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Evangelicals, Education, and Exile



by Harold Dean Trulear

In a 1971 sermon, the late E. Theodore Jones poses an interesting question to the biblical text of Matthew's gospel, Chapter 14, verses 22-33. There one finds the familiar story of Peter walking on the water. Jones, one time dean of the School of Theology at Virginia Union University, does not focus on the miraculous event of the fisherman's sea-top stroll. He does not give primary attention to Peter's sinking when Peter's eyes did not leave Jesus, nor does Jones give much heed to Jesus' rescue of the "rock" during the episode. Rather, Jones

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makes a different entry to the text, posing the following question: "What made Peter get out of the boat in the first place?"

The text really does not specify Peter's mood or mind on the subject, but Jones speculates on the fisherman's frame of mind; his speculation, based on the various times Peter appears in the gospels, reveals a rather distinct personality. This Peter who is quick to answer Jesus' question concerning Jesus' identity, who speaks for the Father, who then lets Satan have control of his voice; this Peter who boasts of his fidelity to Jesus, who then follows this boast with an assault on a temple guard, and who then gives a terse, vulgar-laced denial of the Christ, is the same Peter who asks to come to Jesus on the water. Impetuous and impervious, brash and rash, Peter, opines Jones, probably acted not on faith but on visibility—wanting to be seen. Peter the attention getter, Peter the man front and center, is the one Jones proffers. Jones goes on to recognize the grace that Jesus extended to Peter in granting his request and miraculously bringing Peter toward him. Jones contrasts this response with what would have been his own, albeit flawed, human response to Peter's impetuosity: "I would have yelled, 'Peter, get back in the boat.'"

Jones presses the notion that there are times when impetuosity gets us into trouble that only the grace of God can address. Then Jones turns the tide on his suburban church audience and declares, "Somebody needs to tell America to get back on the boat."

Jones was particularly concerned about America's role in international affairs: he criticized certain policies, notably the war in Viet Nam. However, for him the greater problem was a lack of

national humility concerning our country's place, not just in the world of politics but also in economics, culture, and even religion. Jones espied the need for a culture of humility as a prophetic alternative to a spirit of cultural unilateralism, the kind that Myles Monroe, the Bahamian evangelist, critiqued when he observed that "America is the only country that plays a World Series by itself."

Such a call for national humility frames my address today. Indeed, for the Evangelical Church,

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especially those of us who affirm the Sovereignty of God with Reformed vigor, a culture of humility would seem to be the order of the day. Humanity, no matter how well organized in our institutional life, how well informed in our educational life, how far advanced in our technology, how far "superior" economically, must resist the temptation to take credit for the grace of God. Resisting this temptation is a very difficult thing to do, however, especially when we keep winning, whether it is World Series or a war, the Olympics or the space race, the standard of living or the field of entertainment. It seems as though the United States has developed an outlook on life that echoes the '70s bumper sticker: "When you're as good as I am, it's hard to be humble." We even have the richest poor people in the world, with a standard of living that, while not good, certainly trumps that of the poor

in many other countries.

For the Christian, this attitude becomes particularly problematic in light of the salvation narrative of the Scriptures. God's people always (or are supposed to always) rely on Him as their strength and protection. God's people are supposed to understand that all of their possessions are gifts from God. God clothes us, feeds us, and cares for us. God is Providence and will share His glory with no one. Now, however, with the successful rise of Evangelical involvement in the political sphere in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the church basks in the glow of some fairly bright political lights in some fairly high institutional places. While Christian commitment to citizenship demands our participation in the public sphere, such participation should always be done with humility and a prophetic critical distance that does not equate the agenda of God with any partisan platform.

