shall fall by the sword around you; and one third I will scatter to every wind and will unsheathe the sword after them.” Whereas attention has typically been focused on either those killed in the conquest of Jerusalem or those deported to Babylon, this approach focuses on the plight of the majority of the Judean population in Judah and its environs who live in the aftermath of war and foreign domination. Refugee studies provide the data to demonstrate that the greater tragedy to war is the displacement that follows. Ames writes, “Displacement weakens and kills, and in the long run may be more harmful than the conflict or disaster that caused the displacement. Bluntly, the aftermath is more deadly than the attack.”<sup>20</sup>

Modern refugee studies demonstrate that forced migration results in three basic outcomes: (1) a diminishing of resources and security, (2) increased morbidity and mortality, and (3) the alteration of social rela-

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similarity of this idea with that of the *Epistle of Diognetus* is striking: “They live in their respective countries, but only as resident aliens; they participate in all things as citizens, and they endure all things as foreigners. Every foreign territory is a homeland for them, every homeland foreign territory” (*Diogn.* 5.5; ed. and trans., Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, LCL 25 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003], 141).

19. See Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Rescuing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

20. Frank Ritel Ames, “Forced Migrations and the Visions of Zechariah 1–8,”

tionships and identities. The loss of individual, family, and community resources may be in the form of shelter, land, property, and domestic animals. The relocation to roads and encampments is markedly less safe than prior homes and villages. Women and children are especially vulnerable, and they make up 80 percent of displaced persons in times of war. Ames cites several studies that describe the results of forced migrations:

- In Iraq more than 725,000 people were displaced by sectarian violence between February 2006 and March 2007.<sup>21</sup> By the end of 2007, approximately 75,000 children were living in camps or temporary shelters.<sup>22</sup>
- According to a 2002 United Nations report, 94 percent of displaced households surveyed in Sierra Leone had experienced sexual assaults, including rape, torture, and slavery. In the 1994 Rwandan genocide, 250,000 to 500,000 women were raped.<sup>23</sup>
- Because of the loss of family and community members due to violence or displacement, these same households become increasingly extensive to include distant relatives, nonrelatives, foreigners, and adoptees. Because identities are socially constructed, displacement substantially alters the identities of individuals and communities.

Ezekiel's prophecy, "One third of you shall die of pestilence or be consumed by famine among you" (5:12), describes literally the experience of exile. The end result may be post-traumatic stress disorder not simply for individuals but whole communities. For this reason Hyun Chul Kim

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in *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration*, ed. Mark J. Boda et al. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 152.

21. Norwegian Refugee Council, *Iraq: A Displacement Crisis* (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2007), 7, as cited in Ames, "Forced Migrations," 150.

22. Karim Khalil, "Political Stalemates and Deepening Humanitarian Crises: Internal Displacement in the Middle East," in *Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2007*, ed. Edmund Jennings (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2008), 58, as cited in Ames, "Forced Migrations," 150.

23. Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, *Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace Building*, Progress of the World's Women 1 (New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002), 9, as cited in Ames, "Forced Migrations," 151.

and Louis Stuhlman have chosen to call the canonical prophets “Disaster Survival Literature.”<sup>24</sup>

Ames eschews psychological explanations of the text and instead interprets Jeremiah as a response to the diminishment of resources and security, increased morbidity and mortality, and the alteration of social relationships and identities. If the Babylonian deportation is viewed as a human catastrophe, then Jeremiah’s concern is to attend to the most pressing human needs of safety and security. Ames writes, “My conclusion is that forced displacement creates a need for extended families and inclusive communities that transcends ideologies of separation; in short, ideology bends to the pragmatics of survival.”<sup>25</sup> He believes Jeremiah 29:5–7 is a call to restore those very things that had been lost due to conquest and displacement. When read in this manner, any diaspora or missional theology implied from this passage must be secondary the the primary function of this text and can only be understood when read in light of its practical concerns.

For millions of people today, exile is not simply a metaphor but rather describes a physical and political reality. By mid-2015, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 57,959,702 persons were displaced worldwide and that 15,097,633 of them were refugees or people in refugee-like situations, and these figures continue to rise.<sup>26</sup> The 2015 photo of Aylan Kurdi lying drown on a Turkish beach helped humanize the refugee crisis. Reading Scripture as disaster survival literature became a reality for me when an older Cambodian gentleman enrolled in my class on the prophets. He had survived the genocide of the Khmer Rouge and shared his story with the class. He vividly recalled how one day soldiers descended upon his village, and in an instant he had to flee for his life on foot. He found his way to a refugee camp on the Cambodia-Thailand border where he would live for the next several years in squalid conditions and uncertainty regard-

24. Louis Stulman and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 1–23. See also the work of Kathleen M. O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011). Stulman and O’Connor interpret the text through the lens of trauma and violence, yet their approaches focus on internal, mental, and emotional trauma and its effects upon the literary imagination rather than the physical and social challenges facing refugees.

25. Ames, “Forced Migrations,” 159.

26. UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2015*, accessed at <http://www.unhcr.org/56701b969.html>.

ing his political status. This encampment was literally a “no man’s land” between the warring parties, with little political and military protection and thus regularly exposed to indiscriminate bombing raids. He was separated from his family and had no knowledge whether they had even survived the attack on his village. Eventually he was able to immigrate to the U.S. where he was reunited with his sister and mother. It was only then he discovered that his father had been executed by the Khmer Rouge. While he was glad to be in the U.S., it was challenging for him to live and work in a foreign land all the while missing his homeland and coming to terms with all the trauma he and his family had experienced.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have sought to demonstrate that in order to develop a biblical theology of immigration, the experience of migrants must contribute to the interpretive and theological task. The biblical exiles provide helpful motifs from which to develop this theology since these events mirror the experience of migrants in many ways. Given that as of 2015, 244 million international migrants live abroad and these numbers continue to climb,<sup>27</sup> the church must develop resources to minister to these populations. While the challenges of migration are daunting, the church with its history and identity as an immigrant and resident alien people, is positioned well to be a gospel witness to these people.

27. United Nations, *International Migration Report 2015 [highlights]*, accessed at [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015\\_Highlights.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015_Highlights.pdf).

# The Evangelical Covenant Church's Response to the Civil Rights Movement, 1963–1968

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In the shadow of World War II, the Covenant Church took an official stance against racial discrimination. The Annual Meeting of 1944 adopted a resolution that reads in part: “We believe that all men are of one blood, and that all discrimination, based upon race, creed or nationality, is not in keeping with the Christian profession and life, and further, that it fosters conflict and war.”<sup>1</sup> The 1946 Annual Meeting minutes explicitly linked the racial ideology of Nazism and racial discrimination in the United States: “The Nazis built their house of fury on a foundation of racial superiority, with its implicate of racial hatred. The Nazis are out of power but Nazism is far from dead.”<sup>2</sup> Between 1946 and 1968, with only six exceptions, every Annual Meeting issued a resolution affirming the equal dignity of all people and rejecting racial discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

Held in Minneapolis, the 1950 Annual Meeting passed a resolution on “race relations,” that stated: “We reiterate our unequivocal stand for Christian practices in race relations,” and, “We renew our efforts to bring our practices into line with our beliefs.”<sup>4</sup> In this article I examine whether denominational resolutions on racial relations were in fact

1. *Covenant Yearbook 1944*, 133.

2. *Covenant Yearbook 1946*, 165.

3. 1947, 1955, 1956, 1960, 1961, and 1967. David Nystrom, “The Covenant Commission on Christian Action,” *Covenant Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1987): 25.

4. *Covenant Yearbook 1950*, 202.

increasingly followed by action during the civil rights era. Focusing on the years 1963–1968, my study begins by considering broad denominational engagement through attention to the work of the Christian Citizenship Committee and to Covenant publications. Two congregational case studies follow. After briefer attention to Community Covenant Church of Minneapolis, I consider North Park Covenant Church of Chicago as an in-depth case study, enabled by extensive archival records housed at the Covenant Archives and Historical Library. Initially discouraged by the minimal involvement among Covenant congregations, the more I researched the more I appreciated the remarkable courage required to fight prejudice in a racially hostile society. My research bears witness to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the church and denominational leaders that defied the status quo and proclaimed through their actions the presence of the kingdom of God on earth.

### **Christian Citizenship Commission**

Annual Meeting resolutions did not emerge *ex nihilo*, but were brought by a commission that sought to resource local congregations and guide them in action. In 1944 the Covenant Church established the Committee on Civic Relations to mold a Christian mindset toward various matters of civility. The name was changed in 1948 to Christian Citizenship Commission (and in 1968 to the Commission on Christian Action).<sup>5</sup> The Christian Citizenship Commission would study and offer its opinion on suffrage, civil rights, international wars, political affairs, social ethics, and other important civic issues. The denominational commission encouraged the formation of congregational commissions and provided them with resources and recommendations. This commission also sought to connect with the civil work of other churches and denominations, representing the Covenant Church in ecumenical conferences (for example, those organized by Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America and the United Evangelicals) and reporting back to the Covenant in publications.<sup>6</sup>

The practical action of the commission primarily took place through congregational commissions established at their request and under their direction. At its inception, the commission recommended the establishment of a “committee on civic relations” in every Covenant church,

5. For an overview of this Commission, see Nystrom, “The Covenant Commission on Christian Action,” 5–35. See pp. 25–29 for Nystrom’s discussion on race relations.

6. *Covenant Yearbook 1948*, 178.

sending letters to each congregation with this request in November 1947. As the 1948 report stated, “Commission members quickly realized that no program of information or action could be implemented unless there were local committees,”<sup>7</sup> reporting that sixty churches had formed such a committee. The basic task of these local committees was twofold: (1) to educate their congregation about moral issues facing nation and community, and (2) to guide them in an appropriate response. The denominational commission pursued the same program of education and action on behalf of the local commissions.

**Education.** A significant component of the commission’s work was creating and compiling resources for Covenant congregations. This included writing a general manual on Christian citizenship as well as identifying existing resources on specific issues. The 1961 Annual Meeting approved the commission’s proposal that race be adopted as the “issue of the year,” launching a year of “denomination-wide study of Christianity and racial relations.”<sup>8</sup> In support of this, the commission compiled extensive resources and mailed these to each congregation:

To challenge Covenanters to better align their practices with their beliefs, the commission prepared and sent to all Covenant churches a discussion guide which defined the problem, presented perspectives from the Bible, the churches, and government, and suggested local areas in which these guidelines appeared relevant. Also included in the mailing were several studies by other Protestant denominations and a comprehensive bibliography on the issue.<sup>9</sup>

Prior to the Sunday dedicated to Christian citizenship in October 1966, the commission published an insert in the *Covenant Companion* with suggestions for the practical implementation of each of the 1966 resolutions. One of the 1966 resolutions “vigorously reaffirmed”<sup>10</sup> resolutions on race relations from 1962, 1963, and 1965, again charging Covenanters with pursuing racial justice.

