Book Reviews

Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest & Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

Jon Michael Spencer is rapidly becoming one of the most recognized and widely-read scholars in African American Studies. An associate professor at Bowling Green State University, Spencer's greatest contribution rests in his careful and perceptive analyses of certain aspects of the artistic and spiritual in black culture. Of great significance in this regard is his *Sacred Symphony: The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher* (1987), that explores the mystical potency of music as a central quality in traditional Black preaching. With the appearance of his *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*, a more recent publication, Spencer has moved to a new level in his interpretation of music as a reflection of the experiences, values, and traditions of African Americans.

The ten chapters comprising *Protest and Praise* are bound together by what Spencer calls *theomusicology*, which for him "is musicology as a theologically informed discipline" (p. viii). He employs this method in treating a variety of musical forms, devoting special attention in each chapter to the distinctive historio-theological context out of which each form evolved.

Spencer's discussion of the Exodus story as told through the old Negro spirituals is rich and thought-provoking. Here he emphasizes the themes of "promise" and "passage," asserting that the Christ-Moses of the spirituals is not only the "promise" that unfolds in promises made by God throughout history concerning a definite homeland for the people of the Exodus, but is also the "passage" that occurs in the taking of these people from the Egypt

of slavery to the promised land of liberation. It is at this point that Spencer sets forth some of his most persuasive arguments concerning African American music as a theology of liberation.

The liberation motif also emerges in some measure in Spencer's treatment of Black hymnody. He views Black hymnody as essentially a product of White social gospel hymnody — that antislavery hymnody which, as he puts it, "addressed the real foundation of Black liberation" (p. viii). Here Spencer's discussion provides new angles from which to assess the widespread musical borrowings and exchanges that occurred between Blacks and Whites in the nineteenth century.

Spencer's references to hymnody's role in the Social Gospel Movement of Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden, and others are quite interesting. Here the emphasis is not only on how hymnody reflected the social awakening of the early twentieth century, but also on how it pointed to the possibility of the fulfillment of God's kingdom on earth. The discussion is slightly weakened by Spencer's failure to adequately explore the possible impact that this "Kingdom" or Social Gospel hymnody had at that time on Reverdy C. Ransom, Alexander Walters, Ida B. Wells, and other social gospelers in the Black church.

The freedom songs of the civil rights movements hold a central place in Spencer's analysis. Here he stresses the importance of *group participation songs* (often extemporaneously adapted from extant material by a group engaged in civil rights activities) and *topical songs* (those that comment on protest events from the sidelines). Spencer evidences a keen awareness of how the modern civil rights movement was linked in spirit and in its essential thrust to Black liberation movements dating back to slavery, mainly through the prism of music. "Many freedom songs," he declares, "were adaptations from traditional spirituals and gospel songs," a statement which makes unmistakably clear his belief that the African American freedom movement is one

with historic continuity and an unbroken tradition (p. 83). In terms of the sophistication of his analysis, Spencer compares with Bernice J. Reagon, Guy and Candie Carawan, and others who are known for deep probes into the character of Black freedom songs.

Spencer's examination of the blues as "an expression of Black theology" reflects on the powerful union of the sacred and the secular in African American culture (p. 107). He accepts the Black theologian James H. Cone's perceptive view of the blues as "secular spirituals" that affirm ideas concerning the sacred in black life. Spencer's reflections on both the theological content and the radical protest language of the blues constitute perhaps the most unique aspect of his *Protest and Praise*.

The ring shout takes on a strikingly powerful image in Spencer's discussion. Special attention is given to sacred African instruments such as the drum and its connection to the performance of the ring shout in Africa and in the New World. The peculiar requirements of rhythm in African religious rituals—rituals which honor gods and ancestors and celebrate birth, puberty, marriage, and death—are carefully underscored by Spencer, making his analysis all the more searching and brilliant. His discussion clearly bears out the Black historian Sterling Stuckey's claim, set forth in *Slave Culture* (1987), that the ring shout was the most significant African ritual in America in the pre-Civil War years.

Spencer's treatment of the tongue-song or "singing in tongues" further reveals the distinctiveness so characteristic of his study. He argues convincingly that "singing in tongues," like "evidential glossolalia," was an important activity which distinguished early Pentecostalism from the mainstream Black church tradition. Spencer goes on to highlight the ritual of testimony in the music of Black Pentecostal-Holiness groups as a feature which united them with that tradition. His interpretations on these levels afford rich and useful insights for understanding the

vitality and diversity so typical of the African American religious experience over time.

Spencer's interpretation of Black gospel music is essentially in line with treatments provided by Lawrence W. Levine, Tony Heilbut, and other scholars. "Gospel music," says Spencer, "derives its name and theology from the gospel of Jesus Christ" (p. 199). Spencer displays a keen knowledge of Thomas A. Dorsey, Charles A. Tindley, and others who pioneered in Black gospel, and of the various responses of Black church persons to that particular musical form. His reflections cannot be casually ignored by those interested in distinguishing gospel music from the spirituals, the blues, and other musical genres in the African American community.