In his important work *God's Name in Vain*, Yale University Law Professor Stephen Carter chides the church for uncritical partisan allegiances that make the church indistinguishable from the views of its adopted party. Carter criticizes White Evangelicals for their wholesale adoption of the Republican Party; such an adoption removes them from the likelihood of any prophetic witness, since a prophetic witness requires a critical distance. Carter also criticizes Black Protestants for whom the Democratic Party represents God's agenda. In both cases, argues Carter, the Church loses sight of the larger witness of the Kingdom of God and its sense of otherness.¹ In the Spirit of C.S. Lewis, whose 1941 essay "Meditations on the Third Commandment" contains his objection to starting a Christian party in British politics, Carter proffers the argument that no political party can fully embody the ethics and ethos of the Kingdom.² Also, the idea of a "Christian Party" would be of necessity exclusive, especially to those who have been saved by grace but who may hold a different position on a particular issue.

Such exclusivity characterized much of the verbiage on both sides of the 2004 Presidential election. Not only did White Evangelicals support Bush, but many also wondered aloud if one could be a Christian and vote for Kerry. Others came right to the point of exclusion: one could not

be a good Christian and vote for the Senator from Massachusetts. Such charges did not emanate solely from Evangelicals, Midwestern or otherwise. Many African-American Christians, angered over the policies of the Bush administration, questioned how anyone could call himself or herself a Christian and vote for Bush. African-American angst was further intensified by the virtual absence of talk about race and poverty in the campaign, something one would have to retreat to the Presidential election of 1944 to repeat. To argue that God answered the prayers of those who voted for George W. Bush is to also assert that He didn't hear the prayers of those who voted for Kerry. This response is not humility. We did not know what God would do with or through the Bush administration. Like each stage in the development of Joseph in Genesis, it is always too soon to tell.

Though clearly not a superpower as a colony of England, this country had to struggle with its humility even then. Those who settled on this continent and who saw themselves as "God's New Israel" planted the seeds of the struggle. Israel as a nation was chosen in biblical times, but clearly it was chosen to serve God's purposes, both in its direct dealing with other nations and as an example of covenant living, demonstrating God's will and vision for humanity. When Israel began trusting in foreign alliances rather than in "the Lord our Banner," they edged toward exile. When Israel abandoned their commitment to the poor and the stranger, they edged toward exile. When Israel lost sight of their history as slaves, they ushered in a future of exilic living. Frequently, the oracles of God directed toward wayward Israel began with "I am the Lord the God Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt." The prophets consistently called Israel, not to some new utopian society but rather back to the covenant established on the heels of the exodus. The prophets were not wild-eyed dreamers with new visions of a better world; rather, from Nathan to Amos, Micah to Jeremiah, Isaiah to Elijah, they called the nation and its leadership back to their covenant with the One who had delivered them from bondage.

By the time of the Babylonian exile, much of this prophetic edge had ebbed and eroded. More common then was the "prophet on the payroll,"

who delighted in telling the kings and princes what they wanted to hear rather than what "thus sayeth the Lord." False prophets predicted victory for the Hebrews when God preordained defeat. False prophets encouraged alliances with neighboring superpowers when God saw clearly the impending doom of such forsaking of the One that the Psalms call a "Strong Tower" and a "Shelter," the One Samuel honored when he built an altar after a victory over the Philistines and called it "Ebenezer"—"The Lord has helped us." The political agenda of Israel was now determined by a series of kings and princes, devoid of a critical mass of prophetic activity, who called the nation and its leadership to account. Offering prophecy that didn't support the status quo and the interests of the mighty resulted in jail time or a cistern's depths, being smacked and mocked, and being threatened with death. Exile loomed.

The United States as an entity is not alone in its appropriation of "chosen people" identity. Within its borders, African Americans have adopted a sense of chosenness as well. In his book *Prophesy Deliverance: A Revolutionary Afro-American Christianity*, Cornel West calls this sense of chosenness the "Black Exceptionalist tradition." Black Exceptionalism argues that because of the history of slavery and segregation in the United States, the descendants of those who were enslaved have developed a moral superiority from their perspective as outsiders to the mainstream of society. It argues that prohibited from the corrupting powers attributed to political and economic leadership, African Americans have been able to adopt a political culture where moral values such as altruism and virtue can flourish, resisting the temptation to operate purely from self- or group-interest. West critiques this notion, arguing that with increased access to power in the 1970s and 1980s, Black leadership is plagued by much of the same corrupting influences in the political and ethical realms.³

Still, the adoption of the Israel motif continues in Black America. This motif is especially true in the Black churches' appropriation of the Exodus narrative as a parallel to their own experience. Just as the Hebrews were slaves under the Egyptians, Blacks were enslaved by Whites in America. Just as God sent Moses to set His people free, God sent

people such as Harriet Tubman and events such as the Civil War to do the same for His enslaved people in the United States. Martin Luther King's ministry during the Civil Rights Movement often evoked images of Moses setting God's people free in the segregated South.

