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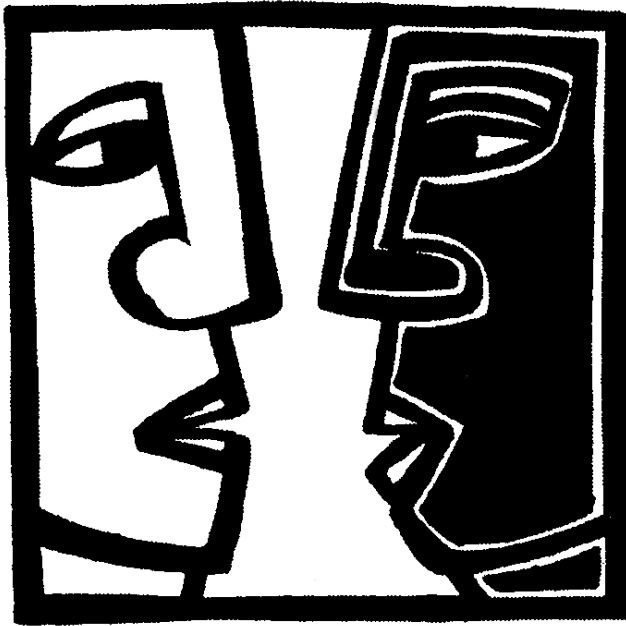
Be Reconciled! Moving Toward the Black Jesus

By Nibs Stroupe

I remember the phone call well. It came to the church office about two years into our ministry at Oakhurst, from one of our African American elders. She called me because she had a concern about a decision I had made as pastor. As we talked and discussed and obviously disagreed, I asked her why she was so angry about this decision. She surprised me with her reply: “What makes you think that I am angry?” I thought it was obvious and answered, “You sound mad.” She said, “No, I’m not angry — believe me, if I was angry you would know it; there would be no doubt about it. No, I’m not angry.”

There was a silence after that; I wasn’t sure what to say. She stepped into the silence. “I’m not angry, but I am interested that you thought I was. It is intriguing and I think I have an answer, but I don’t know that you are willing to hear it. Are you willing to receive this?” Another long silence, as I mulled over my options. “OK, let’s hear it,” I said, feeling both irritated and anxious.

“I’m guessing that you as a white man in power are not accustomed to having a Black person treat you as a peer, that you are not accustomed to having Black women stand up to you. My treating you as an equal is something that makes you angry, and instead of owning up to that you projected your anger onto me. Is that right? How does that sound?” Another long silence — it seemed like five minutes to me, but



Rita Corbin

“conciliation” comes from the Latin “to bring together,” or even “to make friends.” People who are classified as non-white already know that in the system of race none of us are together and none of us are friends. It is those of us classified as white who believe that we are only a small step away from being reconciled to others in the system of race, especially those seen as black. In almost all approaches to racial justice and equity, there is talk of racial reconciliation, and white folks especially want to move to that step very quickly. We

We who are white are highly invested in making certain that other people know that we do not have racism in us, but the difficult truth is that *all* of us who are classified as white have racism in us.

I’m guessing that it was about thirty seconds. She had indeed interpreted my feelings. I had a moment of revelation then, and I responded hesitantly, “Yes, I think that you may be right. I am in uncharted territory here.” I expected the wrath of God to come down on me because my racism was exposed, but she stunned me again when she replied, “Now, we can work with this. As long as I know that you know, and that you will occasionally acknowledge your racism, we can work together. You may be surprised at your racism, but I am not and none of the Black people at Oakhurst are surprised, either.” It was a moment of conciliation, and we went on to become allies and friends and to write a book together on racism (*While We Run This Race*, Nibs Stroupe and Inez Fleming, Orbis Books, 1995).

I use the term “conciliation” rather than “reconciliation” because I don’t believe that those who are classified as white and those who are classified as black have ever had conciliation, much less reconciliation. The root of the word

who are white are highly invested in making certain that other people know that we do not have racism in us, but the difficult truth is that *all* of us who are classified as white have racism in us. We want people of color to believe that we are not racist, but they already know that we are. It is not people of color who are being fooled — it is those of us who are white who are fooling ourselves. In order to have racial reconciliation, we must first have conciliation, and that is a difficult and painful journey for all of us.

In our work to find liberation from our captivity to race, all of us, but especially those of us who are white, will need to do the hard steps of recognizing that we are captives, that this system of race overwhelmed us long before we knew it, and that it will take intentional and deliberate work to begin to find some liberation. There is simply no legitimate way around this, and fortunate and blessed are we if the Black

I Am Staying Outraged Until the Police Stop Killing Our Children

By Catherine Meeks

For several days I was not able to read about Jordan Edwards’ murder because it was too painful. This fifteen-year-old child should not have died at the hands of a police officer. Many voices, but not nearly enough, cry out across the country that it has to stop. But it doesn’t stop. In 2016, there were hundreds of African Americans and other persons of color killed by police, and far too many of these killings were under questionable circumstances. The heartbreaking truth is that this continual attack upon African American males is not incidental or accidental. As long as Black men have been in this country there has been disdain for them. Some of that grew out of fear rooted in white males’ awareness that retaliation by Black slaves was more than justified. That fear fueled a very mean and destructive spirit in white males. A spirit that is still alive and well.

No wonder it was necessary to create powerful negative narratives about Blacks. There had to be a story to justify the horrible reality inflicted on human beings snatched from their lives and loved ones on the continent of Africa, transported in unspeakable conditions and forced into slavery in this country. In order to traffic in such an indefensible trade and to allow the miserable living conditions that slaves had to endure, anyone with any human consciousness would have to make up a story to justify that practice.