Spencer's discussion of musicality in Black preaching in *Protest and Praise* is basically the same as that found in parts of his *Sacred Symphony: The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher*. He is particularly concerned with the close correlation that exists between Black preaching and the old Negro spirituals, and he concludes that "a substantial number of spirituals" probably "evolved via the preaching event of Black worship" (p. 225). Here Spencer's conclusion is quite similar to that advanced in Henry H. Mitchell's *Black Preaching* (1970).

Protest and Praise is a superb book. It has no major, glaring weaknesses. The book evidences Spencer's genius at essentially two levels. First, it reflects his broad knowledge of both the primary and secondary sources concerning Black religion and Black sacred music. Second, it reveals the tremendous depth of insight and analysis he brings to his interpretation of African American musical genres. Spencer has a profound grasp of the unity of African American culture, particularly in the spiritual and artistic sense. The holistic perspective he affords points to

the central thread which unites African American music in all of its dimensions; namely, the historic quest for liberation and survival.

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Sandra M. Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991) 136 pp.

Only thirty years ago a theological analysis of Catholic feminism, indeed of theology directed to the liberation of women on any basis, would have had almost no bibliography; today, the lecture format in which this book originated, and its brevity, must excuse the omission of reference to several significant figures.

Sister Schneiders, a professor of New Testament and Spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, presented three talks, the 1990 Anthony Jordan Lectures in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, to commemorate the pioneering of Archbishop Jordan in admitting women, and men who are not candidates for the priesthood, to study at Newman Theological College. Her concern in the resultant book is to defend what she describes as a radical form of feminism, showing that it is compatible with Christian faith.

The most basic issue treated here is the problem of a feminist Christian in whose experience the life of the Church, the study of Scripture, and involvement in Catholic institutions are both liberating and oppressive. Schneiders wants to show that the restrictive and demeaning features of Catholic teaching and practice may be canceled, making room for genuine and com-

plete equality of men and women, without loss to the essential doctrines of the faith. Further, she claims that the Gospel message of liberation does not fully make sense for anyone unless its consequences for everyone, male and female, are identical, respecting the gifts and serving the needs of all, and opening all positions of leadership in the Church to every qualified person. Although Schneiders' references to feminism in other Christian bodies are few, her approach to the nature of biblical revelation and our means of understanding God, and her specific points about a feminist transformation of the common life of Christian communities, apply fully to other denominations and theological traditions. Her discussion of the authority of scripture rejects not only fundamentalism but any reading of the Bible which submits to the biblical assumption that women belong by nature to a different, subordinate sphere in society. She grounds her argument on a traditional teaching that God, whatever we may know or believe of God, is eternally beyond and above all conceptual knowledge and propositional doctrine, so that the verbal character of revelation, and its inescapable embedding in a particular time and culture, must penetrate our knowing and believing with our own human weakness and liability to sin and error.

Problems involved in the radical Christian feminism that she proposes are numerous; she confronts some more directly than others. Feminists themselves are divided in belief and practice, with some adhering to anti-Christian spiritualities. Feminism as a social movement is chiefly middle class and White, and therefore unrepresentative of Christianity even in America, to say nothing of the rest of the world. Secular society excludes, oppresses and mistreats women, sometimes over the Church's opposition, sometimes with the Church's connivance, but so universally that one may question the wisdom of struggling so hard for institutional and theoretical adjustments, among religious bodies, whose effect on the wider world may be slight.

Many professionally qualified and well educated women have little interest in feminism as a movement; often women theologians, scripture professors, and missiologists have a different agenda. Feminist spirituality, liturgy and politics are largely the commitments of insiders, who suffer from what Schneiders calls "existential anger," a permanent condition of rage at injustices that cannot be soon or easily remedied and that seem to contaminate the life and witness of those who rebel against them.

To what degree then, is Christian faith still a valid option for intelligent, self-aware women? Christianity provides a religious home for millions, including some with personal experiences in civil rights work and other movements for equal justice, who seldom attend to debates about women's place in the Church. Are Christian feminists then a prophetic minority, whose insights and programs of action will convert the Church as a whole and set its future course? Schneiders is occasionally dry and abstract in her presentation, but her prose quickens to the thrill of this forecast, which for her is crucial to the Church's lasting life. She flatly predicts that religious institutions not transformed by feminism will crumble away, leaving barely a trace in society. Thinking back on the intense loyalty and self-giving that the Church, as it has been and now is, has evoked from so much of its female membership, she hopes for a deliverance of the oppressed, one that perhaps will ratify sacrifices that she sees as otherwise wasted.