Such imagery, however, comes short of describing contemporary reality in America in general and the Black community in particular. While the history of Blacks in America certainly mirrors that of the Hebrews in Egypt, to wholly identify the Blacks with the Hebrews solely in light of the Exodus narrative reduces the Jewish narrative to one characterized only by victimization and vindication. Israel's struggles to maintain God's covenant in their public life demonstrates that there is more to a people's relationship with God than that. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that African Americans would do well to consider the Babylonian Exile as a more appropriate model of political and economic practice than the Exodus motif. Like the Exodus, the Babylonian Exile rehearses the reality of victimization and oppression. However, there are acute differences between the social arrangements of the two that commend the latter period as a lens for constructing a contemporary Evangelical political identity. Using the movement from the Exodus to the Exile allows one to follow these changes: (1) from victimization to complicity in oppression, (2) from a clerical focus to lay ministry and vocations, (3) from liberation to transformation as a goal.

We begin with victimization. The Hebrews were not in Babylon on some sort of vacation. They persisted through difficult times in Babylon, expressing their longing for home in the plaintive cries of the Psalmist. Although we do not have the text of their letter to Jeremiah, the prophet's reply surely reflects an audience of alienated souls in wonderment over their predicament. The Babylonian-Exile motif allows African Americans to address the reality of injustice as it persists to this day in the United States and abroad, but without having that as the primary characteristic of their experience. Racism is a persistent reality, and there must be some paradigm that properly deals with oppression.

At the same time, African Americans have ex-

perienced significant gains in the past fifty years. The Black middle class, once bound by residential and other forms of institutional segregation, now enjoy greater horizontal and vertical mobility than prior to Brown versus Topeka Board of Education and the ensuing Civil Rights movement.⁴ Other Blacks have seen barriers to economic and social advancement removed as they have entered the middle class for the first time. For both of these groups, the presence of the theme of victimiza-

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tion is a helpful component both in understanding contemporary injustice and for sustaining a memory of their historically marginalized status. Such memory serves as an important factor in motivating the Black middle-class churches to remember their obligation to the poor. As increasing numbers of Black churches move to the suburbs and away from the inner city, lack of proximity works against these congregations' maintaining a dynamic witness to the poor. The theme of victimization reminds the Black middle class of the place from whence they have come and, more importantly, the place from whence God has brought them.

The Evangelical Church and its institutions ought to consider a similar shift. The exilic period was a time of humbling for the Jewish people. The United States could use some humility at this critical juncture in history, and the Evangelical Church must model such in its self-understanding, its politics, and its economics. With access to power, the Church loses its critical distance and prophetic

voice. Also, like Israel, it will discover that the loss of the prophetic voice will end in judgment. Many White Evangelical churches have their roots in marginalized communities in Europe. Others have experienced the marginalization of their ethnic traditions within the United States. Still others experience the marginalization of their voices in the public square. Even the recent invitation to participate in President Bush's Faith-Based Initiative comes with the qualifying voice that churches must minimize, if not silence, their religious voices with respect to participation in the government-sponsored funding initiative. Indeed, the very thing that churches do best—represent and worship God—becomes the one thing that is taboo in the delivery of services by faith-based organizations.