**Action.** In David Nystrom’s assessment, Covenant resolutions on “race relations” show “development not only toward action, but also toward solidarity with oppressed groups, as well as a keen understanding

7. *Covenant Yearbook* 1948, 92.

8. *Covenant Yearbook* 1962, 228.

9. *Covenant Yearbook* 1962, 163.

10. *Covenant Yearbook* 1966, 196; full report 194–98.

of the complexity of modern social problems.”<sup>11</sup> During these years we find increasingly specific calls to action, focused on actively pursuing integration in all arenas, with an emphasis on housing discrimination. The 1962 Annual Meeting not only “reaffirm[ed] its previous forthright stands against racial prejudice in every form,” but also resolved *specific practical action*, “that the following practical implications of this position be implemented.”<sup>12</sup> The recommended actions included advocacy for voting rights, equal education, and the integration of public facilities. The 1963 resolution, “Race Relations in Neighborhood and Church,” not only asserted characteristically that “racial discrimination in any form is an insult to God and an offense to human dignity,” but also identified housing discrimination as the root of other forms of inequality: “The continued condition of segregated housing produces segregation of schools, churches, and community enterprises.”<sup>13</sup> The resolutions that follow include advocating for implementation of fair housing legislation and a call to Covenanters to “join with other churchmen in those states and municipalities in which fair housing legislation has not yet been enacted to accomplish such legislation.”<sup>14</sup> Even more directly, the 1965 resolution, “Concern for Racial Justice,” calls Covenant churches and individuals to “repent of the sin of racial discrimination” and to “*assum[e] the initiative* in integrating both our urban and rural congregations and their staffs, the faculties and student bodies of our schools, and the employees and residents of our institutions.”<sup>15</sup> We will see below how local Covenant congregations responded to these calls to action.

### **Where Is It Written? Covenant Publications**

The Evangelical Covenant Church is known for its commitment to publications and increasing the knowledge and awareness of its constituents by the written word. Thus, many of the denomination’s publications used the power of the written word to educate readers about the unrighteousness of racial disparities. The commission itself used publications to communicate with the larger Covenant its purpose (and initially extensive justification for it<sup>16</sup>), advocacy for congregational action, and resources

11. Nystrom, “The Covenant Commission on Christian Action,” 25.

12. *Covenant Yearbook 1962*, 247.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Covenant Yearbook 1963*, 229

15. *Covenant Yearbook 1965*, 222–23, emphasis added.

16. *Covenant Weekly*, February 20, 1948, 5.

for engaging specific issues, including racial injustices.

In the summer of 1965, Carl G. Lugn, pastor of Evanston Evangelical Covenant Church in Evanston, Illinois,<sup>17</sup> wrote an article for the *Covenant Quarterly* entitled, “Race Relations: A Community Profile and Proposal.” Lugn was active on neighborhood committees that were concerned with effective racial integration and the eradication of unfair hiring and housing practices in this near north suburb of Chicago. One of these committees commissioned a study in 1964 to assess the status of racial relations in Evanston.<sup>18</sup> The study found that “the total situation in Evanston might be described as one not of integration or segregation but of accommodation.”<sup>19</sup>

Lugn follows his summary of the study with several practical suggestions to further effective racial integration of Evanston. He advocates for integration as “of incalculable value.”

It is the primary way to stabilize a community. What so often happens is that when a Negro family moves into a neighborhood, in due time the adjoining white families move out. If this trend can be terminated and white and Negro live together, security for both groups will be realized. It is through social contacts that any race situation will improve. Civil contacts are important but often superficial. It is in the give and take of residential socialization that help is found. Otherwise the Negro remains in a ghetto and suffers gross indignities as a person. Through discovering one another as persons, understanding comes.<sup>20</sup>

Lugn makes a strong argument for his community to end the practice of white flight and blockbusting. These were regular practices of the day when fear of interracial community motivated white families to leave their established communities in droves.

*Covenant Youth Today* devoted an entire issue to the civil rights movement. The January 1964 issue was titled, “Negros on the March,” and its cover featured a picture of civil rights activist Andrew Young walking to

17. Lugn was a member of the Christian Citizenship Commission 1966–1971, serving as its chair 1967–1969.

18. Carl G. Lugn, “Race Relations: A Community Profile and Proposal,” *Covenant Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (August 1965): 3–8.

19. *Ibid.*, 6.

20. *Ibid.*, 7.

a church in Birmingham, Alabama. This issue published excerpts from Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," written while he was incarcerated there after peaceful protests and marches for integration. It also published photographs of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church after it was bombed by white supremacists, resulting in the death of four little girls. The photos include the church's headless Jesus stained-glass window, and a kneeling African American boy praying outside the church. Young's article highlighted the young people's non-violent demonstrations in Alabama, where he helped lead the non-violent movement.<sup>21</sup> He reported that the young people were arrested, jailed for days at a time, and would go home to rest and return for more demonstrations "with their minds on freedom."<sup>22</sup> Young's article depicted the steadfastness of the struggle for freedom. "The non-violent movement is rooted in our Christian heritage. It is based on a faith that the world is a part of God's moral order and that when evil is exposed, there are forces within the world that will seek to root it out."<sup>23</sup>

*Covenant Youth Today* published an article in 1965 written by a North Park Theological Seminary student who encountered African Americans at a hospital in his work as a nurse's aide. In his work there he changed the bedpans of mostly African Americans and worked with and for African American nurses. He was enriched by this experience of becoming intimately acquainted with African Americans and seeing them as individuals as opposed to a class of inferior people. He acknowledged the main difference as skin tone in a time and era when numerous studies were undertaken to attempt to prove that African Americans were intellectually and socially inferior to their white counterparts.<sup>24</sup> The same issue of this magazine ran an article entitled, "Race and Culture: A Valid Basis for Segregation?" This article refuted the idea that African Americans were genetically inferior, citing reputable scientific studies to debunk such a view. This article decried the notion that such claims of inferiority justified the nation's segregation and unfair treatment.<sup>25</sup>

21. Andrew J. Young, "Everybody Wants Freedom," *Covenant Youth Today* 10, no. 1 (January 1964): 2-5.

22. *Ibid.*, 9.

23. *Ibid.*, 4.

24. Everett L. Wilson, "Neither Easy Nor Naive," *Covenant Youth Today* 11, no. 1 (January 1965): 2-3.

25. Claude E. Stipe, "Race and Culture: A Valid Basis for Segregation?," *Covenant Youth Today* 11, no. 1 (January 1965): 4-12.

In order to paint a picture of freedom from a different cultural perspective, the Fourth of July 1965 issue of *Covenant Youth Today* told the story of the African American experience. Phyllis Reynolds Taylor contributed to the issue four fictional but realistic short stories in an article entitled, "Four Vignettes from an American Family Tree." The stories narrate generations of an African American family, beginning in 1791 with the capturing of African natives on the shores of Africa. The stories follow this family from the horrors of being disbanded on American slave auction blocks to a granddaughter enrolling at a newly integrated college in 1964.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to informing Covenanters on the issue of racial justice, publications served to publicize Covenant involvement in civil rights action. In the April 9, 1965 *Companion*, editor Carl Philip Anderson reported on Covenant participation in the historical voting rights march of 1965 led by Martin Luther King Jr. from Selma, Alabama, to the state capitol in Montgomery. North Park Covenant Church (Chicago) was represented by J. Melburn Soneson, Fredrick Holmgren, Calvin Katter Jr., James Pohl, Elder Lindahl, Earl Dahlstrom, and his son Konrad Dahlstrom. Douglas Park Covenant Church (Chicago) was represented by Vernon Wettersten. Winnetka Covenant Church (Wilmette, Illinois) was represented by John Hanson. Evangelical Covenant Church of Clay Center, Kansas, was represented by James Bowman. The group was instructed in the unorthodox rules of non-violent engagement that included walking with their arms at their side and a strict order to not aid their neighbor if they were assaulted. As the Covenanters sang the freedom songs with their fellow marchers, they reported that many were moved to tears. Some expressed their surprise at the warmth and welcome of the African Americans who did not seem to harbor anger for white southerners in spite of the heinous ways they were being treated. The Covenanters got a taste of this treatment as white protesters of the march spit on marchers and shouted vilifying remarks.<sup>27</sup>

26. Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, "Four Vignettes from an American Family Tree," *Covenant Youth Today* 11, no. 3 (July 4, 1965): 2-7.

27. Carl Philip Anderson, ed., "Covenanters Share in Alabama March," *Covenant Companion* 54, no. 8 (April 9, 1965): 18-19. The 1964 Annual Meeting had passed a resolution on "Direct Involvement in Seeking Racial Justice," affirming "the rightness of orderly and non-violent means of combating injustice toward racial minorities," *Covenant Yearbook 1964*, 233. This affirmation was repeated the following year within a resolution on "concern for racial justice," *Covenant Yearbook 1965*, 223.

Ben Bankson, managing editor for the *Covenant Companion*, reported on the Ninth Quadrennial Convention of Covenant Youth of America in 1966.<sup>28</sup> The theme of the conference was “Knowing an Adequate God in Today’s World.” The goal of that year’s event was to convince the 362 youth gathered that they had the power and the responsibility to make a difference in this issue. The program included plays, poems, speakers (even inviting Martin Luther King Jr. to speak, though he declined), panelists, cartoon strips, singing, and discussion time, providing the youth ample opportunity to consider their role in society. The gathered youth unanimously approved a resolution affirming the need for a Christian response to the societal ills of discrimination in employment, unequal educational opportunities, unfair housing practices, and any other practices that denied the humanity and respectability of any person in the sight of God and humanity. The resolution voiced the youths’ support for “any Christian efforts to provide for the equal opportunities of minority groups which our nation’s history has tacitly denied” along with their intentions “to work in whatever way [they could] in the area of equal opportunity, that as a body we support the efforts of Christians throughout the country in this cause.”<sup>29</sup> This unanimously accepted resolution endeavored to involve Covenant youth in the struggle for the equal rights of minority populations across the country. The youth additionally raised for the Department of Christian Education \$1,214 in cash with an additional \$6,398 pledged, a sum of over \$54,400 in today’s economy.<sup>30</sup> The money was given with the condition that the department create a list of “ways to get involved.”<sup>31</sup>

As recognized by the Covenant Commission on Christian Citizenship, resolutions would be effective only as “interpreted and carried out by the local committees.”<sup>32</sup> For this reason I surveyed two congregations located in cities that, historically, have served a prominent role in the denomination: Community Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and North Park Covenant Church in Chicago, Illinois.