Any rapid survey of a complex field must strike some readers as lacking in balance or thoroughness. This reviewer found it surprising that Schneiders cites as her only source for the theory of a general early worship of a mother goddess the wrongheaded popular mythography of Joseph Campbell. Her disregard of the theological work of several important Catholic women thinkers, e.g. Lisa Sowle Cahill, Rosemary Haughton, and Diane Yeager,

weakens her argument. As she complains that her material must rely entirely on the thinking of White, middle class women, it is fair to note that she ignores the contributions of certain prominent Black Catholic female thinkers, e.g., Sister Jamie Phelps of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and Sister Shawn Copeland of the Yale Divinity School. She asserts that once a feminist spiritual consciousness is formed there is "no going back," no matter how deep has been the assimilation of the Christian spiritual tradition. Theories of cognitive dissonance suggest otherwise. Her survey of forms of feminism and of the currents of feminist theological enterprise is well organized and informative, although its pastoral usefulness, since the movement it depicts is susceptible to rapid change, may be brief.

Her stance is at the margin of faith itself; her long-range inquiry is whether Christianity can ever reform itself enough to be suitable for women, and her eventual acceptance of the faith is partial and qualified, though vigorous. She states that theology should take into account not only the personal experience of the theologian but, even more, the experience of her community. Yet she accepts this view only in theory, disregarding the communal experience of infection with original sin. She omits the entire history of female creativity in Catholicism. Catholic feminists are in continuity with the women who developed forms of witness and service so obviously valid, needful, and prosperous that the Church ratified and promoted what they did. A case in point is the preference for the cloister for vowed women, insistently promoted for centuries, but reversed in the nineteenth century through the pressure of active religious congregations whose members demanded the privilege of serving Christ's people without the restrictions of enclosure. Schneiders' own community, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is unusual among these in that one of its founders, Mother Frances Lange, was an African American woman whose heroic

virtue will perhaps soon be affirmed by the Church's beatification. She ignores twentieth century Catholic acceptance of female innovation and leadership on the part of Dorothy Day, Mother Anna Dengel, M.D., Sister Thea Bowman, and many others.

Despite such weaknesses, however, her powerful defense of justice and liberation as themes essential to the Gospel, and of women's access to religious recognition as essential to the well-being of the human race, deserves attention for its own sake and for its contribution to a growing field of study.

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Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Harper & Row, 1990) 197 + xxxiv pages

Mark Smith's book is far and away the best of all the recent literature written on ancient Israelite religion, despite its presumptuous title and stilted style. Smith avoids many pitfalls associated with those in the past who have wanted to emphasize solely normative religion as described by a majority of late biblical texts. Smith recognizes well that any full treatment going by the name ancient Israelite must be wider in scope, taking into account "both officially sanctioned practices and practices not sanctioned by various authorities" [p. xxi]. Secondly, Smith correctly underscores ancient Israel's Canaanite heritage and describes "the process of the emergence of Israelite monolatry ...[as] an issue of Israel breaking with its own Canaanite past and not simply one of avoiding Canaanite neighbors" [p. xxiii].

The backbone of Smith's methodology is wrapped up in his use of the terms "convergence" (i.e. "the coalescence of various deities and/or some of their features into the figure of Yahweh")

and "differentiation" (i.e. the divergence of the Israelite cult from its Canaanite heritage.) Smith uses these two principles to work out the historical process whereby ancient Israel formulated monolatrous and monotheistic configurations.

Convergence: The Case of Asherah

In the interests of space, I will restrict my comments to Smith's handling of the goddess Asherah. Asherah presents an interesting challenge especially in light of the Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el Qom inscriptions. I agree with part of Smith's reconstruction and find that he strains the evidence at other points. The most critical passage for Smith's thesis about the possible existence of Asherah in the early period is Genesis 49 to which he refers repeatedly throughout the rest of his book. All scholars admit the difficult nature of the text, especially its syntax. D.N. Freedman writes: "we are laboring here largely in the dark, and the prospects are relatively unpromising." Smith fails to heed this caution when he builds a larger construct on one single phrase.

Smith agrees with the difficulties of the text yet affirms that this pericope "represents a series of divine *epithets*, including two *titles* of Asherah" (p. 16; emphasis mine). The phrase in question occurs in Gen 49:25e-26a and speaks of birko-t s£a-dayim wa-ra-am which Smith translates "the blessings of Breasts-and-Womb." Smith points out similar associations with Asherah and Anat in the Ugaritic texts and concludes that we have in Gen 49:25-26 a composite title of the goddess Asherah who would be paired here with the father figure El. Smith admits that the traditional interpretation (viewing this phrase in purely natural terms as signs of natural fertility), reflected in every Bible translation to date, is possible. Nevertheless, the pairing with El convinces Smith that we have *epithets* of Asherah here.

Asherah might be *associated with* "breasts and womb," but

"breasts and womb" are not epithets. Asherah is nowhere called "Breasts & Womb" (or, more properly, "She of the Breasts & Womb"). Thus Smith's evidence that Asherah stood as an identifiable goddess in the early period is scant (a mere two words) and can easily be taken in other (more traditional) ways which make perfect sense in the context. As much as we might like to see the goddess here in all her power and majesty, the data at hand to support such a notion are just too weak.