If the Evangelical Church does not understand its place on the theological margin, the exilic paradigm presents another challenge—that of not belonging. While Daniel and his friends did advance within the Babylonian political system, there were reminders along the way that they were not part of the historic mainstream of Babylonian culture. From the call to bow before the idols in Daniel 3 to the challenge to Daniel's prayer life in Daniel 6, there were posts holding signs of "Not Wanted" in the Babylonian Halls of power. In Daniel 5, the feast held by Belshazzar had a clear anti-Hebrew connotation. The Babylonian monarch and his crew dishonored the Hebrews' God with coarse jesting and mocking. They profaned the cultus through their use of temple vessels as party ware. However, despite the fact that the invitation list included a veritable Who's Who of Babylonian society, Daniel and his three friends did not make the "A" list. Eventually, the mainstream power-brokers showed their true self-interest and dismissed the outsiders who had found their way to the process of decision-making. The Daniel narrative points to the rigidity of the barriers that separate the insiders from the outsiders. God's vindication of Daniel and his friends in each case indicates that trust in God's Sovereignty provides vindication for the oppressed where the appearance of acceptance proves false.

In the movement to the exilic paradigm, however, victimization and its vindication do not tell

the entire story. While Egypt is the clear villain in the Exodus, Israel must accept complicity for its existence in Babylon. The Babylonian Empire was evil, but they served as God's judgment against His own wayward people. Israel had to come to recognize that their sin played a major role in their exile. African Americans, challenged by the gains of post-Civil-Rights America, increasingly see the need for a public voice that engages Black culpability in the current conventions of African-American distressed communities. Some will see this need of a public voice as a new development, though this development is not new. While the public voice of the Civil Rights movement focused on injustice and oppression, there always existed an internal critique within the Black community that insisted on accountability and responsibility within the community itself. Cheryl Sanders, a Christian ethicist and Church of God pastor, calls this criticism "Black Moral Self-Criticism."⁵

This tradition is as old as eighteenth-century moralism within the Black Church, yet it was less visible prior to the mainstream culture. A reputable Evangelical scholar once asked me to identify a nineteenth-century Black Christian who represented a progressive Evangelical personal and social witness. I suggested Henry Highland Garnet, the Presbyterian preacher who was keynote speaker at the 1843 National Negro Convention and later head of the New York branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. "No," my colleague responded. "I need somebody that somebody's heard of." As a rule, Black moral self-criticism is only "heard of" when it serves those in power to point to someone within the Black community to footnote or champion ideas in the majority's self-interest. This self-criticism has been less about the truth of such claims than about political expediency.

Evangelicals must look seriously at the extent to which they/we have been part of the problem in considering the development of a social malaise in our time. Does not accountability demand that we own our own excesses and our own failures to be faithful and that we come to a place of true repentance? No one would deny the challenge presented by the weakening of authority in contemporary America. Evangelicals attribute the erosion

of institutional health to the loss of authority in our leadership. I find myself wondering whether the first chipping away at authority in our society came when “authority” resisted integration and the Evangelical Church was silent. With few exceptions, Evangelicals did not see the pursuit of justice during the Civil Rights Movement as part of their Christian citizenship. As a result, appeals to other institutions, federal courts for example, became the method of engagement. Now, many conservatives lament the “activist” judges who attack the authority of our godly heritage—the Ten Commandments, “one nation under God,” etc. The Warren Court brought judicial activism to a new intensity, from which we currently recoil. If we had moved to dismantle segregation as a moral issue before Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund brought their strategy of litigation to the Supreme Court, judicial activism might never have reached current levels.⁶

In calling for accountability, I don’t simply mean mass verbal confessions of sin, though that could be a start. Such confessions by the

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Southern Baptists and the National Association of Evangelicals certainly have a place. Rather, I envision a willingness of all Evangelical institutions, churches, and otherwise to be self-critical in order to assess our accountability for the ills that plague us. In the case of higher education, this

self-criticism would require colleges, universities, and seminaries to move beyond curriculum reform and ask questions about their ethos and culture in general. One such issue is the growing pre-professional character of undergraduate education in colleges in general and Christian colleges in particular. By giving increased space in the curriculum to pre-professional studies, students have less opportunity to reflect historically and ethically on such issues as spirituality and vocation. College is increasingly seen as job-preparation rather than as a context for spiritual, intellectual and social growth. The realities and responsibilities of citizenship are given increasingly less attention. Could this lack of attention be a contributing factor to increased corruption in business and government, decreasing dollars available for programs that truly serve the needy, and failure to take responsibility for civic life, a failure that weakens families and communities?