So the story was created and then the rules, regulations, laws, customs and every other social mechanism needed to support that story were created. Even as the “end” of slavery was established by the 13th Amendment, it provided for the Republic to continue to enslave Black people by simply declaring them criminals. The spirit of that amendment continues alive and well. It fuels the fires that keep the Prison Industrial Complex in place, supports the death penalty and makes it possible for police officers to shoot unarmed Black people and other people of color without being held accountable for the most part.

Jordan Edwards should not be dead! He was murdered. The police officer who killed him has been fired and charged with homicide. Time will tell whether he will be held accountable or not. I have many questions about that event. The first one is why was he using a rifle in the city to shoot at anyone? Why did his fellow officers say the car was backing up when it was clearly going forward? An innocent 15-year-old boy is dead. His only crime was that he was Black and lived in

Be Reconciled! *continued on page 4*

I Am Staying Outraged *continued on page 6*

Jesus and the Easter Bunny

By Joyce Hollyday

During an overly pious phase in my childhood, my favorite holiday was Maundy Thursday. I had nothing against the traditional favorites of Christmas, Easter and Halloween. I did, after all, grow up in Hershey, Pennsylvania — raised in the First United Methodist Church on Chocolate Avenue, where the domes on the street lights resemble Hershey's kisses and the fragrance of chocolate hung often in the air. I had no complaint against holidays that brought bonanzas of candy and gifts.

But at some point in my young life I began to understand that not every child lived in a town with a chocolate factory, an amusement park and zoo, four swimming pools and nine golf courses. Some children were hungry and lonely and had no home in which to live. When this first glimmer of comprehension about suffering in the world came to me,

glued beside him — a perfect object for my piety. I wanted to be a faithful disciple, and my test of discipleship was being able to stay awake all night. I never made it past about one o'clock in the morning. My eyes would grow heavy and I'd begin to nod off. I'd wake up on Good Friday morning, spy the picture of Jesus on the nightstand, and feel utterly disappointed in myself. I was sure that Jesus was disappointed, too.

A few years ago, I spent Maundy Thursday in a church providing overnight shelter for women. My shift for staying awake and being available in the kitchen if needed, while the women and the other volunteer slept on mattresses on the floor of the parish hall, was midnight to 3:00 a.m. I turned off the glaring overhead fluorescent lights and lit a candle. I opened my New Revised Standard Version Bible to Matthew 26 and began to read about Jesus and the disciples on the night before he died.



Micheal Tercha/Chicago Tribune/Getty

as she was, climbing into a stuffy costume and welcoming a stream of energetic children all day long. To be honest, at that moment I couldn't imagine anything except getting home and falling into my comfortable bed for a long sleep.

The sunrise was spectacular that Good Friday morning — a pale pink sky in the East, hemmed in by purple thunderclouds, the mountains draped in white mist. A brilliant orange sun peeked through for just a moment as I turned toward home. After four hours of peaceful dozing, I bolted awake about noon with the thought, "I should have been the Easter Bunny." I wished that I had thought to offer to take Rhonda's place, to give her a break so that she could have the day to rest and recover. I thought then about how often as a child I had been told that Jesus "took my place on the cross."

I haven't embraced that version of sin and atonement for a few decades. I understand now that the cross was the inevitable end for a prophet preaching and practicing compassion, inclusion and nonviolence in the jaws of an unjust, repressive and militaristic empire. Surely this Jesus, who chose to be one with the marginalized and despised, was with Rhonda as she struggled to survive one more day, one underpaying job at a time, trying to put her life back together and make a new start for herself and her children. On that Good Friday, Jesus was the Easter Bunny. ✦

Joyce Hollyday is an author and founding co-pastor of Circle of Mercy church in Asheville, North Carolina, where she's active with the immigrant community and the sanctuary movement. She has been a friend of the Open Door for four decades. Her blog can be found at www.joycehollyday.com.

Surely this Jesus, who chose to be one with the marginalized and despised, was with Rhonda as she struggled to survive one more day, one underpaying job at a time, trying to put her life back together and make a new start for herself and her children.

I began to like Maundy Thursday.

My family always went to church that night. When we got home, I climbed into bed, unzipped my Red Letter Edition King James Version Holy Bible, and turned to Matthew 26. Over and over, I read the part about Jesus going off in the Garden of Gethsemane to pray before his arrest, asking his disciples to watch with him, then finding them asleep and saying, "So, you couldn't stay awake with me one hour?" He had to say it three times.

I had a 3-D, framed picture of Jesus in the Garden, with a real stone and a fake bush

Then I prayed — longer than I had prayed in a very long time — for the women snoring lightly just beyond the kitchen door, for friends facing illness, for situations of suffering and hardship around the globe. My heart and my eyes grew heavy, and time slowed to a crawl. I struggled to stay awake until three — nodding, pacing, counting minutes, pacing again.

At breakfast, groggy and unfocused, I tried to make coherent conversation with Joanne, whose husband had blackened her eye and broken her jaw three days before, and Sybil, a former stripper and exotic

dancer who was hoping to find other work. Rhonda dragged herself to the table, looking extremely pale. When I offered her breakfast, she grimaced at the cinnamon pastries and cold boiled eggs, then told me that she had been awake all night with a very upset stomach.

She sighed heavily and said, "I'm the Easter Bunny." Over the years in my work at shelters, I've heard people claim to be everybody from Adolf Hitler to Jesus Christ, but this felt different. Rhonda sipped some water and said weakly, "I'm the Easter Bunny at the mall." I couldn't imagine her, sick and weary

HOSPITALITY

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Please join us on **facebook** for the continuing journey of the **Open Door Community in Baltimore.**
 Thank you, Murphy, David, Robert and Ed.