Later Smith devotes his entire Third Chapter to the presence of Asherah/asherah in the later periods. The evidence at hand does not lend itself to easy hypotheses and again Smith is to be commended for helping us navigate the tempestuous waters. Asherah/asherah was certainly present in monarchic Israel. On this there is agreement. The debate is over whether we have the deity Asherah, or a cultic representation of some sort (and what it signifies). Smith notes that most scholars would emphasize that Asherah was worshipped in ancient Israel as the consort of Yahweh, while fewer would argue that "the data point to the asherah as a symbol within the cult of Yahweh without signifying a goddess" (pp. 88-89). After examining the passages which have been used for Asherah worship Smith concludes that "the evidence for Asherah as an Israelite goddess during the monarchy is minimal at best" (p. 93). Smith will certainly come under severe criticism by some who desire to see the goddess shining through these androcentric texts. I think he is half right and half wrong.

Smith wisely distances himself from the simplistic pan-Deuteronomism of S. Olyan who argues that all condemnations of Asherah, including the prophets, are the result of Dtr influence. Smith writes: "Rather than supporting a theory of a goddess [in the monarchic period] as the consort of Yahweh, it would indicate that the symbol outlived the cult of the goddess who gave her name to it and continued to hold a place in the

cult of Yahweh." Smith then needs to answer why the symbol was condemned by the Deuteronomists, to which he answers that it was due to "its roles in providing fertility or healing" (p. 94).

Smith does seem to pass over some of the evidence a little too quickly (and his suggestion [p. 89] that it is Astarte underlying these passages will not be embraced by many). The silence of the destruction of the prophets of Asherah in the Elijah narrative *remains* most intriguing (1 Kgs 18:40). Similarly, Jehu destroys the Baal from Israel yet no mention is made of Asherah (2 Kgs 10:18-28). Smith knows these arguments well and they are indeed arguments from silence, yet, in this case, the silence seems to speak quite loudly. The reference that the asherah remained standing in Samaria (2 Kgs 13:6) cannot be easily glossed over.

What then about the symbol of the asherah poles? Smith wisely distances himself from the simplistic assertion that the symbol is *always* synonymous with the deity (again—a la S. Olyan). But what does he mean when he writes that "the symbol outlived the cult of the goddess who gave her name to it and continued to hold a place in the cult of Yahweh?" (p. 94). This is confusing and needs to be unpacked. Why would those holding an aniconic tradition preserve such a symbol at all?

In contrast to Smith, I would view the goddess Asherah as a part of the early monarchic cult. Two conclusions about her legitimacy are usually presented: the worship of Asherah was (a) a part of legitimate Yahwism which was later made to look bad through a pervasive pan-Deuteronomic polemic (Olyan), or (b) a practice which was at odds with some influential parts of the community who had *already formulated* an exclusive notion of Yahweh's independence from any other deity. If we have to choose from just these two, the latter seems more reasonable. Not all anti-Asherah feelings can be treated as late innovations.

But if the truth were known, the actual situation was probably far more complex. Ancient Israelite society was probably more pluralistic than we usually imagine. There were probably numerous viewpoints (many of which were at odds with each other) and they most likely differed from city to city. Arguments over religious pluralism and exclusivity are older than one might think. Differing degrees of conservatism versus liberalism in religion are not unique to our modern society.

The asherah symbol is not easily divorced from Asherah in its origin. The question is one of degrees of appropriation. Different groups would have had differing degrees of toleration when someone mentioned Yahweh and his asherah. (1) Some may have believed Yahweh to be the national deity, yet would have had no problem in worshipping local Asherah deities (esp. in areas of fertility and agricultural concerns). (2) Other circles had no problem in appropriating mythic imagery apart from mythic content (see below) and thus the symbol could be a legitimate part of the Yahweh cultus. (3) For yet other circles (e.g. including certain prophetic groups & Dtr but not limited to these groups) who argued for exclusive worship of Yahweh, any mere hint of the goddess deserved condemnation.

What do I mean by distinguishing mythic imagery from mythic content/reality? When it comes to religion, mythic images can be adopted wholesale (i.e. the imagery adopted contains a full understanding of the underlying mythic reality), but, more often than not, the mythic images that are appropriated are either remythologized or demythologized (for lack of better terms).

"Demythologizing" seems to be especially appropriate for Smith's differentiation process. There needs to be some discussion of the possibility of demythologizing cultic paraphernalia to the degree that it might become "denatured." In other words, can a symbol carry the name of a deity and yet be void of the

rich mythology associated with the deity? Religious iconography and vocabulary is frequently used in the secular domain in our own society devoid of any religious connotations. The days of the week and their relation to Teutonic mythology easily come to mind. We all refer to Thursday void of any association with Thor, the god of thunder. In short, to what degree might we have mythic imagery (fleshed out in very earthy vocabulary and iconography) devoid of mythic reality? This question needs to be explored more deeply if we want to understand Smith's convergence/differentiation principles.