Colleges that require community service represent a step in the right direction. However, such service cannot simply be a trip to “observe” and/or “help out.” Co-curricular activity such as community service requires Christian ethical, theological, biblical and historical reflection. Other explanations exist for distressed communities besides the poor and any series of accidents of history.

Colleges should cultivate a sense of identity within their students so that the question of who they are in Christ is a live issue in the family, workplace, community, and civic arenas. Resources found in these areas should be directed to the Kingdom-building process. In this case, reflection on community service should lead graduates to participate in the common good in a manner less self-interested and less group-interested. This participation leads to the second movement in exilic identity—from a clerical focus to a focus on lay ministry and vocation.

In the Exodus motif, there is an extraordinary focus on leadership. Moses received top billing in the narration of the heroic epic of the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Aaron, the priest, played a major role in the development of the cultus, as did the Levites in the stratification of the Hebrew society into priest and people, clergy and lay. Even recent arguments for

the inclusion of Miriam in the leadership pantheon of Israel in the wilderness reflect the emphasis on leadership in the Exodus paradigm. However, the exile hagiography is rife with persons in the lay ranks who saw their role as using their positions within the general society to bring glory to God and seek the common good. They combined with priests to form a robust blend of persons engaged in seeking the peace of the city where they had been sent by Yahweh, knowing that in its welfare they would find welfare.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego all served within the government structures. Daniel's final appointment seemed somewhat akin to a cabinet post in education. Nehemiah's ministry required his strategic location within the Babylonian civil-service system in order to mobilize the resources necessary to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and insure the protection and provision of God's people. Esther's location within the royal family enabled her to seek her people's safety. Esther risked not only her position but also her very life after some prodding by Uncle Mordecai—something about the Sovereignty of God—in order to approach the king: "If I perish, I perish." These are all lay persons, socialized and supported in such a way that they could maintain their religious identity in government, community, and marketplace and could believe that their placement in those venues was neither an accident of history nor their just reward for efforts educational.

Among the priests, Ezekiel preached the message of personal accountability that seemed foreign to the lips of his ordained counterparts. Avoiding the corruption of the official denominational structure, he seemed well aware of God's presence and call. Ezra demonstrated broad talents for a priest: historian, scholar, statesman, organizer, almost something like Antonio Gramsci's "organic intellectual." His knowledge of other cultures and foreign affairs made a major contribution to the resettling of Jerusalem and the reclamation of covenant identity among the Jews, if only for a season. Also, his willingness to partner with lay persons such as Nehemiah demonstrates a spiritual humility that made for good leadership.

The African-American church must move in a similar direction. The focus on "Black leaders"

reflects a failure in many circles to think of the empowerment of persons in government, community, and market as a means of strengthening distressed communities rather than waiting on "the next Moses." Several African Americans have attempted to wear this crown since the death of Martin Luther King, but none of King's self-proclaimed successors was obviously anointed for the job. The media cooperates in this folly by continuing to use the term "Black leaders." Most ethnic groups do not have leaders—they have clergy, politicians, businessmen and women, etc. The constant reference to Black "leadership" objectifies Blacks as "followers," homogenizes a diverse pool of talent, and limits their voices and efforts to "race issues." African-American churches cannot afford to have their voices silent in other areas besides race. The tenures of Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell in the administration of George W. Bush loom as a prime example of such areas.

Evangelical institutions must press vocational identity as a critical component of preparation for citizenship. With Os Guinness, we limit the term *vocation* to neither its Protestant distortion (job-related) nor its Catholic one (clerical). Rather, vocation refers to the whole of one's calling to be in the world before the God whom Guinness calls "the Audience of One."⁷ Vocation encompasses family and community life, workplace and church life, educational and civic life, all lived in conscious, intentionally reflective awareness of one's relationship with God and response to God's grace. This awareness led Nehemiah to seek the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls from his vantage point as a government bureaucrat. It led Messiah College alumna Amy Sherman to place her Ph.D. in economics from the University of Virginia, as well as her commitment to civic culture, at the disposal of the poor; she documented programs that make a difference in the lives of the disadvantaged.