Poverty Stinks

By Peter Gathje

Poverty stinks, literally and metaphorically. Being in poverty and on the streets doubly stinks. A shower and a change of clothes helps with the literal stench. For a day or so, the smell of homelessness and poverty are kept at bay. A shower, followed by putting on freshly laundered clothing and some deodorant, is a small but significant act of resistance. Still, sleeping in one's clothes, not having a change of clothes and not having access to a bathroom will inevitably lead to the odiferous return of the stench of poverty and homelessness.

I did the laundry today at Manna House. I do not have a very strong sense of smell. It is a helpful characteristic as I sort the clothes from the men who showered. But the pungent smell of human shit penetrated my nostrils as I lifted a pair of jeans out of the dirty clothes bucket. Clearly the man who had been wearing these pants had not made it to a bathroom in time.

Most likely he shit in his pants because he was denied access to a bathroom in a store or restaurant. I am sure you have seen the signs, "Bathrooms for Customers Only." Many places go even further and keep their restrooms locked. To enter the restroom you have to ask for the key. If your clothing looks tattered, or you are dirty and disheveled, and you also happen to be Black, your chances of getting that key are severely diminished. One way poverty and homelessness stink is the systemic denial of access to bathrooms. The system stinks.

Another set of clothes in the laundry bucket gave off a systemic stink. It was a discarded blue paper suit. You get those when you are discharged from a hospital, or sometimes from jail, if you do not own any clothes. Last night and this morning was unseasonably cool. A paper suit is not much protection against the cold. I am sure the hot water of the shower was helpful in thawing out the man who was given a paper suit. The clothes we gave him to put on after his shower must have helped as well.

Slightly over twenty men showered this morning at



Manna House

midsouthpeace.org

Manna House. There are already seven women signed up for tomorrow's showers. Another twenty-plus men will sign up for showers on Thursday. They will be different than the men who showered today. Men and women have access to a shower once a week at Manna House.

Manna House is a small place with two shower stalls. We practice hospitality, which means we do not want to become large. We know that size and efficiency are enemies of hospitality, of personal relationships, of knowing people by their names and welcoming people with dignity. We encourage others to open houses of hospitality that are also sized for welcome.

We know that hospitality does not remove the systemic stench of poverty even as it helps a few remove that stench temporarily with a shower and a change of clothes. For the men that showered this morning that was no small thing. But they know and we know this hospitality is not ending poverty or homelessness. Ending poverty and homelessness requires systemic change, change to our economics and to our politics. Such change is not on the horizon. I read in this morning's paper that the president is proposing a budget that will bring severe cuts to a number of programs designed to help people in poverty. Provisions for food, housing and medical care for people already in poverty will all be cut. The stench of poverty will be made worse by these shitty policies.

I doubt that the president or his advisors or members of Congress have ever smelt the shit left in the pants of a man made homeless by our economic and political system. I also

doubt that they have spent the night outside in a thin paper suit. Maybe if they did, they would make policies that reduce instead of increase the stink of poverty. Maybe.

While we engage in the struggle against policies that stink, we will continue with hospitality. The stench in my nostrils from this morning's laundry keeps me focused on both hospitality and justice. Both are about reducing the stink. I think that is what Jeremiah was talking about when he gave a vision of a society justly ordered, of a time in which the stink is gone: "They will come home and sing songs of joy on the heights of Jerusalem. They will be radiant because of the Lord's good gifts — the abundant crops of grain, new wine, and olive oil, and the healthy flocks and herds. Their life will be like a watered garden, and all their sorrows will be gone." (Jeremiah 31:12, *New Living Translation*) In such a time, Jeremiah tells us, everyone comes home. The abundant goods of the earth will be shared. And we will flourish from showers that do more than remove stench; they will lead to abundant life. ✦

Peter Gathje is Academic Dean and professor of Christian Ethics at Memphis Theological Seminary, and a founder of Manna House, a place of hospitality in Memphis. He wrote Sharing the Bread of Life: Hospitality and Resistance at the Open Door Community (2006) and edited A Work of Hospitality: The Open Door Reader 1982 – 2002. (pgathje@memphisseminary.edu)

Ten Rules for Addressing Panhandlers and Panhandling

By Peter Gathje

1. Give or don't give. It is really your choice. But always look the person in the eye who is asking, greet them and then maybe add, "Sorry I can't help today," or "Here you go." Always treat the person with respect.

2. If you do give to a panhandler, remember it is a gift, and the person is free to do with it whatever he or she wants.

3. If you don't give, that is ok. Panhandlers expect most people not to give. One said to me, "It's like cold calling in sales. I expect to get turned down most of the time and it doesn't bother me. Just treat me with respect." (See Rule #1.)

4. If you feel unsafe or the person is being aggressive or threatening, leave the area and don't give. As one said to me, "There are assholes in every line of work. Don't reward them."

5. Sometimes give more than you are being asked for. If someone asks for a dollar, give them five — just for fun!

6. Set a limit or a boundary to your giving. Mine is \$5 per day. Once I've given out my \$5, I respond to anyone who asks,

"I've given out already what I give each day." I consider this my "street tax."

7. There are people out there who aren't homeless who panhandle. They are simply poor. So, again, give or don't give, but treat everyone with respect. (See Rule #1.)

8. Feeling awkward or uncomfortable when you see a panhandler is ok. It means you have a conscience and some compassion.

9. If you have time and are so inclined, volunteer with an organization that works with people on the streets offering food, shelter, medical care, etc. You'll get to know some really interesting people, and they'll get to know you. And you might just see them on the streets from time to time, and you can wave and yell, "Hi!"