Differentiation: The Case of Sex & Death

Finally, at the very end of his book, Smith discusses "the absence of some Canaanite divine roles in the biblical record" (p.163-166). In particular, he notes the conspicuous absence of sex and death associated with depictions of Yahweh (p. 164).

Herein is the biggest disappointment and failing of the book. These observations are certainly not new. They formed the core material for Yehezkel Kaufmann's multi-volume reconstruction of Israelite religion (1937-56). No matter what one thinks of Kaufmann's other ideas, one needs to interact with him on this point. Rather than saving this differentiation for a mere two pages at the postscript of his book, Smith should have made it one of the focal points of his study. Though not intended by the author, the ending of the book gives the appearance of being tacked on, as if to say, "oh yes, by the way, there is an absence of sex and death attributed to Yahweh." But in the ancient Near Eastern world when you've said sex and death, you've said it all! These are not minor motifs. The absence of sex and death is indeed conspicuous and is a major aspect of the differentiation process. It should have been at the heart of the book, not a postscript.

Summation:

The crux of the debate boils down to reconstructing the earlier periods, especially the League period. It is more difficult, however, to demonstrate the social, political, and theological background of this period, given the paucity of textual and material evidence, and because of the fact that the texts we do have may or may not constitute plausible historical witnesses. I have been critical of Smith's use of Genesis 49, yet I applaud his attempts to reconstruct the earliest period. Elsewhere Smith writes that the "religious situation changed at an early stage in ancient Israel" (p. 26). It takes courage to make such a statement in the present state of scholarship that is increasingly being characterized by pan-Deuteronomism. All too many scholars take refuge in the safety of lateness and skepticism. W. Hallo addressed "the limits of skepticism" well in his 1989 AOS presidential address. Limited (and even heavily edited) textual documentation need not be overly paralyzing. Furthermore, is there really safety in lateness? J. Day's assessment that there are just as many dangers associated with "Pan Deuteronomism" is right on the mark.

We are constantly forced back to two basic and enduring questions: (1) What was the *extent* of Yahwistic exclusivism as well as the underlying reasons (sociological, political, and *most importantly, theological*) which led ancient Israel to come up with a configuration of beliefs that was radical in its West Semitic Canaanite context? (2) What is the rate of time involved in Smith's convergence/differentiation process? When did these changes occur and are we speaking of a gradual, evolutionary process, or is this more revolutionary in nature? The first (which Smith follows) would put emphasis on the typological method well known to us through our epigraphic and archaeological models. The second would fall more in line with Pat Miller's argument that the "tendency to unity and centralization in Yahwism is not. . . capable of being traced as a slow development

within a polytheistic framework." Perhaps we should be more willing to entertain the possibility, using T. Kuhn's vocabulary, of a revolutionary paradigm shift where at some point, for some specific reason, someone saw reality from a different point of view and/or different framework.

Conclusion (s-p d-b-r hakkol nis£ma-): When all is said and done, the conclusion of the matter is that Smith has written a very important book. We are extremely indebted to him not only for giving us a very well researched monograph, but, more importantly, for pushing our thinking along on such a vital body of material. Indeed, this is what scholarship is all about.

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Philip C. Stine and Ernst R. Wendland, eds. *Bridging the Gap: African Traditional Religion and the Bible Translation*. UBS Monograph Series 4. (Reading UK and New York: UBS, 1990) x + 226 pp.

This fourth volume in the UBS series on translating the Bible brings together the work of six individuals engaged in translating the Judeo-Christian scriptures in different African contexts. The essays concern themselves particularly with translating terms such as "God," "lord," "Holy Spirit," "prayer," "sacrifice," and "Devil," in cultural contexts which do not always have one-to-one equivalents. The team includes persons trained in Africa (A.O. Mojola), Europe (K. van der Jagt), and the United States (E.R. Wendland, L.M. Zogbo, P.A. Noss and P.C. Stine). All have lived, studied, and worked extensively in Africa. They advocate the necessity of understanding the socio-cultural dynamics involved in a given African context. To this end, the

work is a success.

This volume is divided into two parts. Part I contains three chapters written by Wendland (an abbreviated version of an earlier study in this series [see review in the *JITC* XVI, pp. 317-318]): one chapter on method; another on appropriate socio-cultural models; a final chapter which applied the method and the model to the Chewa and Tonga Central African cultures. Part I is simply outstanding and adequately sets the stage for the case studies in Part II. Wendland possesses a thorough understanding of the methodology, realizes its limitations (e.g., p. 68), yet still employs it in such a manner that one gains at once an appreciation of it and an understanding of the African societies being studied. The cogency and consistency of his presentation provides a clear and strong case for the need for more sociological studies on translating the Bible. Furthermore, his critique of Western religion, both as it is practiced and studied, is painstakingly accurate (e.g., pp. 35, 49, 77, 92, 97, 106-107).