How this awareness manifests itself in courses within the disciplines should be continuously debated. Some argue that there is no such thing as a Christian form of their discipline. Others see Christian perspective as the way in which a vocation can be lived through a discipline. To the extent that disciplines degenerate into narrowly defined pre-professional programs, colleges will

need to find different ways of approaching vocations—through co-curricular or extra-curricular activities.

There remains, finally, the shift from the liberation motif of the Exodus to the transformational theme of the Exile. For Moses and the children of Israel, the goal was the Promised Land, with the remains of the Egyptian army squarely in the rearview mirror. This event became the primary emblem of Jewish identity to which Yahweh regularly referred when calling the nation of Israel back to Himself. When Jeremiah gives direction to the exiles in Babylon, however, he advises them to unpack and seek the peace of Babylon. Babylon is to be changed in some way, a way that will ultimately bring glory to the Sovereign Lord and benefit His people.

The adoption of the Exodus paradigm by African Americans, as we have noted, was a natural parallel in presence. At the same time, there were always those who pointed to the limitations of the paradigm as a means of gaining hope from this biblical narrative. This list included the above named Henry Highland Garnet, the African American Presbyterian minister from New York. In his 1843 address to the National Negro Convention, Garnet pointed to deficiencies he saw in the exodus paradigm, most notably that deliverance or escape from slavery would not bring the freedom for African Americans that it brought for the Hebrews. North America, noted Garnet, whose father had been a fugitive slave hunted throughout New York State, was no real place of rest. Whether one called the Promised Land Canada or the Northern states, declared the abolitionist, “Pharaoh’s army is on both sides of the blood-red waters.”⁸

The liberation paradigm caught hold in the formal theological work of Black theologians such as James Cone and J. DeOtis Roberts in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹ However, the liberation motif still lacked a Promised Land; the idea that there existed a place of freedom, short of an integrationist vision, found no root in reality.

This lack of a place of freedom necessitated a shift to an ethic of transformation. African-American churches, clear that there was no Promised Land free from the presence of the oppressor, saw the transformation of existing communities as a de-

sirable goal. The work of Nehemiah became a ready model for community development, as the government bureaucrat’s role in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem served as a paradigm for such efforts across the country.

As Evangelical churches and their institutions consider their future, the call for social transformation looms large. While some Evangelicals press the claim for an otherworldly ministry given the eminent return of Jesus Christ, other Evangelicals press the claim for a this-world ministry. As we have witnessed, Evangelicals’ role in the re-election of George W. Bush, and their claiming the moral high ground for legislation and litigation in everything from anti-abortion to the public use of the Ten Commandments, demonstrates that the question is not “Should Evangelicals be politically active in the United States?” but “What form will that activity take?” For me, the tragedy of

Vocation encompasses family and community life, workplace and church life, educational and civic life, all lived in conscious, intentionally reflective awareness of one’s relationship with God and response to God’s grace.

Evangelical social action lies in its failure to move beyond group self-interest toward the view of a just society.

Simply put, Evangelical churches, especially within the Reformed tradition that has produced historical figures such as John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper and contemporary thinkers in the mold of Nicolas Woltersdorff and Richard Mouw, have a responsibility to view social transformation in ways that transcend the interests of local communities and ethnic groups and that plumb the depths

of the biblical understanding of justice and shalom. This challenge critiques the politics of a country whose founding fathers established a bi-cameral legislative system to create a body—the Senate—whose role would be to see beyond the interests of local communities—the role of the House of Representatives—and strive for the common good of all. In more crass terms, the original philosophy of bi-cameral legislation is violated when the primary question asked of a Senator is, “What did you do for our state?”