10. If you really want to help people who are housing deprived, then advocate for housing for all homeless people. Support organizations in your area that practice a "housing first" approach to homelessness. Also, resist all efforts, such as No Panhandling laws, to dehumanize, disrespect and criminalize people who are on the streets. (See Rule #1.) ✦



Pete Gathje

Praise to You, Through Our Sister, Mother Earth

An Introduction to the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*

By Rosalie Riegler

With words from a song in the Umbrian vernacular — Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Sun" — Pope Francis opens what is no ordinary encyclical. For starters, *Laudato Si'* isn't addressed to prelates or people who call themselves Roman Catholics, or even to all Christians or to men of good will, as prior papal letters have done. It's addressed to "every living person on the planet." As such, it invites all people into dialogue, which means even climate-change deniers who think popes shouldn't be meddling in matters of Mother Earth. Also, it was written in Italian, not the usual Latin of papal encyclicals, and it cites bishops' conferences, apparently quite a new thing in this genre, proving that Pope Francis is more collegial than his last two predecessors. And it's long. At eighty pages and over 40,000 words, it's three times as long as Pope John XXIII's lovely call for *Pacem in Terris*.

Commentaries and synopses of *Laudato Si'* abound, including some that fault the pope for meddling in politics. As it's readily available in many languages and an easy read, I recommend that you read it yourself, perhaps in a study group as I did this past winter. Because it's not written in the cumbersome abstract language that makes even revolutionary encyclicals like Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* difficult reading, *Laudato Si'* is stylistically a joy, with specific examples and everyday language. Clearly Pope Francis is appealing to both our hearts and our minds. He wants people to hear and to understand and to make the personal, national and international sacrifices necessary to save the planet.

As in all his pronouncements, the emphasis in *Laudato Si'* is on how the actions of the privileged hurt the poor and powerless, an emphasis familiar to readers of *Hospitality*. Again and again, Pope Francis points out that rampant global capitalism, compulsive consumerism and over-consumption of vital resources have the heaviest repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, and will doom the planet if we don't change.

He calls us to see that we are at a breaking point with ecological damage, and that we must take concrete steps now, before it's too late. He discusses the notion of the common

good, so much neglected in our consumerist "throwaway" society and says we must extend the concept to future generations.

After an introduction and forecast, there's a chapter on the origins of the crisis and one on its human roots. Chapter Two, on the biblical basis for the care of creation, shows with many examples that "God created the world for everyone." The mutual responsibility and love in the creation stories of the Old Testament remind us that "We are not God" and that our troubles began when we distorted the necessary relationships among all

of creation. Everyone is challenged to move forever beyond self-interest, and to regain the conviction that we need one another and that being good and decent Christians is what's needed to save the planet.

Chapter Four argues that environmental and social crises are integrally related and that all solutions must combat poverty and restore dignity to the excluded, as well as address the environmental crisis. As political groups are learning, it's all connected. Chapter Five gives specific plans for collective

action, including dialogue, transparent decision making and enforceable international agreements. He warns against solutions that place an even heavier burden on poor countries, and says developed countries must repay an "ecological debt" to poor nations.

Chapter Six, the most beautiful and mystical section of the encyclical, calls us to conversion. Adopting policies that undo the damage humankind has inflicted on the environment is essential to spirituality. What is needed, he says, is an "ecological culture," one which involves "a distinctive way of looking at things . . . which realizes that less is more," and that spiritual detachment is a necessity, something the Open Door has sought to live out for years. The encyclical encourages a return to the peace of the Sabbath rest and concludes with two prayers, one for the earth and one asking God's help as we make the individual and world-wide changes necessary to save it. The final prayer concludes with these words:

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.

Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good,
advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.

The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen. ✠

This essay was first published in a slightly different version in the July 24, 2016 issue of Bad Subjects: Political Education for Everyday Life. Rosalie Riegler is professor emerita in English at Saginaw Valley State University and a grandmother of seven whom she hopes will have a planet to live on when they become adults.



Margaret Scott

Be Reconciled! Moving Toward the Black Jesus *continued from page 1*

Jesus motivates a person of another racial category to engage us and help us to move out of our captivity to race. In the story I cited above, I was blessed that an African American person decided to engage me rather than dismiss me. It was painful, painful, painful, but I am grateful to her for taking me seriously as a child of God. Let no one hear that it is the responsibility of others to make us white folks engage our captivity to race. That work is our responsibility; but blessed are we when the Black Jesus sends us a prophetic voice and blesses us with the ears to hear that voice.

In his letters to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us of the necessity of acknowledging that we must begin with the Black Jesus and not the white Christ. In I Corinthians 1:18-31, he writes that in order to receive God's grace we must recall that the God we know in Jesus of Nazareth was black, that God came to us not from the statehouse or courthouse or penthouse but from the underpasses and prisons and tenant shacks of life. God came to us from the margins, and that is where we

must begin our journeys to life and liberation.

Paul addresses this issue of conciliation and reconciliation often. There is no small irony for Paul that his strongest statement on reconciliation comes in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (II Cor. 5:16-20). Scholars think that there were even more letters written to the church at Corinth, the church that seems to be the one from whom Paul was the most alienated. In this second letter, Paul rails at the Corinthians, and in 11:21 he acknowledges that he is a fool for going down this path of blaming the Corinthians for not recognizing his authority. Yet he has powerful and inspiring words for us in 5:18: "All of this is from God, who reconciled us to God through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation."