In Part II, all four writers stress the need to include more socio-cultural factors when translating scripture and demonstrate the kinds of difficulties which may arise in each of their respective contexts. For example, van der Jagt examines the problems one faces with the six meanings of *akuj* in the nomadic, cattle-oriented Turkana society; Mojola discusses the influence of ancestral traditions on contemporary Luo Christianity in Kenya; Zogbo describes the difficulties the Godie clan system, with few rites of passage, presents in relating the meaning of biblical rituals; and Noss discusses the centuries old influence of Islam on the Gbaya culture before the coming of Christianity in 1924. All these situations present unique problems and require culture-specific answers. However, the authors never lose sight of the common symbols, concepts, concerns, etc., that these respective African cultures have with the biblical tradition and also with one another. All four of these essays give qualitative presenta-

tions, especially the first three.

This book has two distinct strengths. First, it demonstrates the value of sociological studies in religious studies in general, not simply biblical translations. Second, and most importantly, it reiterates the often overlooked fact that Africa is not a monolithic society and like other continents has diverse cultures, languages, and religious perspectives.

This study will be appreciated best by the specialist and the advanced student who wants more information about African societies and more information about the usefulness of sociological methodologies.

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James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991) Preface, 351 pp., Index.

King and Malcolm were very important influences upon Cone's thought during the earliest stages of his career. For more than two decades Cone has been engaged in a struggle to reconcile both the black separatist and integrationist traditions in his Black theology project. His earliest works, *Black Theology and Black Power* and *A Black Theology of Liberation*, clearly demonstrate this fact. His work is rooted in both African American political philosophy and the Black religious tradition. He has argued that true Christian theology has to be rooted in the nationalist demand for liberation of the oppressed.

The foundational stage of Cone's career was preoccupied with developing these claims; the next period, 1979-1985, was a time of retrospection and autobiographical reflections. Here Cone, as

evidenced in *My Soul Looks Back* and *For My People*, tells the story of the origins and development of Black theology; he also spent a lot of time during this period demonstrating the relevancy of his Black theology/Black Power hermeneutic to other forms of critical discourse.

Martin and Malcolm represents a new point of departure in Cone's scholarly work, culminating more than a decade of research and writing. During his time of researching for this text, Cone has poured through volumes of published and unpublished materials, texts, sermons, speeches, books, tapes, records, newspaper articles, written by and about his two principals. Cone's use of King's unpublished sermons and writings is one of the more impressive aspects of this text and, as we shall see, it is central to his thesis.

The subtitle of the text, "A Dream or a Nightmare," is its underlying theme and central metaphor. It is the interpretive framework within which Cone analyzes King's and Malcolm's respective socio-political philosophies and religious visions. The dream represents King's hopes for Blacks in American society. Malcolm's nightmare, on the other hand, described the sad plight of Blacks in America. In the Introduction, Cone links King's dream with the history of African American integrationist thought which preceded him. Likewise, he links Malcolm's philosophy to the legacy of Black nationalist thinking. He demonstrates that Martin and Malcolm were products of these traditions. Moreover, they also helped to redefine, in their respective ways, the meaning of nationalism and integrationism. Integrationist thinkers and institutions (e.g., the N.A.A.C.P.) and Black nationalist thinkers (e.g., Marcus Garvey) offer radically different proposals for the future of the Black community. Ironically, however, the central thesis in this text is that Martin King's integrationist, religious philosophy was, in the last stages of this life, much more closely akin to the Black nationalist

thinking of Malcolm X. Moreover, Cone contends that Malcolm's mature thinking resembles many of the themes which were common to King's thought. Given this thesis, Cone refuses to suggest which one of these philosophies was the "best" socio-political vision for the black community (though he does not shy away from identifying the strengths of each tradition). Instead, he proposes that King and Malcolm offered complementary and equally important proposals for the African American community. The first page of his book, appropriately enough, contains a picture of Martin and Malcolm together; the photograph was taken on March 26, 1964, as the two met for the first and only time.

The Introduction and first six chapters of *Martin and Malcolm* unfold the background, context, and meaning of Martin King's dream and Malcolm X's nightmare. In these chapters, Cone carefully examines the socio-cultural, intellectual, and religious backgrounds of each thinker, so as to demonstrate roots of their respective visions. His contention is that there is a direct correlation between the social contexts from which Malcolm and Martin emerged and the socio-political philosophies that they espouse. Of King's dream, he notes: "It was quite easy for him to think of America as a dream. . . he himself was a concrete embodiment of its realization" (p. 36). King's family, community, educational background, his level of intellectual, cultural, and religious exposure had prepared him to be a bearer of the American dream.