28. Ben Bankson, “Involvement: Ben Bankson Reports the Covenant Youth Quadrennial,” *Covenant Companion* 55, no. 19 (Sept 23, 1966): 4–6, 24–25.

29. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

30. CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

31. *Ibid.*, 5.

32. *Covenant Yearbook 1962*, 163.

## Community Covenant Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota

In October 1966, the near north side neighborhood of Minneapolis, Minnesota, experienced racially motivated rioting, following a summer of racial tension in the community. Community Covenant Church (CCC) expressed its stance on the racially induced violence by planting a “brotherhood tree.” This multiracial church and neighborhood came together for this momentous occasion that attracted the city’s mayor, Arthur Naftalin, as well as Harry Davis, the local chapter president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The tree was placed in the ground by a twelve-year-old African American boy.<sup>33</sup> The church’s pastor, Arnold Bolin, spoke at the event, stating, “It is highly inappropriate and undesirable that we should see one another in any terms other than human being.”<sup>34</sup> He concluded his speech by urging those gathered to “nurture and tend to the growth of brotherhood and goodwill.”<sup>35</sup>

CCC identified itself as a “multi-racial church . . . not a ‘black church,’ not a ‘white church,’ but a group where skin is no consideration, where all work for a united community.”<sup>36</sup> CCC sought to live this out in their congregational life. In June 1966, seven African American children from the CCC congregation spent a week on a farm in Iowa where they were hosted by congregants of Albert City Covenant Church. One purpose of the endeavor was “to provide a basis for better understanding between two completely differently cultures within our society.”<sup>37</sup> Many in the town of Albert City had never had a conversation with a person of color prior to these encounters and, according to the article, two times the question, “Can they talk English?” was asked. The same project was adopted by Vista Covenant Church in New Richland, Minnesota. This program was well-received by the rural churches and the inner-city children, encouraging mutual understanding across cultures.<sup>38</sup>

33. Carl Philip Anderson, ed., “Symbolic Tree Is Planted,” *Covenant Companion* 55, no. 19 (September 23, 1966): 22.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. Community Covenant Church, “What Do You Know about Community Covenant Church,” Chicago, IL Covenant Archives and Historical Library (Record Series 8/11/14/56, n.d.).

37. Carl Philip Anderson, ed., “City Youth Visit Country: Cooperative Venture Is Met with Enthusiasm,” *Covenant Companion* 55, no. 15 (July 29, 1966): 14–15.

38. *Ibid.*

In the initial days of its ministry, CCC served mostly children through its Sunday school and afterschool programming. On one occasion, the junior-high students had a discussion about the civil rights movement and collectively wrote a letter of appreciation to Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>39</sup> Bolin worked to move his church staff and members into the community, reasoning, “Just think how much more advantageous it would be if the youngster’s Sunday-school teacher were also his neighbor.”<sup>40</sup>

Bolin wanted to share his love for inner-city integrated ministry with the Covenant Ministerium. He hosted an event where Twin Cities Covenant pastors were served a meal typically eat by low-income residents of the community. The purpose of this event was to raise awareness of the effects of racial prejudice, unfair employment practices, and unemployment as it related to the daily life condition of those suffering these oppressions. During this event the pastors listened to the personal narrative of a local African American woman who had recently migrated north to raise her nine children. She expounded on the differences she experienced living in the South versus the North, sharing her lived experience with those in attendance.<sup>41</sup>

### **North Park Covenant Church, Chicago, Illinois**

Through his ministry as pastor of North Park Covenant Church (1955–1970), Douglas Cedarleaf served a prophetic role in the church, daring to live the Gospel truth that all humanity is created equal and deserves to be treated with dignity. On June 16, 1963, Cedarleaf preached a sermon to his congregation based on one verse of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done” (Matthew 6:10).<sup>42</sup> Cedarleaf challenged his congregation, along with Covenant pastors from across the nation who were in Chicago for a workshop, with the convicting question, “Do you really want God’s kingdom?” He followed with prophetic utterance:

Friend, is God on the side of Martin Luther King? Is God on the side of Bull Conner? Is God on the side of the Supreme

39. Carl Philip Anderson, ed., “In Search of the One: Minneapolis Church Serves the Inner City,” *Covenant Companion* (June 18, 1965): 4–6.

40. *Ibid.*, 6.

41. Northwest Conference, “Ministers Receive a Glimpse of Poverty,” *Covenant Companion, Northwest Conference Edition* 54, no. 26 (December 17, 1965): 1.

42. [Editor’s note: A transcription of Cedarleaf’s June 16, 1963, sermon is printed in this issue, [pp. 33–44.](#)]

Court? ... Is the cry of the Negro for justice in this community a cry that is actuated by God Almighty, and will God Almighty answer his prayer? Is it possible for us simply to sit here and hope somehow that maybe we will still be able, double tongued as we are, to talk about the will of God while we have nothing to say about sharp fanged dogs? While we have nothing to say about fire hoses turned on children? While we have nothing to say about a [gun] shot in the back? Which side are you on? ... I am asking at this moment for you to decide in your own soul, whether or not you can mix up God's will with our keeping one-tenth of our population submerged. Do you want to pray with me that God will sharpen the teeth of Bull Conner's dogs? Do you want to pray with me that more black men will be shot in the back? ... You have the right to do this and defy the law of God, if this is your wish. But no one has ever defied the law of God and found peace.<sup>43</sup>

These powerful words of judgment called civil rights era Christians to discern the depth with which they wanted to embrace and respond to the truth of God's word. Cedarleaf's prophetic words were key in effecting transformation in the hearts of his congregants and leading many to advocate proactively for justice.

In the same sermon, Cedarleaf suggested a creative idea for advocating racial harmony. He suggested his congregants wear badges, made of black and white cloth, with a gold pin as the fastener. The black and white pieces of cloth sewn together would represent the communion of blacks and whites in the kingdom of God. The gold pin would represent the golden rule's centrality to one's life practices. This badge would be a symbol to African American citizens that its wearer desired to follow God's will and supported equal rights for all American citizens. Cedarleaf also led the church in sponsoring a Haitian family of six. Cedarleaf did not paint a rosy picture for those who would decide to pursue justice in this way. He warned his congregants of the resistance this bold declaration would invite from their neighbors and friends: "you're gonna have to answer these neighbors around here who say that stupid church is bringing dark

43. Douglas Cedarleaf, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done Sermon," Covenant Archives and Historical Library (Chicago: North Park Covenant Church, June 16, 1963).

people into this community.”<sup>44</sup> Despite the intolerance of fellow white citizens, he urged his congregants to choose to do the will of God.

This congregation was consistently challenged by their beloved pastor to stand on the side of racial righteousness and to show it with their lives. On January 22, 1967, NPCC experienced cross-cultural worship. Sixty members of NPCC traveled to the South Side of Chicago to engage in what they described as “a sub-culture quite different from ours.”<sup>45</sup> They were guests of the First Baptist Church at 935 East 50th Street, an “integrated” church. A sacred interracial moment highlighted by the Covenanters was “watching two little girls drinking fruit juice together—one a bright-eyed, dark-skinned youngster from First Baptist and the other a bright-eyed, fair-skinned girl from North Park.”<sup>46</sup> After the church service, these sixty guests were welcomed into the homes of the congregants for dinner and fellowship. Three weeks later First Baptist congregants traveled north for fellowship, as members of NPCC reciprocated the hospitality they had received.<sup>47</sup>

Having a new perspective of the African American plight after spending time building community with their black brothers and sisters, the NPCC congregation was able to offer an empathic response to their suffering. At the end of that same year, the NPCC congregation was moved when they heard about the devastation of the Hester family. This African American family’s newly purchased home at 10528 South Forest Avenue in Chicago was bombed weeks before Christmas. Fifty-one members of the congregation were moved by this news to donate money to offer restitution to this family. December 11, 1967, Cedarleaf and his wife, Carolyn, delivered the \$500 gift, today’s equivalent of over \$3,500.<sup>48</sup>

NPCC built a culture of using finances to support causes they felt strongly about. NPCC donated funds to the racially integrated Oakdale Covenant Church on Chicago’s South Side, which the church used to hire a part-time minister and build a Christian education library.<sup>49</sup> Paul Erick-

44. Ibid.

45. *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, February 1967, p. 2; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 6, Folder 1.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, January 1968, p. 8; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 6, Folder 1. CPI Inflation Calculator.

49. Incidentally, the minister hired was Pastor Cedarleaf’s daughter, Jeannine Cedarleaf.

son, a member of NPCC and on staff as youth counselor while attending seminary at North Park, resigned his position at NPCC to serve Oakdale and continued to serve as a bridge between the two congregations. He would write in the NPCC newsletter, "The Oakdale church is one of the very few in the Covenant denomination where a racially integrated group of Christians is working together in harmony and devotion." Robert L. Erickson, Central Conference superintendent at the time, saluted NPCC for their care and financial support of the Oakdale congregation that was on the front lines of the struggle for racial reconciliation.<sup>50</sup> Erickson, in speaking about Oakdale, stated, "this congregation . . . has faced the racial problem in a very realistic and constructive way."<sup>51</sup>

In addition to building community with African Americans and giving benevolent offerings, NPCC was also active in providing educational opportunities to better understand racism and African American people as a people. They offered a special series of adult Sunday-school classes that addressed issues of daily Christian living, one of which was entitled, "Towards Racial Redemption."<sup>52</sup> The NPCC library also exemplified the congregation's genuine concern for eradication of the racial tension of their contemporary society. It contained books such as, *Call Me Neighbor, Call Me Friend* by Philip A. Johnson, which analyzed the integration of the Park Manor neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. The library also contained, *Mandate for White Christians* by Kyle Haselden, which also spoke to the racial crisis of the day.<sup>53</sup> The church encouraged its members to be educated about this issue in order to decide for themselves where they stood.<sup>54</sup>

The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. stimulated many dialogues about race and power. To further educate the congregation, an NPCC family hosted a viewing party in their home for the "What Do You Know about Black Power" 1968 summer television series. The weekly topics,

50. *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, November-December 1966, p. 5; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 6, Folder 1.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, September 1967, p. 3; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 6, Folder 1.

53. *Call Me Neighbor, Call Me Friend: The Case History of the Integration of a Neighborhood on Chicago's South Side* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1965); *Mandate for White Christians* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966).