In order to do this work in regard to race, we must allow ourselves to know the vulnerability of the margins, where the Black Jesus lives. Some of us know it because we live there, and some of us have a hard time connecting the margins with

God. Why would God come to us like this? Why not as a conquering general or rich banker or powerful politician? Yet only by engaging the margins in the world and in ourselves will we ever be able to conceive conciliation in regard to race and to many other systems of oppression. Reconciliation is a long way off because we must first engage and confront the truth that the system of race has created us to be opponents. (It's not called "race" for nothing; there must be winners and losers, there must be a hierarchy.) Fortunately for us, the God of the Black Jesus has experienced this and continues to call us into new life. She parts the waters of the Red Sea daily — can we see them? Can we put our toes into those waters and begin to find liberation? ✠

Nibs Stroupe is a longtime friend of the Open Door Community. He is a retired pastor of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, GA. (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)

The Religion of Empire

Empire Baptized

How the Church Embraced What Jesus Rejected
2nd – 5th Centuries

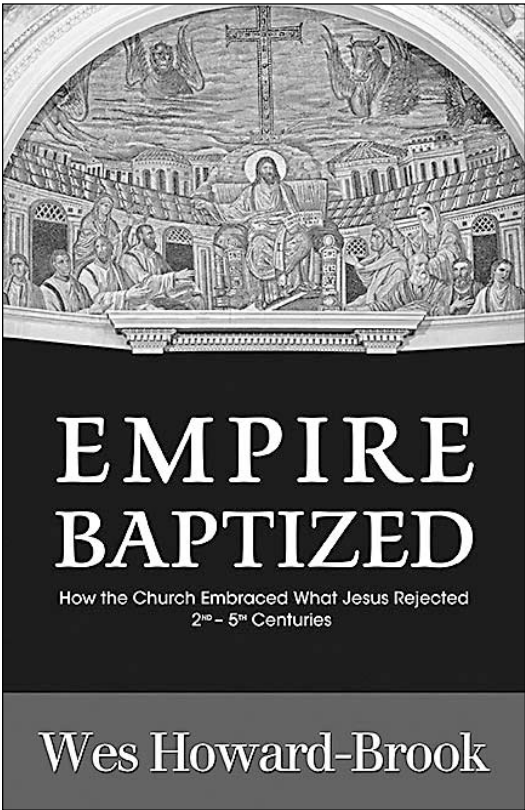
by Wes Howard-Brook

Orbis Books
Maryknoll, New York
2016

Reviewed by Andrew Foster Connors

At the end of *Empire Baptized: How the Church Embraced What Jesus Rejected, 2nd – 5th Centuries*, Wes Howard-Brook concedes that most of the historical figures that he has written about in this 300-page book are unknown to the vast majority of Christians. Yet these are the “church fathers” most responsible for distorting the Christian faith from “the exciting, radical, dangerous life of discipleship” birthed by Jesus and his disciples to the “safe, routine business of ‘saving one’s soul.’” (297) Tracing the church’s gradual embrace of the very “religion of empire” that Jesus rejected in his life and teaching, *Empire Baptized* draws on existing scholarship to conclude that much of early church history is marked by erroneous theological choices that now must be rejected if the church is to regain its faithful footing.

While critiques of the church fathers are nothing new, the organization of such scholarship into a single, coherent volume leads to a clear-eyed call to reject much of early church orthodoxy. Howard-Brook’s approach is not so much to argue against particular doctrinal understandings of God that emerged in the first four centuries, but rather to demonstrate how adherence to doctrinal tenets displaced radical dis-



Empire over and against the Way of Jesus?

Excusing these contradictions as “people of their time and place” whom we can’t expect “to be like us” is inadequate in Howard-Brook’s view, not when the Christian church has come to reject the very things that Jesus lived and taught as a result. (297)

While critiques of the church fathers are nothing new, the organization of such scholarship into a single, coherent volume leads to a clear-eyed call to reject much of early church orthodoxy.

cipleship to Jesus as the heart of the Christian faith. Though such a call is sure to rankle theologians and historians across the church, it cannot easily be dismissed by appeals for deference to historical figures simply because they ended up on the winning side of power.

Walking step by step toward the Mediterranean centers of Christian thought in the second through fifth centuries, Howard-Brook examines the life, writings and impact of each major Christian thought leader, beginning with Philo and ending with Augustine. The questions this book raises about each significant historical figure are precise, and vary according to the specifics of each context that Howard-Brook explores. How is it that we came to embrace Tertullian as a church “father,” for example, when he completely ignored the central economic justice message of Luke-Acts, helped reify an anti-Semitic supersessionism, unified divergent views of faith as “heresy” that must be eradicated and was so “blatantly misogynist that one would think he’d never actually been in a relationship with a flesh-and-blood woman”? (117) Why are Clement’s views esteemed when “even things that Jesus said plainly” are interpreted allegorically? (136) Or Cyprian, when “his engagement with Scripture wasn’t really exegetical at all,” using Scripture “as a source of prooftexts to validate his already-formed position”? (171) Or Eusebius, who colluded with church power to manufacture an “original” church unity of thought and practice when “there *never was any unity* in the Christian world”? (209) Why do we revere Jerome as “holy” and a “saint” when history teaches he was a “manipulative, maddening man”? (242) And why do we continue to regard the ideas of these writers as foundational standards for the church when they supported the hierarchical patronage system that Jesus rejected, failed to condemn the rich as Jesus did, and paved the pathway for Christianity’s embrace of

This book is an important contribution to the church, extensive in its details and portraits without languishing in what could be a dense recitation of each Christian thinker’s prose. Better choices of maps and charts would improve the readability of the work. For example, there is a chart detailing the players and events of the narrow, forty-year period from Diocletian to Constantine, but no overarching chart on the major figures covered in the book.

One of the challenges of Howard-Brook’s provocative claims in this book is that his main argument hinges on a thesis from his earlier work, “*Come Out My People!*”: *God’s Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond*. In that initial book, which I have not read, the author sets up a contrast between a “religion of creation” preached by Jesus over and against a “religion of empire” which Jesus rejected.