> A dream of equality of opportunity of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men no longer argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character...(p. 58)

In keeping with the spirit of recent King scholarship, Cone identifies several stages in the development of King's dream. The first period of the dream covers the time between the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Voting Rights Act (1955-1965); the second phase of the dream covers the period between the fall of 1965 and the spring of 1968. This periodization of King's thought is central to Cone's claims about the maturation of his thinking. As King's political philosophy matured, his view of the American dream changed likewise. King's thought changed drastically as he began to face his inevitable demise. In his last years King grew more cynical about the American dream and the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. Cone segments King's dream into two periods: 1955-65 (corresponding to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the signing of the Voting Rights Act); and 1965-1968. He explains the meaning of King's dream, and examines the maturation of and the social, intellectual, and political implications of the dream in the chapter on this topic.

Cone's chapter on Malcolm's formative years is appropriately entitled "The Making of a 'Bad Nigger.'" Malcolm's vision of America, a nightmare, emerged out of his experiences as a member of the Black underclass in urban America. Cone traces Malcolm Little's development from his birthplace in Omaha, Nebraska to the streets of Lansing, Michigan—where he grew up—and eventually to Roxbury, Massachusetts. As a teenager in Roxbury, Malcolm identified with the culture, lifestyles, and plight of the Black underclass. He was also drawn to the underside of ghetto life and involved himself in many criminal activities that eventually landed him in jail. While serving time in prison Malcolm encountered the religious teachings and Black nationalist philosophy of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. In 1948 he converted to the Nation.

Cone posits that Islam became the religious catalyst for

Malcolm's intellectual thirst, his political philosophy, and his vision for Black life in America. The Nation of Islam rekindled in his thinking many of the ideas that he had learned from his parents, both of whom were followers of Marcus Garvey. Malcolm was drawn to Islam because, among other things, of "its definition of the White man as the devil and its affirmation of Black history and culture" (p. 51). This influence is spelled out in detail in Chapter Four.

Chapter Ten is very important. Here Cone assesses the strengths and weaknesses of King and Malcolm. Two key areas of weakness are identified, their sexism and lack of attention to class oppression. He argues that King and Malcolm were equally chauvinistic about the roles that women should play in the home, the society, and particularly in the respective organizations each man headed. He documents his claims with references to incidents and quotations attributable to both men.

It is interesting to note that Cone refuses to engage in the much publicized discussions about King's alleged sexual indiscretions. He is content with simply noting that the man was indeed sexist and his alleged infidelity should simply be viewed as one aspect of this tendency. In this sense, he circumvents the King basher label which has been attributed to David Garrow and Ralph Abernathy because of their allegations about King's sexual habits. (See Garrow's *Bearing the Cross* and Abernathy's *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down.*) Cone is not, however, as uncritical on this matter as some of King's more loyal interpreters, e.g., Lewis Baldwin, the author of the very important work on King's socio-cultural roots, *There is a Balm in Gilead.* At any rate, it does seem, given the importance of his issue, that Cone's discussion of this area of King's behavior might have been more extensive.

One of the most impressive and important features of this text is Cone's use and grasp of a wide range of unpublished sermons,

speeches, lectures, and other material. He has read, listened to, examined, and digested volumes of this kind of material by both Malcolm and Martin. He uses this literature in order to support his thesis that the black religious tradition was, broadly speaking, the dominant influence on both men. Once goes even further in arguing that both Malcolm and Martin relied most heavily upon their faith during the latter and most troublesome stages of their lives, as they faced the certainty of death. This is one of the key areas where Cone's skill as a theologian and his passionate commitment to interpreting the African American religious tradition is clearly evident. There is one final issue that I will examine before concluding this review.

Cone's emphasis on King's unpublished writings, coupled with his claims about the development of King's religious vision, puts him in an interesting position within the community of King scholars. On the one hand, he clearly stands in opposition to Jon Ansboro, Kenneth L. Smith, and Ira G. Zepp, all of whom fall victim to the temptation of overestimating the influence that King's mentors—such as George Davis of Crozer and L. Harold DeWolf of Boston—had upon his thought. Neither Ansboro's *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* nor Smith's and Zepp's *Search for the Beloved Community*, adequately account for how King's theology and piety were fundamentally shaped by the Black religious tradition. Cone's work provides a necessary corrective to these understatements. Cone, as does David Garrow in *Bearing the Cross* (1986), Lewis Baldwin in *There is a Balm in Gilead* (1990), and Volume One of the controversial work on the King Papers—edited by Clayborne Carson—entitled *Called to Service* (1992), makes a strong case for the importance of King's African American roots as the formative force in his life and thought. Cone's articles on this subject are even more convincing than his statements in this book.

On the other hand, his references to the importance of King's unpublished writings, his claims about the degree to which most of King's published works were either produced by ghost writers or heavily edited so as to reflect improperly his deepest faith convictions, have drawn severe criticisms from Baldwin, who accuses Cone and Garrow of engaging in severe revisionist scholarship. Baldwin links Cone and Garrow with Ralph David Abernathy, King's best friend and assistant in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

This text will undoubtedly help to expose a much larger audience to the writings of James H. Cone. It will do much to further promote the recent renaissance of interest in Malcolm X and Martin King. Cone has indeed filled a very important scholarly gap with the publication of this text. Look for him to return with individual studies of both Malcolm and Martin.