54. *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, May 1968, p. 4; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 6, Folder 1.

televised on Channel 5, included defining black power, black power and psychology, black power and white racism, black power and black churchmen, black power and white churchmen.<sup>55</sup>

In 1965 the young adults of NPCC began a coffeehouse in the North Park neighborhood as a way to serve and engage the community in dialogue without the walls of the church being a barrier. Named the Broken Wall, the coffeehouse sought to be “a fit instrument through which Christ may ‘break down the dividing wall of hostility’ (Ephesians 2:14) which separates people from one another and from God; to overcome the barriers of class and status which come between both groups and individuals, and above all between church and world.”<sup>56</sup>

Even in this community project the church’s heart for healing the social ills of its day was manifest. On appointed evenings the community would come together to dialogue about various socially engaging topics. On one occasion the topic of discussion was race relations. A white Roman Catholic priest, an African American minister, and members of a civil rights organization gathered, along with eighty community members. It was noted at the time that this discussion night yielded full audience participation and the greatest debate the coffeehouse had seen thus far.<sup>57</sup> On another occasion, the Broken Wall’s evening hot topics series engaged a discussion on Chicago’s challenges with racial integration. Hal Freeman, director of housing and community services for the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, was invited to speak to the community at the coffeehouse, “to discuss the integration problem in Chicago.”<sup>58</sup>

This coffeehouse, an outgrowth of NPCC’s socially minded ministry, displayed the church’s commitment to live the truth of the gospel in their neighborhood. The Broken Wall, in its short life, was able to provide a space for theological dialogue on civil and human rights.

In 1955, at the direction of the denomination, NPCC started a Christian citizenship committee. The committee invited NPCC members to

55. *Ibid.*, 11.

56. North Park Covenant Church, “Proposed Revised Constitution,” Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 5, Folder 2.

57. Carl Philip Anderson, ed., “Coffee and...,” *Covenant Companion* (October 8, 1965): 14–15, 26.

58. *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, February 1966, p. 5; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 6, Folder 1.

participate in the betterment of their local community, city, and nation. From 1963 to 1968 NPCC's, committee focused primarily on fair housing and equal educational opportunities for all, in partnership with the North River Commission (NRC). The NRC was established in 1962 as a community development partnership of North Park College and Theological Seminary, Swedish Covenant Hospital, and the National Bank of Albany Park.<sup>59</sup> With the NRC, NPCC helped lay the foundation for a smooth transition when the area's high schools, Von Steuben and Roosevelt, finally integrated, and calmed fears about neighborhood integration.

In 1968, the church sent a letter of support to the Chicago Board of Education, encouraging and supporting their efforts to integrate public schools in the North Park neighborhood by busing students from lower income areas. NPCC's committee held a Christian citizenship service on April 2, 1967, and invited non-discriminatory housing activist Edward Holmgren, executive director of the Leadership Council for Open Housing in Metropolitan Chicago, to speak. A panel discussion with Holmgren and representatives from other community organizations ensued after the service. This dialogue centered on the negative effects suffered by people of color due to poor race relations, unfair housing initiatives, and unjust housing practices.<sup>60</sup> In order to address housing discrimination, the committee offered the congregation an opportunity to support the "good neighbor pledge," which meant that they would allow people of color to live on their block or in their neighborhood. This presentation saw a 33 percent response from the congregation in February 1968, with more than 250 members positively responding to the pledge. This support led to the formation of a community organization that would advocate for equal housing in the North Park neighborhood.<sup>61</sup>

After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the committee sponsored a discussion to hear from the perspective of an African American activist about the violence and riots that occurred as a result. Around

59. Still in operation, now with over 100 organizations in membership, focused on work of business development, education, affordable housing, community development, and environment for Northwest Chicago. <http://northrivercommission.org>.

60. *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, April 1967, p. 3; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 6, Folder 1.

61. North Park Covenant Church, "Annual Reports 1968," p. 11; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 10, Folder 1.

the same time the congregation contributed a special offering of \$168 (today's equivalent of \$1,155) to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.<sup>62</sup> NPCC's committee was motivated by and responded to the denomination's commitment to racial reconciliation across the nation communicated through resolutions passed at the 1968 Central Conference annual meeting. Reprinted in the congregational newsletter, the resolutions read in part:

Whereas the Scriptures call upon us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only, and whereas we are likewise instructed that faith is to work itself out in love, and whereas our nation faces many crises in its domestic affairs, particularly the racial revolution with its components of inadequate housing, employment, education, law enforcement, political representation, and other responsible factors, we therefore resolve to confess and renounce all racism in ourselves and in our churches and other social structures of which we are apart... and to increase our contact with areas of tension through specific programs.... We also resolve to become involved in power structures by which we can bring influence to bear upon the problems that contribute to the urban crisis... and we resolve to so order our churches that effective, redemptive, and loving action on these and other issues may become as regular and effective a part of their corporate lives and the lives of their members as the preaching of the Word.<sup>63</sup>

In September 1968, the pulpit hour was used to highlight issues of race and poverty with an opportunity for the congregation to receive additional information and contribute financially to effect change in these citywide crisis areas.

## Conclusion

The Evangelical Covenant Church was active in its efforts of pursuing racial reconciliation during the 1963–1968 period of the civil rights era.

62. Ibid., 22. CPI Inflation Calculator.

63. "Excerpts from the Report of the Resolutions Committee," *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, June 1968; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 6, Folder 7.

The denomination is nothing without the pursuits of its body. Thus, these pursuits were witnessed through the written words of its publications, the education and cross-cultural experiences of its congregations, prophetic preaching, and through the forward-thinking leadership of church boards and citizenship committees. Instead of merely talking about acting, this research has revealed that churches and leaders actively responded to the call of the gospel to work together and live in community without regard for differences in language, culture, or race.

The ECC currently offers the Sankofa program, which facilitates a journey back to the night season of the civil rights era so that we might move forward with greater insight and freedom. This research suggests that our current efforts of racial righteousness were incubated in the womb of a denomination that saw the gestation of the evil of racism in American society and sought to abort it with passionate pursuit of justice on behalf of people of color. This work, the pursuit of racial righteousness, is part of the “DNA” of the Evangelical Covenant Church. It is a natural progression for the ECC to continue pursuing justice in these ways to bring the kingdom here on earth.

## **“Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done”**

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*Douglas Cedarleaf, pastor, North Park Covenant Church,  
Chicago, Illinois  
Transcribed by Jeffrey Hunter, annotated by Hauna Ondrey*

**T***his sermon was preached by Douglas Cedarleaf (1914–2000) at North Park Covenant Church (NPCC) in Chicago, Illinois, on June 16, 1963, two days prior to the 78th Covenant Annual Meeting. The year was weighted with significance for the civil rights movement. On April 12, nonviolent protesters—including Martin Luther King Jr.—were arrested en masse while marching to Birmingham City Hall. In the following days, high-school students continuing the protest were met with police dogs and fire hoses under the orders of Bull Connor, commissioner of public safety. This brutal aggression was televised, eliciting broad outrage and sympathy for the movement. Five days prior to Cedarleaf’s sermon, President John F. Kennedy had dispatched National Guard forces to support the integration of the University of Alabama against the opposition of Governor George Wallace. That evening, in a nationally broadcast address, Kennedy introduced the civil rights bill he would submit to Congress on June 19. In the early hours of the following day, civil rights activist Medgar Evers was assassinated in front of his home in Jackson, Mississippi. The March on Washington would take place on August 28, and the following summer the Civil Rights Act would be passed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson.*

*On the Sunday of this sermon, North Park congregants were joined in the pews by Covenant pastors gathered in Chicago for a ministerial workshop preceding the Annual Meeting. In a real sense, then, this message was delivered not only to the congregants of North Park Church, but to the Covenant at large. Two days later Cedarleaf would present to the Ministerium “A Pastoral Letter to the Churches of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America,” as*

*chair of the resolutions committee. The letter called all Covenanters to repentance for their indifference to racial injustices and to join “the vanguard of those who help break down the sinful barriers which separate us.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Prior to assuming the pastorate at NPCC in 1955, Cedarleaf had made the pages of the Chicago Sun Times and Time magazine for his leadership in resisting violent opposition to neighborhood integration as pastor of Erie Chapel Presbyterian Church in Chicago (1943–1948). While serving at NPCC Cedarleaf organized the neighborhood community toward housing equality and education integration.*

*The sermon is presented here with only slight modification. We recognize that despite both the pastoral and prophetic tone, some of the language—reflective of 1963—seems dated or even jarring fifty-three years later. In an interest to preserve historical accuracy, we chose not to edit the sermon to match the Quarterly’s current style.*

From the good news according to St. Matthew, chapter 6, verse 10, we read, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” It would be interesting to know how many voices have been raised all over the world in this particular prayer and in this petition this morning. Across all the barriers of race and class and denomination. Across the seas. Across misunderstandings.

I see in my mind’s eye an archbishop resplendent in his robes in an Anglican cathedral chanting the prayer. I see a Baptist pastor in Russia in a crowded church in Moscow praying together with his people, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” I see a bearded Orthodox priest leading his people in a little out-of-the-way Greek village. “Thy kingdom come,” he prays. An Auca<sup>2</sup> Indian stumbling over these phrases just recently learned. A Chinese Christian saying it secretly for fear of the authorities who are trying to wipe out all thought of God’s kingdom. I hear a Roman Catholic priest intoning it in Latin.

It circles the globe, this heart cry of the human race. What will it be like when God’s kingdom comes? Do you hunger and thirst after it? Do

1. The entire letter is worth reading and can be accessed through the Frisk Collection of *Covenant Yearbooks* of the Covenant Archives and Historical Library, <http://bit.ly/CovenantYearbooks>; *Covenant Yearbook 1963*, pp. 206–208.

2. The Waorani. “Auca,” Qechua for “savage,” is the name given to the Waorani by their neighbors. Cf. Kathryn T. Long, “‘Cameras “Never Lie”’: The Role of Photography in Telling the Story of American Evangelical Missions,” *Church History* 72, no. 4 (2003): 820–51.

you seek after it? Is your blood stirred by it like it's stirred by a new home or a new car or a new washing machine? Does your blood beat with it? Does it hammer in your temples sometimes late at night? Do you hunger and thirst for it like a man lost in the desert? Does God's kingdom—his rule—mean anything to you this morning? Do you believe that your final destiny will be with *this* kingdom? When all the rest of the kingdoms are shaken there will be only one kingdom, and this is the rule and reign of Almighty God who set the Pleiades in their spaces, hung the earth on nothing. Do you have any hope this morning? Do you believe there is any kingdom that will not be shaken?