This interpretive move cannot be overstated since it becomes the measure the author uses to judge the shortcomings, failures and we might even say “apostasy” of the church fathers. Each church writer’s positions on the various components of “religion of creation” vs. “religion of empire” are examined for their faithfulness measured by this standard. Conceding that I have not yet read *Come Out My People*, one wonders whether Howard-Brook is attempting to replace one form of rigid orthodoxy with another standard, albeit one rooted in the radical discipleship movement that Howard-Brook acknowledges as his anchor point.

For example, would Howard-Brook advocate for a new Christian canon purged of Ezra-Nehemiah and the Pastoral Epistles? Since these books clearly fall into the “religion of empire” category, should they be excised from use since they represent something other than the “religion of creation” that Jesus proclaimed? And how would Howard-Brook make sense of my own observation that the place where I have most

heard the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative preached is not in congregations cozying up to Empire, but in the Black church making demands on powers and principalities to rebuild communities shattered by Empire’s racist-driven disinvestment from them? Is Howard-Brook arguing for the more generous orthodoxy that he sees present in the church’s early years, or a more rigid orthopraxy defined by the Jesus of history, the “real Jesus” distorted by some of the biblical texts? Of course the focus of the book is on the early church writers, not the biblical witness. But readers will find themselves wondering just which part of the biblical witness Howard-Brook embraces as authoritative for evaluating those early Christian “fathers,” questioning his use of the historical Jesus in correcting Scripture and tradition, and probing how deeply his view of that Jesus is informed by his current socio-political commitments.

Regardless, the Church’s slow but steady march away from critiquing the power of Empire to embracing it is clear, with devastating impact for the contemporary church. It becomes much easier to understand many North American Christians’ embrace of anti-hospitality policies, obsession with gun rights and idolatrous commitment to nationalism when one understands the rise of early thought leaders in the church who reframed faithfulness away from Jesus’ central notions of discipleship and toward the maintenance and preservation of power. In unveiling how the Church arrived at its current location, Howard-Brook has given Jesus followers an opportunity to begin to disentangle our present from our past and recommit ourselves to Jesus’ radical Way. ✚

Andrew Foster Connors is Senior Pastor of Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, Maryland (andrew@browndowntown.org). Andrew and his wife Kate Foster Connors were volunteers at the Open Door during their years as students at Columbia Theological Seminary.

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We Are Human, Too!

Voices and Views from Kurdistan: Christian Peacemaker Team Iraqi Kurdistan, May 26, 2017

By Weldon D. Nisly

“Why?! We are human too, just like you!” was the anguished cry of a young Kurdish woman fleeing for her life with throngs of others in Iraqi Kurdistan.

That haunting cry is heartbreaking in its particularity and universality. Her question, wailed in the trauma of a particular time and place, echoes across history and around the world. It is a cry meant for our ears and hearts. Yet it falls on the deaf ears of privileged people and is rejected by cold-hearted powers inflicting cruel violence on innocent people. Deaf-eared denial and cold-hearted rejection are predictable patterns in national security states.

Nowhere is this more true than where “Make America great again!” and “Build that wall!” are rallying cries of fearful people shutting out other human cries. We forget that when we turn deaf ears and cold hearts to the cries of others, we diminish our own humanity and connection to all humanity. We forget that the Black Jesus confronted and transformed our deaf ears and cold hearts forever. In our Western white world we create a Western white Jesus in our image to justify deaf ears and cold hearts.

Forgotten Kurdish people know the anguished cry of long-suffering oppression and genocide. Yet Kurdish people are exceptionally resilient and resourceful. Rather than seeking violent revenge, many Kurds dedicate their lives to non-violent peacemaking, promoting human rights and undoing oppression.

I write this column from Iraqi Kurdistan while serving with the Christian Peacemaker Teams Iraqi-Kurdistan team. Ringing in my ears and on my heart is this young woman’s “Why? We are human too, just like you!” Her cry is a call to embody our own humanity by embracing another’s humanity. Her cry is a consequence of the fallacy and failure of Just War — just war inflicted on other innocent humans while privileged people close our ears and heart. The Just Peace of Jesus gives us a heart and ears to hear and heed every human cry. I share these “Voices and Views from Iraqi Kurdistan” pieces to reveal this human cry and crisis of humanity that also reveals our own humanity or inhumanity.

In May, we hosted a CPT delegation from six countries. To orient delegates to Kurdish culture and context, we visited the National Museum in Sulaimaniya, known as Amna Suraka, meaning “Not to be forgotten.” In addition to portray-



Kak Bapir and Weldon Nisly at the Sulaimaniyah Governorate in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Latif Hars

ing creative Kurdish culture, the museum is the site of the Iraqi Baathist regime’s prison for Kurds accused of opposing Saddam. On the walls of a room are 182,000 shards of mirror, one for each Kurd killed during that oppressive era. Their voices cry out. Another room is filled with haunting photos of Kurds fleeing for their lives, many of them children. A documentary on the 1991 genocide of Kurds showed thousands of survivors fleeing across rugged mountains into the Kurdish sector of Iran. While the world turned a deaf ear and cold heart to this genocide against Kurds, a British journalist recorded it so the world will not forget.

This museum speaks of unbearable terror, torture and trauma inflicted on humans just like you and me. It also inspires hope, as Kurds have established Amna Suraka so they never forget and never inflict atrocity on others.