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Lewis V. Baldwin. *There Is A Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), Preface, ix-xii, Pp. 339, Index.

Those who have followed the published works of Lewis V. Baldwin expect that when his name is attached to a book or article they will find lucidity and symmetry of thought, careful and penetrating analysis, thorough documentation, evenhandedness and fairness to the subject(s) under investigation. The readers of the first of his two-volume study of Martin Luther King, Jr. *There Is A Balm in Gilead*, will not be disappointed. The second volume, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, made its debut in early 1992 and, hopefully, will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of the JITC. Professor Baldwin of Vanderbilt University is a very

prolific writer as well as superb researcher. For those interested in the American and African American religious experience, or any branch of studies dealing with Black people, this fact is quite a boon.

As the subtitle suggests, *Balm* examines King from his nurturing cultural context. Increasingly scholars are looking less at White, liberal Protestant and Gandhian influences upon King and devoting greater attention to Black cultural and religious roots as formative factors in his theology and writings on political and economic liberation. Thus, Baldwin presents King as a product of the South, places him in the caring and loving environment of his family, focuses upon the influence of the Black church in his early years, and demonstrates how King reflects the art and influence of Black preaching. The portrait on the cover of *Balm* captures the essence of Baldwin's thesis: Dr. King is presiding at a church service with Daddy King looking over his shoulder and the choir singing in the background. The message is clear that the basic character of King must be understood in the context of his Southern cultural and religious context.

Baldwin's book is significant for a number of crucial reasons. First, as mentioned above, the author places King firmly within the Black church tradition. Thus, Baldwin not only highlights the influences of the Black church and preaching traditions upon King, but suggests how his life and work might offer stimulating critiques and directions for the contemporary and future African American church. Second, Baldwin demonstrates that King is a leader of the masses of Black Americans. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Ida Wells Barnett, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X notwithstanding, Dr. King is the only leader in American history who led an organized mass movement of African Americans in a prolonged, direct, obvious, and, for the most part, successful assault upon the

economic and political status quo of the entrenched, oppressive system that supported or countenanced racism and institutional poverty. Third, Baldwin, while being creatively critical, salvages the *moral* King— all too often lost because of the well-meaning but damaging writings of some scholars. *Balm* encourages us to take a second, more critical look at this aspect and rediscover the magnificence of King, who *morally and spiritually* led the nation to higher heights of temporal liberation and taught a fuller, richer understanding of religion than many had grasped or experienced.

Now, there are some minor concerns that I have with a number of Baldwin's interpretations or citations. First, there are places in the text where he attempts to place King within a tradition of surviving Africanism in America (e.g., pp. 102, 165). I am aware of the movement on the part of many scholars of the African American experience, secular and religious, to highlight a substratum of powerful African cultural roots among Black Americans. In many instances, however, I find this argument unpersuasive or over-emphasized, especially when the reader might infer, correctly or incorrectly, that a given African behavior trait or action is conscious on the part of the subject(s). Perhaps continued research and publication along this line will dissuade me from my current skepticism.

Second, the author leaves the impression (206-207) that the National Baptist Convention (USA, Inc.) was founded in 1880. Though the NBC claims this date, it actually belongs to one of its founding groups, the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, which became the Foreign Mission Board of the NBC when the NBC emerged in 1895.

Third, Baldwin claims that a number of leaders in the history of Black America advanced the theory that God permitted slavery because of the disobedience of African ancestors, or allowed it to serve as a school to strengthen Blacks. He states

that King would reject these explanations because they "assumed the inferiority of Africans" (255-256). Perhaps King would have rejected such arguments, but, in fairness to the nineteenth century Black promulgators of these ideas, they did not understand "inferiority" to be genetic or racial, but cultural and religious. I believe the author has a correct understanding of "inferiority" as employed by these historical individuals, but perhaps he should employ another term, given the ambiguous implications of this one for his readers. Fourth, might we not critique King for not making a more effective and sustained use of the Black historical tradition, e.g., references to Richard Allen, Sojourner Truth, E. C. Morris, Ida B. Wells Barnett, Henry M. Turner, etc., as he might have? Or, perhaps the author could have made more direct references to King's frequent use of this tradition. Or, will the author deal more directly with this issue in the second volume?

There are a number of other points with which I might take issue; but like the above, none is serious. These minor concerns certainly do not detract from the overwhelming significance and fine construction of this work. Baldwin in *There Is A Balm in Gilead* has lived up to his record as a fine scholar, has rescued King from caricatures and misunderstandings, and has buttressed the foundation of African American Religious Studies. I wholeheartedly recommend this book. I believe it to be one of the most important and insightful ever written on King and the Civil Rights Movement.

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