Why doesn't God answer this prayer? That's what I want to know. People have been praying it for all these years since it first fell from the lips of our Savior. People in desperate straits, "O God, thy kingdom come." People dying under the oppressor's heel, walking in seas of blood. People who knew not which way to turn.

I remember a little old man in the slums [...] to visit him, someone said he was dying [...]. The faucet—you couldn't even turn it off [...] dripping, the dripping, as he lay [...]. Thy will be done [...] what it's all about. Your will being done in a place like this—how is it possible? Like the ancient Jews, I said, "How long? How long, God, how long?" Why isn't it answered with all these people, some eight hundred million of them in a grand chorus Sunday after Sunday saying, "O God, thy will be done. Thy kingdom come"?

Is it just for us? Are the people right who say it's dangerous to pray the Lord's Prayer because after a while people don't pray it at all; they just intone it? They just say a prayer. They get together on a beautiful Sunday morning and everybody is caught up in the glory of it and nobody pays any attention to what he is really saying. If Jesus Christ came in and said, "You really want my kingdom to come? Is this what you're after? You really want my will to be done in the whole world? In your life? In your job? In your home? Is this what you're really after?" We would cringe and say, "God, go away! This isn't what we want. Leave us alone. Leave us alone. We're comfortable the way we are. We've got everything we need. We live in the greatest nation in all the world. The kingdom of America is good enough for us!" Are they right who say it's best not to pray a set prayer because after a while the words and phrases go through a man's mind like worn coins until they no longer even awaken him to

3. Bracketed ellipses indicate skips in audio.

the marching truth that he expresses, all unknowingly?

Well, could I take a few moments this morning to talk with you about what this petition means? What does it mean, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”? Well, our Lord never defined this kingdom. He expected that the Jewish folks who had longed for this kingdom long before his birth knew what he meant by it. Very, very often in order to make it clear he used parables for the purpose of lighting up its central meaning.

The kingdom of God, what is it like? It’s like a sower who goes out and sows his seed in the field and some of it comes up and some of it is choked out and some of it is picked up by the birds [cf. Matthew 13:3–4, 7]. What is this kingdom like? This kingdom is like a woman who hid some leaven in three measures of meal, and the whole thing after a while was leavened [cf. Matthew 13:33]. What is it like? It’s like a thief coming at midnight [cf. Matthew 24:42–44]. You’ve read them, and so have I. What do all these add up to?

Well, in the first place the absolute declaration that though there are earthly kings, behind the earthly king is the one invisible King. It is God, the God who made the universe. Go out and tell your neighbor, the universe is not like a runaway train going down a mountainside. The universe is made by a loving and compassionate God. A God who stands against evil with all the powers that he can command. A God who loves the good. A God who takes pity on his poor, erring children. A God who calls them back, who calls [...] his only begotten Son on a cross. Do you believe that God runs it all this morning? [...] in his hands? That he’s got the little bitty baby in his hands? He’s got you and me in his hands? That when all’s said and done his will will be done, regardless of all the little dictators that strut across the stage as though they were able in their own hands to contain the destinies of men? Do you believe this morning and can you shout with gladness that God is the ruler, the ultimate king?

There is a second strand of truth in this kingdom. It is that there is a great day coming when God’s rule, which is now at least partially hidden, will fully be revealed. As one of the poets puts it,

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim  
unknown,

Standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch above his own.<sup>4</sup>

Paul declares it, “That at last every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [Philippians 2:10–11]. Do you believe that as we look at the strange, complex systems that men have devised, that someday there will emerge beyond the shadow of a doubt the evident rule of Almighty God?

There is another thing: that this perfect day coming is a day when God’s whole family will at last be together. That the genius of the Christian faith is not just that men are saved individually here and there and go their own separate ways, it’s that we are the sons and the daughters of God. That all of us are destined at last to be together.

Every Jew longed for this rule of God. Do you long for it? I think Branscomb’s definition is a pretty good one. He says, “The kingdom may be defined thus. It is a group of individuals bound together by a common allegiance to God who do his will and receive his blessings and await his righteous judgment in the world.”<sup>5</sup> The Christian believes that history, when it’s finally over and God the author walks out on the stage, we will understand then why it was he did this or did not do that. The Christian trusts God.

But you know, the amazing thing is this: that the people who waited for the kingdom, when the one came who was the only one able to so incarnate the meaning of this kingdom, they decided that he could not live. And so as the circle of hate closed round him more and more, they finally brought him to a cross on Calvary. Now the question I want to ask this morning is, have you ever felt that there might be some danger in your life that though when one speaks about the consummation of this glorious kingdom, it does [not] stir our blood? When we think about the way in which God has come to save us from our sins, we cannot help but feel that God must love us a very great deal. But when we ask why it is that the kingdom does not come, why it is delayed, and why God does not answer the prayers of his stricken people, have you wondered

4. James Russell Lowell (1819–1891), “The Present Crisis.”

5. B. Harvie Branscomb, revised by Ernest W. Saunders, *The Message of Jesus: A Survey of the Teaching of Jesus Contained in the Synoptic Gospels* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 41. The quotation reads, “So we might define it thus: a group of individuals bound together by a common allegiance, who do God’s will perfectly and on whom God pours forth his richest blessings.”

sometimes, even if you are Christian, if maybe you and I could be in the way? You see, what I am trying to help us decide together is if we really want God's kingdom to come. What I want us to decide together, if we can, is whether or not we are just giving lip service to this whole thing.

The prophets had some very serious things to say to the Israelitish people because it appeared to them that their religion only inhered in their mouths. "Your lips," said Isaiah [29:13], "they praise me, but your heart is really far from me." Jesus, knowing the danger especially for people like us, ministers, he said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord'" —notice the repetition— "shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, the great day that is coming, many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of iniquity'" [Matthew 7:21–23]. And this is evidently, I say, being said to people like me. People who earned their living by saying, "Lord! Lord!" People who earned their living, maybe, by doing many mighty works and casting out a few demons once in a while.

Doesn't it come to you sometimes with a terrible anticipation that we might really just be fooling ourselves? That when we come and sing all these wonderful songs about "Love divine all loves excelling"; when we say, "Take my life and let it be dedicated Lord to thee"; when we say, "Take my moments and my days and take my silver and my gold" —what if he said, "All right, this is what it's going to cost you to follow me." Wouldn't we turn tail and run as rapidly as we could for the doors?

The Apostle Paul reveals his heart to us when he says, "It concerns me sometimes that though I've preached to other people, I myself might be disqualified" [cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27]. Now our Lord recognized again and again and again that the supreme temptation of the Christian life was to talk about it, to make pretty mottos, to put it up on the wall and say, "Isn't that beautiful? Doesn't it just move your heart? Isn't that the most wonderful saying you've ever heard?" "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Isn't that a beautiful sentiment? I just think it's one of the most wonderful things that ever fell from human lips." "I like the Golden Rule, 'Do unto others as you would be done by,' and this would be a good thing to put up over my desk."

You see, I am trying to ask myself if I really care about the will of God at all. Do I ask anything about God's will when it comes to the matter of

what I should pledge to the kingdom each year? Or do I say, “Go away now, please, God, for a little while; I have a little bit of business to do here, and it would be much more convenient both for you and me”? When I am in a discussion with my wife that’s approaching what might be called an argument, do I say, “Come now, dear, we shall look to God and see what he has to tell us”? Do I really want to be objective? Is there any way of being objective except to call in he who knows everything about the situation? Do you consult God when you’re taking a new job? Do you consult God when you’re moving out into a new neighborhood? I talked with some friends the other day who moved out into a new neighborhood, and I said, “What church are you going to?” “Well,” they said, “we haven’t looked around for any yet. I don’t think there is any right close by. But we’re Christians. We’ll find a church.” They had moved out into the neighborhood and not even asked whether or not there were possibilities here for service of the God whose kingdom they sought above all else. Do you consult God about the use of your time and your energy? When you’re asked to serve on a committee in the church do you consult God before you send back a letter saying, “I’m just too busy”?

And let me ask you, too, because I’m inclined to feel that we had best raise this question at its sharpest. And let me warn you before I tell you what I’m going to talk about that I am facing this with you. That we’re all in it. That there is no possibility of any single person’s evading this question. Let me tell you that I am speaking to you as a friend, as a Christian brother. Let me tell you, I am not trying to dictate your conscience.

Let me ask you where God is in this whole business where one-tenth of the population of America is crying for justice.<sup>6</sup> Is God hearing this cry? Will God answer this cry? When they cry, “Thy kingdom come, and thy will be done,” will God hear what they have to say? And if he hears it, what will happen to the nine-tenths of us who feel either, on the one hand, that these folks should be restrained, or else we will *nothing* in the matter? We just let it go. We are just indifferent. We hope this big, bad ogre will go away. And it sounds to me as though the voice of God himself is thundering through the pain of these people, “You had best wake up, wake up, lest at last you shall be submerged in the wrath of the heavenly Father who will not allow one-tenth of the human beings

6. The 1960 U.S. census registered 10.5 percent of the total United States population as black. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), 145.

in this nation to be denied their basic rights!”

Friend, is God on the side of Martin Luther King? Is God on the side of Bull Conner? Is God on the side of Governor Wallace? Is God on the side of the Supreme Court? Friend, you who are a Christian—and if you are not a Christian this morning, you who are an American—you must decide this sooner or later. Is the cry of the Negro for justice in this community a cry that is actuated by God Almighty, and will God Almighty answer his prayer? Is it possible for us simply to sit here and hope somehow that maybe we will still be able, double-tongued as we are, to talk about the will of God while we have nothing to say about sharp-fanged dogs? While we have nothing to say about fire hoses turned on children? While we have nothing to say about a shot in the back? Which side are you on?

I want to point out to you that it was in specific instances like these throughout the Old and the New Testament where a person had a possibility of deciding which side he would be on. Joshua stands before his people, and he says the time is over for temporizing; you must come to a conclusion. “You choose this day who you’re going to serve. . . . As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” [Joshua 24:15]. Elijah says, “If Baal is God, go ahead and follow him, by all means follow him. If Yahweh is God, then follow him” [1 Kings 18:21]. The people who listened to what Jesus had to say had to respond. There was no way out of it. To be indifferent was to turn one’s back upon him.

Now, let me make things as clear as I possibly can. I am asking at this moment for you to decide in your own soul whether or not you can mix up God’s will with our keeping a tenth of our population submerged. Do you want to pray with me that God will sharpen the teeth of Bull Connor’s dogs? Do you want to pray with me that more black men will be shot in the back? Do you want to join me in prayer that the fire hoses be made ever greater in their pressure so we can mow down these people and put them back in their place where they belong?