Kurdish poet and CPT friend Choman Hardi shared the trauma of genocide with us. A leading Kurdish expert on genocide, she is chair of the English department at the American University in Sulaimaniya and an activist in the women’s movement for human rights and gender equality. As an artist, academic and activist, Choman Hardi hears the cry, “We are human too.” After years teaching in other countries, she returned home to join the struggle for humanity. With gentle humor, searing critique, and passionate wisdom, Choman Hardi opened our ears and hearts to the cry of her people.

Kak Bapir is a leader of 63 villages in the mountains of northern Iraqi Kurdistan. A long time CPT partner, we

encountered him four times in May. My CPT teammate, Latif Hars and I accompanied him to meet the regional governor to request electricity for the villages. Kak Bapir invited the CPT delegation to his mountain home in the village of Basta. There we were served tea and shared a bounteous feast while he described how Turkey’s bombing terrorizes their lives. The CPT delegation also met Kak Bapir at the U.S. Consulate in the city of Erbil to support his call for the U.S. to urge Turkey to stop bombing Kurdistan. A week later, CPT teammates accompanied him to meet with the Turkish consul general in Erbil to support his plea that Turkey stop bombing them. Stories of death and destruction did not open the consul general’s heart. He agreed that we are all sisters and brothers, and that military solutions are not the answer. Yet he justified Turkey’s bombing of Kurds in their war on

terrorism allied with the U.S. We challenged him to join us in seeking peace through nonviolent peacemaking and the opposition of violent military solutions. Sadly, Kak Bapir’s cry fell on deaf ears and a cold heart.

Trump’s house of whiteness openly abandons human rights and democracy for all in the name of America’s national security and economic prosperity. The Domination System’s deaf ears and cold hearts promote profits and power for a few people at the expense and sacrifice of many. Do you hear the broken-hearted cry, “Why? I am human too, just like you,” or do you join the cold-hearted chant, “America first!” and “Build that wall!”?

Do you hear Jesus’ heartbroken lament over Jerusalem: “If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” (Luke 19) Or do you close your ears and heart to her cry and Jesus’ lament? Closed ears and hearts are the way of just war. Open hearts and ears are The Way of the Black Jesus’ Just Peace. Will you open your ears and heart to live your humanity? ✠

After 40 years of Mennonite Church ministry that included community, pastoral and peace ministries, Weldon Nisly currently devotes himself in “retirement” to Contemplative Just Peacebuilding and work with Christian Peacemaker Teams. He is a Benedictine Oblate. His life is devoted to the abolition of war.

I Am Staying Outraged Until the Police Stop Killing Our Children *continued from page 1*

America and had the audacity to go out with his own brothers and friends to a party, which evidently they felt they needed to leave, and their leaving put them in the way of a police officer who was out of control. Another maddening piece of this story is the effort that the press and others quickly engaged in to demonstrate whether the victim was worthy of life or death. In Jordan’s case the conclusion was that he was a good student who did not cause anyone any trouble so he should not have been killed. This type of idiotic and bigoted commentary about the character of the folks that are being gunned down by police is as outrageous as the murders themselves. No one deserves to be murdered by the police or anyone else. There is no defense for these 21st-century police lynchings, and they have to stop. Perhaps if enough police officers lose

their jobs and their freedom as a result of their reckless actions, it will help them to think before killing someone.

All of us who have any capacity for empathy and compassion should be grief-stricken and we should be angry. I am grief-stricken. I am angry. I am sick and tired of hearing the stories of abuse of Black and Brown children and the mindless justifications that are given to validate the abusive behavior. We have to stand against the abuse of our children in the schools and we have to stand against the killing of our children in the streets. The children belong to all of us and all of the caring adults in this country need to get that idea fixed in their heads and hearts. After we do that, we need to find ways to act and to make it crystal clear that the outrage is not going away and that it will get stronger and stronger as we go

forward, because we will not stand by and silently watch this horror show. We will resist. ✠

Catherine Meeks is Chair of the Beloved Community: Commission for Dismantling Racism for the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, and the retired Clara Carter Acree Distinguished Professor of Socio-cultural Studies and Sociology from Wesleyan College. She has published six books and is editor of Living Into God’s Dream: Dismantling Racism in America (2016), which focuses on racial healing and reconciliation. She writes for the Huffington Post and is a regular contributor to Hospitality. She is involved with prison work, visits regularly on death row and works for the abolition of the death penalty. (kayma53@att.net)



David Payne

Above: Murphy Davis with Mary Sinclair, who came from Atlanta for a visit.



ODC/Baltimore

Mary Palmer and Andrew Legare came for a visit from Virginia.

Right: Eduard Loring, Mary, Andrew and Murphy Davis.



Photographs by David Payne

Right: Joyce Hollyday journeyed from North Carolina for a visit with Murphy Davis.

Left: Eduard Loring travelled to Washington D.C. to join 300,000 others, including this polar bear, for the People's Climate March on April 29.



Robert Lee



Robert Lee

In, Out & Around ODC/B

Willa Bickham and Brendan Walsh from Viva House Catholic Worker in Baltimore paid a crosstown visit. Left: Robert Lee, Brendan, Willa, Eduard Loring and David Payne.



In June, Wende Bellew and Vicky Kline arrived from Atlanta and posed for a picture with the Peace Pole which came to Baltimore from the yard at 910. Left: David Payne, Wende, Eduard Loring, Vicki and Murphy Davis.

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed and Murphy,

Did I ever tell you that the “Radiolab” interview about forgiveness was heard by an actor/director in Moscow? He came here, took back a sheaf of letters that passed between Ivan and me (with Ivan’s permission), turned them into a play in Russia that is in the repertoire of a theatre collective in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Split the royalties with Ivan, so he has a small income every few months. Now they want to do a film, but that’s a long way off. He wants to interview Ivan and maybe have me visit once more. Never could have imagined all that.