To wit, leadership education in the Evangelical Church requires painting social engagement with a much broader stroke while recognizing that any true view of biblical justice will be a perspective from the margin. Any real appropriation of biblical ethics for political and economic change will be a minority report. When the nation and its powers-that-be discover that a person won’t always vote his or her personal or group interest, whether in the polling place or in the shareholders meeting, they will place that person on the margin. When they discover that a person is rejecting his or her crass, least-common-denominator form of political coalitions, whether conservative or liberal, left or right, democrat or republican, they will close ranks as did Belshazzar in Daniel 5 and move to exclude that person.

Hope still exists, however. Daniel ultimately received an invitation to the very feast designed to celebrate the marginalization of the Hebrew tradition. He received an invitation because another Uninvited Guest to Belshazzar’s feast arrived unannounced and began writing on the wall. When this Mystery Guest began writing on the wall, Belshazzar sent for Daniel, who, through his education and spiritual discernment, was able to give King Belshazzar the interpretation of the writing. Daniel’s subsequent elevation to a cabinet post gave him a platform built by that Same Hand—the Hand of the Sovereign God—from which he fashioned a curriculum for the intelligentsia of Persia. Five hundred years later, representatives of the Persian intellectual community, under the influence of Daniel’s curriculum, followed a star to Bethlehem, where they fell down to worship that Same Hand.

It is a violation of our understanding of the

Sovereignty of God to believe that Evangelicals, by adopting a minority opinion, cannot see the vindication of God’s truth while standing for justice and shalom in spite of the loss of secular coalitions. The Sovereign God, who raised Jesus from the dead, always has the last word. It is such faith in God’s sovereignty that moved the Black Methodist preacher, Charles Albert Tindley, to write,

Harder yet may be the fight.
Right may often yield to might.
Wickedness a while may reign.
Satan’s cause may seem to gain.
But there’s a God Who rules above
With hand of power and heart of love.
And if I’m right He’ll fight my battles.
I shall have peace someday.¹⁰

Endnotes

1. Stephen Carter, *God’s Name in Vain: The Right and Wrong of Religion in politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). See especially pages 35-47.
2. The essay is found in the collection C. S. Lewis, *God on the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).
3. Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press 1982, 2002). See especially pages 70-78.
4. The debate on social progress among African Americans centers on comparing the gains and growth of the middle classes with the growth and despair of the contemporary poor. A spike in the debate occurred with the appearance of *America in Black and White*, by Susan and Stephen Thernstrom (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).
5. Professor Sanders devotes an entire chapter to this phenomenon in her book *Empowerment Ethics for a Liberated People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).
6. Houston’s career and contributions are well documented in Genna Rae McNeil’s *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1938). One can see the development of Houston’s philosophy of civil rights litigation in McNeil’s chapter “To meet the group needs: the transformation of Howard University School of Law, 1920-1935,” in *New Perspectives on Black Educational History*, V.P. Franklin and James D. Anderson, eds. (Boston: G.K. Hall 1978). I attempt

to connect the social context of Houston's work with contemporary judicial activism in my column, "Just Desserts" in *Prism: The America's Alternative Evangelical Voice* 12.4 (July/August 2005), 6.

7. Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose in your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003). See especially pages 27-35.
8. See his pamphlet "An Address to the Slaves in the United States of America," delivered in 1843 at the National Negro Convention in Buffalo, New York. It has been reprinted in numerous places, often along with David Walker's "Appeal to Persons of Color" of 1829.
9. James Cone's most mature, complex statement concerning liberation theology and the Black experience remains his *God of the Oppressed*, revised and reissued in 1997 by Orbis Press. J. DeOtis Roberts, whose *A Black Political Theology* was initially published in 1974, was another early Black liberation theologian whose work helped set the parameters for how the liberation paradigm would guide the discussion. Both have several pieces recorded in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, edited by James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore and published in two volumes (1966-79 and 1980-92) by Orbis Press in 1979 and 1993 respectively.
10. From the hymn "I'll Overcome Some Day," written by Charles Albert Tindley. See *Charles Albert Tindley* (library.advanced.org/10854/tindley.html).

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