Now if you choose this road, you have a right to do this and defy the law of America. You have a right to do this and defy the law of God, if this is your wish. But no one has ever defied the law of God and found peace. If, on the other hand, you want to say, “God, bless these leaders who have tried in every possible way they could by what appears to be, if not Christian, at least ethical means to gain the rights we all enjoy. God bless these people.” I want you to notice now I am not saying that the problem is a simple one. I don’t know how the former will be imple-

mented in the future—the side of Bull Conner. I don't know how the latter—the side of God—will be implemented in the future. There will be many difficulties, I am certain.

I was proud of our congregation the other night. We got a letter from Dan Ericson<sup>7</sup> who said, “We've got a couple of people here who are Haitians. The man has an MA from Columbia University. They want to come to the United States with their four children, settle down in a neighborhood somewhere, and see that their children are educated. We want you, if you will, to sponsor this family.” And the congregation said, yes, of course we will sponsor them, after we'd thought about what this meant in our community with dark people only coming in as domestics and workers in gas stations.<sup>8</sup>

But friends, there is more to it than this. You who are the members of this congregation, are you willing and ready to welcome these people when they arrive? They will be here as big as life, six people with darker colored skin than yours. You're going to have to answer these neighbors around here who say, “That stupid church is bringing dark people into this community.” What will you have to say? Will you dare to say, “Brother, it's the will of God. I don't know where it's going to end. I know this, that we have to, in every situation, take the responsibility and the problems that come along with it of being Christians, of following Jesus Christ. This is all I know. I am willing to trust God for the rest”? Or will you say, “Yeah they're a bunch of foolish n\*\*\*\*\*-lovin' Christians; I think I'll get out of that old church. They have really gone off the deep end.” Friend, this is what you're going to be asked. And you men, who come from different parts of the country, and you women, who sing these great songs about our nation and its freedom, are you ready to come to terms with this? Will you identify yourself in some way or other?

I've been trying to think about what could be done. And you know, the suggestion I am going to make now is so corny I almost hesitate even to say anything about it. But I've lain awake nights lately. I said to myself, O God, is there any way that—I'm white, I've got all these privileges—is there any way that I can show a person of a different colored skin that in

7. L. Daniel Ericson (1922–2012) was a Covenant minister and missionary who served in Congo from 1951 to 1974. At the time of this sermon Ericson and his family had recently returned to the United States on home assignment.

8. In 1960, African Americans comprised 3 percent of North Park neighborhood's 17,866 residents. Evelyn M. Kitagawa and Karl E. Taeuber, eds., *Local Community Fact Book: Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1960* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1963), 41.

this awful struggle I want to do what God wants me to do? And if you can imagine anything so crazy, I've come up with a badge—a badge of all things. As silly as a wedding ring or as a flag hung out. And I'm afraid that some of the people who wear this badge are going to feel that they're holier than other people because they wear the badge. And some people who don't say, "They really must be off their rocker going around with a badge hanging on them, trying to tell people that they're Christians and good people and all that kind of thing." But you know, the average person when he's faced with a problem as great as the problem we face today says, "Give me a handhold. What can I do?"

Write a letter to Martin Luther King. Pray. Become informed. All this is important. Are you praying about this problem? Do you want God's will to be done in it? Do you really want God's will? Are you informing yourself? Have you read a single book, one single book at this late hour in this situation? Have you read one single book that would help you decide as a Christian what is the right side to be on? The Bible first of all? And maybe some other book? *Segregation and the Bible* is a good book; get it for a dollar.<sup>9</sup> Have you discussed it with your friends?

But you know, I think the time has come. And because our own people here in the North Park Church have felt that the coming of the Boncys to the North Park community, this Haitian couple and their children,<sup>10</sup> may open a way for bearing witness to the fact that God is no respecter of persons, that these Christians are our brothers and sisters, too, I've wondered if it wouldn't be helpful to wear something that would excite peoples'—wonderment, maybe? I'm not going to suggest a yoke like Jeremiah wore walking around Jerusalem, a big, heavy wooden thing. I'm not suggesting that somebody best go naked like Isaiah did and try to impress these people with the fact that God's horrible judgment was coming down upon them. I just want to suggest that anybody who's willing make or buy something or other, a little thing like this. It's half black, and it's half white. The black and the white are together. They

9. Everett Tilson, *Segregation and the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958).

10. Roger Bony was a prominent attorney in Haiti who fled the country after refusing a juridical position in the regime of president François Duvalier ("Papa Doc"). Bony took a U.N. position in newly independent Congo (1960), helping to establish a Congolese court system following Belgian withdrawal. It was in Congo he met Dan Ericson. Roger and Emma Bony and their children arrived in Chicago September 1963 and become active members of North Park Covenant Church. In 1967 Roger Bony was hired by North Park College to teach French and Latin.

can't be taken apart if they're God's children. The black and the white are both the same size. There's a little gold pin at the top here. This would be supported on the garment by this little gold pin. And at least for the religious person, Christian or Jew, this little gold pin would mean the Golden Rule. And he's saying to anyone who looks at it, you know we feel that it's time to let a lot of black people know, who imagine that most of the whites are against them, that we want to do God's will. We believe that the Golden Rule is the fulcrum on which hangs the law and the prophets, "Do unto others as you would be done by."

How foolish can you get? If I had something more sophisticated to suggest, God help me, I'd suggest it. But in my honest attempt to say, "What will help people rise out of their indifference at this point? What will help us decide whose will we're going to follow?" I'm going to offer these to people. I don't have any now. I'm going to have to ask for some women to sew them up for me. My wife did this one. I think you could do about thirty-five or forty an hour if you're good with a sewing machine. You can sew it up yourself if you want—even a man could; I could in a pinch. It's really very simple. Would you wear something like this? People at the conference<sup>11</sup> will be asking you, "What's wrong with you?" Maybe you can tell them that you feel the hour has arrived where, with all its difficulties, I would like to follow God's will. Maybe you feel that you can't wear one, God bless you. Will you study and pray? And will you think? And will you help me? And if you've got any better idea than this, oh, I'd be so grateful for it.

Are we going to just sit still here? Until this tidal wave, maybe, of hate and lust and violence overflows us? Are we as a Christian church—while a good portion of our population suffers under the horrors we have seen these people suffer under, human spit, the fangs of a dog, the force of water—shall we just sit here until God in his mighty wrath shakes the whole world until nothing is left at all except those who believe in his kingdom and welcome it with joy and go into heaven with people of all colors and stations and all backgrounds, all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ? Do you want God's kingdom? Sometimes I hesitate and say, "God, God, what you're calling for now is above and beyond me." But this is why Christ came, I think. He came to offer the power of his

11. The 78th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church, held June 18–23, 1963, at North Park College and Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois.

heavenly Father through that Holy Spirit in which we find one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

If you'd like to help us make these things—you see I have faith that a few people would wear them besides myself.<sup>12</sup> One of my Negro friends said, "Here we sit in this restaurant. I think your idea's awfully corny, but I can't tell you what it would do to the inside of me if I came here, came into this restaurant where there are no other Negroes, and I saw a few fellows sitting at a table. I'd know then where I could go and sit down."

Friend, whatever way you do it—wearing a badge or saying a word or reaching out a friendly hand or just praying, "O God, show us some better way than any we've seen yet to follow Jesus Christ"—may we be praying together, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, here in this neighborhood, here in this community, in my family, O God, in my church, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

12. The minutes of the 1963 Ministerial Meeting suggest the outcome of Cedarleaf's proposal: "At this point, the chairman of the resolutions committee presented the revised copy of the 'Pastoral Letter' to Covenant churches. In an additional statement Mr. Cedarleaf showed a black and white ribbon affixed by a golden clasp, symbolizing the wearer's recognition of the essential oneness of all mankind before God, an equality interpreted by the Golden Rule—this being a sort of a 'handle' by which the average person might tackle the race problem so gravely facing the United States today. He proposed that these be made up and worn in our home communities all over the land. Many responded by purchasing and wearing the ribbons, in the expectation that this should result in many a fruitful conversation" (*Covenant Yearbook 1963*, p. 210). The NPCC June newsletter reports that, following Cedarleaf's June 16 sermon, several women "kept their sewing machines busy producing the 200 badges, most of which were sold to Covenant ministers and other delegates at the annual conference of the denomination. It is hoped that this simple idea will have a wide circulation." *North Park Covenant Church Newsletter*, June 1963, p.1; Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Record Series 8/2/10/23, Box 19, Folder 2.

# Watching, Not Waiting: A Sermon for the First Sunday of Advent<sup>1</sup>

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*Catherine Gilliard, co-pastor, New Life Covenant Church,  
Atlanta, Georgia*

**W**hat I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” (Mark 13:37). Today we begin a new year in our communal life as we enter the season of Advent. Advent is a season of reflection and expectant watching. The name “Advent” comes from the Latin word “*adventus*,” which means “coming.” Throughout the history of the church, Advent has been a period of preparation, as God’s people wait in hope for the coming of their long-promised Messiah. Today God’s people continue to observe this season of preparation, as we too wait in expectant hope for the coming of all Christ has promised.

As we enter into this new church year together, we do so knowing that God’s reign has already broken into our world through Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection, but it has not been fully realized. We experience the tension of living in a time when God’s kingdom is near, God’s kingdom is here, and God’s kingdom is coming. In this tension we heed Christ’s call to the church to be alert, watchful, and aware as we prepare for his second and final coming. Our emphasis in this first week of Advent is watching, not waiting, for the fulfillment of the reign of Jesus.

God chose to send Jesus into our world as we all enter it—as a baby. Christ’s earthly incarnation demonstrates a total commitment to our humanity. God takes on human flesh, is born to a mother who was pregnant before marriage, and is raised in an under-resourced community. Jesus, the promised Messiah, enters the day-to-day routines and

1. Adapted from a sermon preached at New Life Covenant Church, Atlanta, Georgia, November 30, 2014. The text for the sermon was Mark 13:24–37, and the version used here is the NIV.

challenges of being human, from the cradle to the grave and beyond the grave. And today God lives *within* us, working through the Holy Spirit day by day and through the word of God and the holy sacraments. Today God makes the ordinary extraordinary and the broken whole, redeeming the past, present, and future, whatever they hold for us. This is the message of Advent. It is the journey where our past, filled with expectant hope for our future, informs our present. On this journey the church is empowered by an unshakeable, eschatological hope that empowers us to be companions in God's redeeming and restoring all that is broken in our world. Our Advent preparation focuses on manifesting God's love with uncommon grace to a chaotic world.