My love to you both.
Hector Black
Cookeville, Tennessee

Dear Ed,

I am one of the recipients of the “new” *Hospitality*, now in Baltimore. I am pleased that you are attempting to carry on the Catholic Worker at the new location, and, I must say, I am saddened that you were unable to continue it in Atlanta, but that is just the way it is.

I became aware of your work in Atlanta some years ago. It was through your newsletter that I obtained the name and address of a man on death row with whom I correspond — David Edenfield.

Before receiving the latest *Hospitality*, I had a letter from Dick Rustay in Vancouver. I had written to him, asking him to say hello to David the next time he visited him, which he did. I also enjoyed reading Dick’s article, and I hope that he and Gladys locate a good place to live and serve, wherever it may be. Good luck to you and your associates in Baltimore.

Peace,
Peter Kopkowski
San Diego, California



Ed and Murphy,

I was deeply touched by your letter in the May-June 2016 *Hospitality*. Your package arrived with Ed’s *The Cry of the Poor* and Terry Easton’s *Raising Our Voices, Breaking the Chain*. Thank you for the books. I recognized your anguish at moving on from the Open Door in Atlanta.

We now have two grandkids, one in Brooklyn and one in Amsterdam. We have both spent our energies in dealing with race in different ways. What has encouraged us is the knowledge that we continue to make a difference. You guys have certainly made a difference, and have inspired many of us around the state of Georgia and the country. Many thanks for all you have done!

Lee Formwalt
Bloomington, Indiana

Dear Murphy,

I hope that this Easter was a beginning of a time of renewal for you and Ed in your continuing journey. I just received the latest issue of *Hospitality* and read your remembrance of Ed Weir. Thanks to you and Ed and everyone else for getting out another life-giving issue.

So many times I have been inspired by your articles and sermons. If you can, you must write your book, Murphy. Let me know what I can do to help. I am not that far away, although Trumpland sometimes feels like it must be in another country.

Love and prayers,
Edith Holleman
Silver Spring, Maryland

Hello Rev. Eduard and Mrs. Murphy,

I got your letter the other day. The funds you send me I’m grateful for but if Mrs. Murphy needs them I would like for it all to go for her so she can get better, okay? I get a place to sleep, food to eat, clothes free. Only thing they charge for here is medical attention, which I just found out, but I’m saying thanks for all you do for me. I’m grateful for it and appreciate it, but during all of this time I found out it’s not about me; love is to be shared by putting other people’s needs before my wants. Mrs. Murphy, you hang in there and if you get close to a mirror, smile for me one time; I’ll receive it in the spirit. Thanks, be good, and God loves you all. I do too.

Love,
prisoner-in-chains
U.S.A.

Ed,

We are downsizing as we prepare to move into senior independent living. Last week I was emptying my key ring to add the keys to my new apartment. The last key I removed was to The Open Door on Ponce! Wow! Symbolized the end of an era for me!

So my daily prayer for Murphy and yourself suddenly was highlighted. Thank you for making a whole phase of my life so meaningful. Still in regular contact with Nelson Earl Mitchell on death row; Murphy first suggested I advocate for him 20 years ago. Visits from Augusta will be challenging at age 86. But we’ll see. Still fairly regular phone contact as well as by letter. All things considered, Earl is doing quite well.

Must call Barbara Schenk right now. Won’t have time/space to visit before leaving.

Peace!
Jim Powers
Atlanta, Georgia

Dearest friends of God Triune, and me, Tom Francis,

Thank you for news about your move to Baltimore, but more especially about Murphy’s condition and fierce struggle with cancer. I admire the courage of both of you as you struggle together in this awesome situation, and both fight fiercely to keep Murphy on planet Earth, and yet ready to accept God’s loving divine providence. Know that I pray daily for and with both of you. May both of you unite yourselves to the veneratum of Christ’s passion and Murphy’s!!

My prayers and love accompany you.
With affection,
Tom Francis, OCSO
Monastery of the Holy Spirit
Conyers, GA 30094

Ed and Murphy,

I’ve just read the February-March issue of *Hospitality* and wanted to write to thank you for your faithful witness. I’m sure your transition from Ponce de Leon hasn’t been easy, and I know it’s not what you would have chosen. But your steadfastness in a new season is an encouragement to me. I spent the first hundred days of this presidency writing a book on reconstructing the gospel — naming the difference between the Christianity of the slaveholder and the Christianity of Christ. As I wrote I thought often of y’all and Jubilee Partners, Clarence Jordan and Will Campbell. These are dark days, with plenty of reason for concern. But y’all remind me that a light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overwhelmed it.

Shine on,
Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
School for Conversion
Durham, North Carolina

Raising Our Voices, Breaking the Chain

The Imperial Hotel Occupation as Prophetic Politics

By Terry Easton

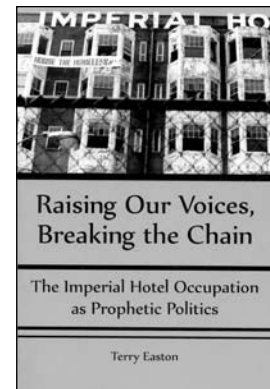
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poetry corner



Julie Lonneman

“Trump has the attention span of a gnat on meth!”

(Rick Wilson, Lawrence O’Donnell Show, *The Last Word*, April 7, 2017.)

Trump has no ability
To undo this disability,
And moral imbecility,
This insult to a gnat
And that my dear, is that!

Roger Cooper
4/8/17

Roger Cooper is a Lutheran minister, retired psychologist and former seminary professor who lives in Florida. His poetry has been published in various journals. He is active in the Friedrich Hölderlin Society and travels regularly to Germany for its meetings.