As we read in today's gospel lesson, Jesus's disciples also watched for the unfolding of God's kingdom and sought to understand their role in its unfolding. After Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:1–2), the disciples ask him two questions: "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" (Mark 13:4). In response Jesus teaches his disciples about the pain and suffering that precede a new birth. Jesus urges the disciples to remain awake so they do not miss God's work in the middle of the chaotic events unfolding around them. Jesus instructs his followers to be alert and aware of present pain so they will be able to recognize the times in which they live. Nine times in Matthew 13 Jesus tells his disciples to watch: "Do you see?" (v. 2). "Watch out that no one deceives you" (v. 5). "You must be on your guard" (v. 9). "So be on your guard" (v. 23). "At that time people will see" (v. 26). "When you see these things happening" (v. 29). "Be on guard! Be alert" (v. 33). "Therefore keep watch" (v. 35). "I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (v. 37). Nine times this reminder that his disciples are to be alert and watchful.

And this is my call to the church today: we too must be watchful. This week we watched peaceful demonstrators march to the seats of government power in city after city, bringing awareness to racial injustices that plague communities across this nation. Jesus is no stranger to the unrest we have seen; in our text Jesus warns his disciples that persecution will come. Jesus himself and his disciples were betrayed, handed over to authorities, beaten, thrown in jail, and eventually sentenced to death. This is also the journey of justice marked for the church today.

The unrest in city after city is not just about the death of Michael Brown, no matter how badly organizers need a face as a banner for the movement. What is resonating with people throughout this nation is not

the unrest in Ferguson alone. What is resonating in city after city is the sign of simmering tension of systemic racism present across this country, racism that those in positions of influence and power do not want to discuss or confront. What's resonating with people about Ferguson is how signs of racial and class tensions present in their own communities are not being discussed either.

And sadly we, the church, have also been far too silent about the tension arising in our nation—and far too silent about the present signs of God's kingdom breaking through, even as the violence increases. The voices speaking about injustice are rarely people of God who bring the hope of Christ into the dialogue. It's as if we too truly believe that there is another answer to the sinful activities that sustain injustice other than the power of Christ.

Often our silence is rooted in the fact that we feel safer when certain practices legalize the very fears we have internalized. On some level, if we were truthful, we could admit that seeing others as having less value and little worth affects how concerned we are when they are mistreated. We make those being targeted in our society, the “others,” those not like us, believing that those people could never be “us” and we could never be “them.” Some move into neighborhoods that are considered safer, feeling relief because distance now limits their interactions with those who are not like them. But moving into a new community should never mean that we are no longer concerned with the mistreatment of others. Too many have simply accepted the evils of racism, classism, and “otherness” as an acceptable way to live. For far too many, a black life is viewed as not being human but criminal and of little worth. Our black men are often viewed as deviant, and our black women are subjected to being viewed as sexualized objects.

How many times can we witness lawlessness protected by legislation? When will we take time to lament the rate at which black and brown people are being incarcerated and killed? We need to look deeply at what it means to say someone looks suspicious simply because they are different than us as they walk through the neighborhood. We must be on guard and watchful of the number of times we are told to trust the system and believe in the judicial process when reports produced by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reveal deep flaws in this system and process. Is it time to face the tensions that have historically been present in our communities and are now erupting by asking some very different questions?

When we are alert and watchful, we don't miss the signs that the legal,

judicial, political, educational, and medical systems are broken and their processes flawed. The system is broken and the process is flawed when a response, a look, a walk, or an action taken too quickly could cost a black or brown woman or man their life.

As long as the system is broken and the process flawed, black parents must continue to teach their children the realities of being black in America. As long as the system is broken and the process flawed, black and brown men and women will suffer disproportionately when making choices to challenge those in authority. As long as the system is broken and the process flawed, the walls of division will continue to separate communities along lines of race, gender, and class, deepening the tensions that ignite the protests we are witnessing.

Repairing the system and changing the process means noticing the signs and calling on the power of God to change hearts, to convict hearts, and to break the hearts of those who are the “called out one,” the church. The church is called to engage the pain of families losing their sons, fathers, brothers, daughters, mothers, and sisters across our country. The church must weep in sorrow and lament the deaths of those being targeted or profiled. The church must see the leaves on the fig tree emerging and know that summer is near. The church is called to this long journey toward justice, to walk as companions with those being targeted, to be visible in nonviolent protest, and to give voice to the voiceless that God’s power stands in solidarity with justice and mercy. The church must become an advocate for change, partnering in God’s kingdom unfolding, establishing each community it serves as a place where God’s justice reigns. The church must speak boldly in a collective voice about God’s action in our world if we are to bring a new hope that shapes the cities and neighborhoods in which we live. We need to be confident that God’s people, when shaken to their core, will be radical in their response, using spiritual resources to break our silence and lack of involvement in confronting the evil mistreatment of people present in our world.

The church is called to use powerful spiritual resources to engage in the struggle for justice and the liberation of all people. We’ve been given these spiritual resources to demonstrate the power of God in the face of evil: the power of testimony, speaking truth to power, participating in the larger dialogue, and actively engaging in the struggle—all these are means by which the church can participate in the unfolding of God’s kingdom.

The greatest resistance to using our spiritual resources often comes not

from outside forces but from within. We are intimidated, embarrassed, and often unsure of how to speak powerfully about our faith and God's concern for the injustice in this world. Jesus reminds us that resistance to proclaiming our faith will come from those closest to us, those who oppose our views, and from those in positions of influence and power (Mark 13:9–13). Our family members, friends, and neighbors are often uncomfortable with the attention that comes from standing up for justice. But we who believe in the Holy Spirit's power must speak boldly of the ways we see God working in our midst. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit is present with us to guide our steps, to give us words to speak, to embolden us, and to impart wisdom as we meet resistance that will come in the struggle to free those who are targeted, profiled, overlooked, and pushed aside in our society. Those who follow Christ understand that we cannot tell the truth, the whole truth, without talking about God's action in the world and God's care for all people in the world.

So on this first Sunday of Advent, as we light the candle of hope, we not only understand the anger of people who feel as if they have little to live for and nothing to lose; we also lament our treatment of them. As we light the candle of hope, we know that people are tired of being ignored and treated with disrespect. As we light the candle of hope, we know people are tired of being invisible and treated as though they don't matter. The church must be broken, placing ourselves in the difficult work of ministering alongside those who have been left behind and left out in our community. This is exhausting and labor-intensive work.

What is the redemptive story we offer local communities in this time when a great healing is needed? As a local church, we can share with others how this church comes together to discuss the very topics that are tearing communities apart. We have communal conversations on difficult topics as part of our continuing transformation to become the people of God—a new community that longs to be a place where truth can be spoken and understanding and healing can begin.

We can share how we worship a God who understands the anger we hold over the mistreatment of others and how God laments with us. We can share our personal movement in how we view others and our current desire to move to places of deeper understanding and engagement. Our community needs to see an example of people struggling and caring, offending and forgiving, lamenting and loving in ways that heal what's hurting and broken. We can share how the birth of our Restoration and Reconciliation Justice Center brings leaders of ministries together for

two days to engage in peer learning, from practitioners and theologians, about how to raise our awareness of God's vision for the city. This annual gathering is a place where we learn to weep with Jesus over the city.

The birthing of this new kingdom means that there are labor pains that must come before a new community can be born. When Jesus returns, he heralds in a new era of redemption that extends throughout the world, gathering God's elect and redeeming God's people. We don't know the day or the hour, but we are confident that all Jesus promises will come to pass. We don't know the day or the hour, but we are confident that the Holy Spirit guides us out into engagement—and not into the comfort and safety of our homes. We don't know the day or the hour, but we boldly proclaim that it is our faith that leads us to confront evil and dismantle injustice. We don't know the day or the hour, but we must speak and speak now so that our collective voice has impact in shaping all that must change in our treatment of the oppressed and marginalized.

God has given each of us who follow the Lord something to do until Jesus returns. If God sends you out to march, then march for justice. If God sends you to serve, then serve those in need. If God sends you to speak with someone in power to change the system, then go with confidence and do so. When God sends you, you must go.

Jesus calls the church to a journey toward justice. The Holy Spirit calls the church to see what needs to change and then empowers the church to become advocates of that change. God calls the church to embody the power of the cross, crucifying evil and resurrecting God's plan. God heals us! God delivers us! God uses us to proclaim and witness the Holy Spirit's power to bring good news to all who are suffering in this world. So be on guard! Be alert! Keep watch, so that those watching expectantly will not lose hope. It is through us, the church, that the world experiences God's love, forgiveness, and grace. It is we the church who are called to bear witness to God's power to dismantle walls of division and separation through our ministry of restoration, redemption, and reconciliation.

# North Park Theological Seminary Faculty Statement on Race and the Justice System

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*February 2015*

**O***ver recent months, the undersigned members of NPTS faculty have formulated the following statement in response to the debates in the nation concerning race and the justice system. We were moved to do so because of the tragic incidents in Ferguson and elsewhere, and we wished to add our own voices to others on the North Park campus and in the Evangelical Covenant Church calling for change. We also noted and supported the engagement of many of our own students in actions calling for just treatment for all. This statement is far from the first to be issued on this topic in the world of theological education, but we hope that to publish our statement now is all the more timely in a context where the media news cycle is gradually prioritizing other concerns and paying less attention to these matters.*

As faculty of North Park Theological Seminary we join our voice to those of our university, denomination, neighborhood, city, and nation and declare unequivocally: Black lives matter.

We affirm the dignity of every human being as made in the image of God, created to flourish physically, emotionally, spirituality, socially, culturally, and economically. As one body in Christ, if one part of the body suffers we all suffer; if one part of the body cannot breathe, none of us can breathe. The outcry heard on our campus and our streets demonstrates that the body of Christ cannot breathe. Violence against Black lives without sufficient cause or accountability points to a broken system and demands justice.

We affirm the biblical witness that God desires justice on earth (Gen-

esis 18:19; Deuteronomy 16:19–20; Amos 5:15–24), that Christ himself is the servant who proclaims justice to the nations (Matthew 12:18–21; cf. Isaiah 41:1–3) and whose gospel puts to death hostility between races (Ephesians 2:14–16), and that the Spirit intercedes as we pray that equality before the law be realized (Romans 8:26–27). When our institutions, our churches, and especially our justice system, do not align with these values, the systems—and not the values—are at fault.

As a seminary we support nonviolent forms of civil disobedience that show solidarity with victims of power abuses and that refuse to perpetuate the very cycles of violence that spawn injustice. We commit to striving toward creating safe places for dialogue and conversation on the topic of racial justice in co-curricular activities, in our classrooms, and in our community life. We as faculty acknowledge that the toil for justice is arduous and long. Nevertheless, Christians must not ignore any injustice; therefore, we are committed in our vocations as educators to teach and embody God’s heart for justice on our campus, in our city, and in the world.

Deb Auger

Jodie Boyer-Hatlem

Jim Bruckner

Stephen Chester

Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom

Paul De Neui

Tim Johnson

Dave Kersten

Ellen Kogstad

Paul Koptak

Max Lee

Hauna Ondrey

Jay Phelan

Elizabeth Pierre

Soong-Chan Rah

Klyne Snodgrass

Stephen Spencer

## Book Reviews

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*Eric Sorenson, pastor of Christian formation, Community Covenant Church, Santa Barbara, California*

*Maria Erling, professor of modern church history and global mission, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania*

*John E. Phelan Jr., senior professor of theological studies, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

**Kahled Anatolios, ed., *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*, Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History (Baker Academic, 2014), 272 pages, \$30.**

Since World War II there has been a resurgence of interest in trinitarian theology due, in part, to the prolific work of Karl Barth. This “massive revival,” as Alister McGrath called it, is enhanced by the contributions of Kahled Anatolios and the writers he has drawn together in *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*. The special contribution of this volume is alluded to in the series title: it is a study in *patristic* theology and history. Further, it focuses on the work of theologians from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, with some reference to Augustine and an interesting, if not somewhat out of place, chapter devoted to Martin Luther.

Covenanters should be aware that some aspects of Orthodox theology may be unfamiliar since Pietism is historically rooted in the Reformation, therefore using thought and language developed within the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Certain terms central to Orthodox theology, but likely less recognizable to Protestants, punctuate the text, such as “*deification*,” “*perichoresis*,” “*theosis*,” and “*anaphora*.” Similarly, the names of Orthodox theological authorities (simply, “the fathers”), such as Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus, may be less

familiar to non-Orthodox readers than Aquinas or Calvin. However, it is precisely in these less familiar areas readers will experience the reward of this rich volume, for it was these fathers, especially the great Cappadocians, who fleshed out the biblical texts to frame the doctrine of the Trinity. Anatolios's work does a great favor for those steeped in Western theology by bringing them back to the Greek theologians, perhaps even motivating them to read the fathers for themselves.

The idea of this volume is clear enough. The authors' intent is to illuminate the doctrine of the Trinity and explain how it works itself out "in the concrete life of the church" (p. xi). Three sections give structure to the book. The first relates the trinitarian doctrine to Christian worship, the second to Christian salvation, and the third to the church. In light of its applied aim, the material gives attention to how the lofty and mysterious truth of God's threeness-yet-oneness has implications for life and ministry. In particular, Kathleen McVey's brief examination of patristic feminine metaphors for God is riveting and has direct implications for contemporary liturgy.

With this in mind, the reader should be prepared to occasionally encounter dense theology. Do not expect to breeze through this volume. These specialists in trinitarian studies have analyzed the nuances of Greek terms and have applied their intellectual scalpels to parsing the subtle differences between Eastern and Western conceptions of the Trinity. The book is not a lightweight attempt to simplify doctrine; it is an intensive effort to better understand the God who exists eternally in a mysterious communion of three persons in one *ousia*, "a circle of glory" (Gregory of Nyssa). So, even as one's mind swirls amidst the profound concepts being considered, the reader also gets caught up in moments of worship as the fathers of Eastern Orthodoxy break out in praise of this ineffable God: "O Holy Trinity, glory to you." If for no other reason, this volume is worthy to be read because its subject is worthy of glory.

ERIC SORENSON

**Paul Peter Waldenström, *Squire Adamsson, or Where Do You Live? An Allegorical Tale from the Swedish Awakening*, translation with introduction and notes by Mark Safstrom (Pietisten, 2014) 290 pages, \$24.99.**

Peter Paul Waldenström's novel, *Squire Adamsson, or Where Do You Live?* is a welcome contribution to studies in Covenant history. The

allegorical tale, based on a series of sermons and vignettes, reveals the dynamics of the Swedish Awakening and the spiritual turmoil that attended the waves of emigration from Sweden during the nineteenth century. According to Safstrom, the novel evokes the memories of places where people gathered from near and far to meet and encourage one another, such as the health spas that Waldenström's followers frequented and that provided the backdrop of his sermons.

Waldenström's inventive allegory about the emotional struggle of the Swedish Awakening first appeared as his controversial movement clashed with established Lutheran theology and tradition. The story presents Waldenström's quarrels with traditional Lutheran teachings and elucidates the ordeal of salvation and sanctification by describing the struggles of ordinary people whose efforts to find security, admiration, and respect also become spiritual battles. It reverses the traditional perceptions of the times; simple and elderly women receive more favored attention, while clergy and preachers receive robust criticism. The characters experience continual spiritual torment, beset by many choices about where to live and uncertainty about whom they can trust.

Squire Adamsson moves from one city to another, receiving advice from a number of characters as he wonders whether or not he is doing enough to be righteous, dutiful, or sanctified. Characters such as Mother Simple, Mother Wounded Hip, Bankrupt Faith, and Conscience continually speak to him about the understanding of grace as a free gift, not a work, while he meanders through a full spectrum of feelings from inadequacy to pride. Squire Adamsson becomes Squire Abrahamsson when he accepts grace and moves to Evangelium. But the story does not end here. His experiences range from pride in his accomplishments, salvation and relief from his canceled debt, uncertainty about Immanuel's promises, and a continual wandering through cities that seem to promise more than the poor, humble provisions of Evangelium. Grace and forgiveness is at the city's center, but neither seems to interest him enough to keep him happy at home.

Adamsson's tale may leave the reader frustrated at several points. He is a fickle man, and Mother Simple's love and concern for him are hard to understand. The same uncertainty and inconstancy plague Adamsson so frequently that a typical Christian would have given up on him. Modern readers may have a difficult time maintaining interest in his spiritual state, which is why this narrative might be more useful in understanding the revival itself than in providing the devotional counsel it did for

earlier readers. Even Waldenström needed an editor to pare down the many episodes of despair, impulsivity, and uncertainty that the subject makes us endure.

Today we experience as radical a transformation in society as that experienced by Waldenström's original readers. In particular, a communications revolution undermines the traditional means of instilling faith. An allegorical tale such as Waldenström's novel, so radically innovative in its time, may have a hard time reaching individual believers or hearers today. However, Waldenström's memorable characters and useful vignettes provide short moral lessons. The novel contextualized to the modern audience would prove an effective resource for the church at large.

MARIA ERLING

***The Swedish Pietists: A Reader: Excerpts from the Writings of Carl Olof Rosenius and Paul Peter Waldenström, edited, translated, and introduced by Mark Safstrom (Pickwick Publications, 2015), 237 pages, \$24.***

Tell someone you are a Pietist these days and you are likely to get a quizzical look. This is in spite of the fact that, for better and for worse, Pietism was instrumental in shaping the character of American evangelicalism. Even denominations with Pietist roots often know little and care less about this heritage. Within the Evangelical Covenant Church, the Evangelical Free Church, and the former General Conference Baptist Church—all churches birthed from the Swedish revivals—fewer and fewer of the songs are sung, Pietist distinctives acknowledged, and great names recognized. An additional problem is that, although both C.O. Rosenius and P.P. Waldenström were prolific writers, very little of their work has been translated into English. A few of Waldenström's famous sermons and short works have been translated, but for the most part even these are relatively inaccessible or long out of print.

In light of this, Mark Safstrom, lecturer in Swedish and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Illinois, has done a real service by editing and translating a collection of the writings of Rosenius and Waldenström. In his introduction he describes his fascination with a collection of “dusty, but beautifully bound” books in his grandparents' basement. The books had belonged to his great-grandparents who had been “readers” in the revival movement in Sweden before immigrating to the United States. These books and their accounts of the lives and thoughts of early

Pietists sparked Safstrom's lifelong interest in the Swedish language and the literature of the Swedish Pietists. In addition to the current volume, Safstrom has also translated Waldenström's widely read allegorical tale *Squire Adamsson* (Pietisten, 2014).

Although Rosenius and Waldenström were colleagues and collaborators, they were very different men. Rosenius was a layperson and resistant to additional training, going so far as to refuse ordination. He understood his role as speaking as a layperson, as a simple believer, to and on behalf of other simple believers. His writings reflect his concern. Again and again he returns to the questions of ordinary Swedish Christians. How does one grow in the faith? How does one confront sin and live a holy life? How does one find assurance of salvation?

Waldenström was a very different man. He held a doctorate in theology and classical languages and was ordained in the state church. Near the end of his volume, Safstrom provides a translation of Waldenström's ordination sermon that pretty nearly derailed his ordination before it occurred. Waldenström was forced to placate an angry bishop before it could go forward. Waldenström was concerned, as was Rosenius, that individuals through faith in Jesus find peace with God and grow in that faith. But he pursued the logic of the Reformation in ways that perhaps would have distressed Rosenius.

Waldenström's great contribution was to attack the notion that Jesus's death was intended to appease the wrath of God. He rejected the idea that God needed to be reconciled. *Sinners* needed to be reconciled to God, not God to sinners. Waldenström considered "heathen" the idea that Jesus was sacrificed to appease a wrathful God. In a striking piece entitled "Punished by God," he writes:

We imagine that God is such that he cannot be appeased unless he is able to strike back. If he is going to spare the guilty person, then he must have someone else to strike in his place. And people call this righteousness.... But God is not like this. This image of God we can leave to the heathens, who are lacking God's word. Our God is a God who out of his great mercy sent his only begotten son Jesus into the world, not in order to strike him in our place, but in order to deliver us from our sins, make us pure and holy and transport us home to God again, away from whom we had fallen. (p. 84)

Small wonder this got Waldenström in trouble with the religious authori-

ties! His views on the atonement caused a rift within the revival movement and were instrumental in the formation of the so-called “free church movement” among the Scandinavians in both Europe and the United States.

Reading Waldenström is at times exhilarating. He calls his readers and hearers to look again at the text. He questions received traditions and settled opinions. If we are going to be people of the book, he seems to insist, let’s make sure we actually know what it says. I find myself wishing for more in English about this fascinating man. Mark Safstrom deserves our thanks for this wonderful and helpful volume. Is it too much to ask that he now consider a theological biography of Waldenström?

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