

Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Colonialism, Han, and the Transformative Spirit*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2013. 102 pp. \$72.00. ISBN: 9781137346681.

In case you haven't heard, we have a global ecological crisis on our hands. It's big, it's for real, and, if it hasn't already, it's coming to your neighborhood. There's a window of opportunity to make significant changes in how we source our energy and organize our society, but the window is small and it is closing. If we don't change course soon, politically, and personally, life on earth will experience dire consequences.

As a person of faith, a father, and a sentient being, this troubles me. I welcome any resources, any movements, any signs of hope that address our ecological crisis and aid in shifting our collective consciousness and actions toward a more healthy future. In *Colonialism, Han, and the Transformative Spirit*, Grace Ji-Sun Kim adds her voice to the growing chorus of people speaking into this reality. It's an ambitious work, aimed at unmasking the underlying mentality that got us where we are and calling for nothing less than a spiritual transformation. Not only is our planetary well-being at stake, but also the vitality of theology to illuminate, convict, and energize.

The title provides a basic outline for the book, with the first two chapters dedicated to examining what colonialism looks like in our contemporary global context. The opening sentence of the first chapter, "Today's world is often characterized by imperialism, colonialism, and consumerism" (8), is reminiscent of Martin Luther King Jr's naming of the "giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism" in his 1967 speech at Riverside Church. Kim proceeds to paint a picture of a dominant culture held, and holding others, firmly within the grip of these destructive forces. From the outset, she injects points of insight from the Christian tradition, noting that Christian theology had its origins in an imperial setting, starting with John the Baptist's call to repentance, followed by Jesus' persistent challenges to the established social order. Tragically, after several centuries, the church became enmeshed in and a primary voice for the spirit of colonialism, from which we have not yet fully recovered.

In chapter 3, Kim introduces the Korean term *han*, which includes a wrong committed against a person, and the enduring pain it produces. *Han* is "a sense of unresolved resentment against injustice suffered" (50) and "the critical wound of the heart generated by unjust psychosomatic repression, as well as by social, political, economic and cultural oppression" (52). It is a rich word, difficult to translate, which holds within it the weight of injury carried by the natural world and humans. Kim calls for a new worldview of interconnectedness, which will reform the systems that continue to perpetuate *han*.

The fourth and final chapter, “Transformative Power of the Spirit,” provides multiple metaphors of *the Spirit* that contain the content of this new worldview. In doing so she draws from within and beyond the Christian theological tradition or, more precisely, a pneumatological tradition, including the following images and metaphors: Sallie McFague’s proposal of viewing the world as the body of God; the Hebrew notion of the *ruach* of God as the divine presence which gives, sustains, and redeems life; Starhawk’s three categories of “power over,” “power within,” and “power with,” as ways of thinking about methods of spiritual transformation; the Spirit’s intimate relationship with Eros, the beauty and erotic power within creation; and, lastly, Sophia as the feminine manifestation of the Spirit as described in Jewish wisdom writings and embodied in Jesus and the community of faith. For Kim, these multifaceted experiences of the divine Spirit offer the transformative power needed to change both perception and action in our relationship with the created world on which we depend and for which we are responsible. It is through our participation in this transformative Spirit that we reject colonialism and address *han* in a life-giving and healing way.

Although I am familiar with the basic contours of our ecological situation and some of the theological responses to it, I found the chapter on *han* to provide new ways to rethink our theological engagements with our crisis. I had not encountered this word before and it is empowering to have new language with the density to embody a complex set of concepts.

At one hundred pages, the book is well suited as an introduction to the matters at hand—both sociologically and theologically—and would work well for small group study and discussion. Those without a college education might struggle with the accessibility of some of the writing. The book draws heavily from the work of Sally McFague, at times so heavily one wonders if one should put down this book and pick up one of McFague’s.

As I made my way through this material, I had an internal response I don’t often experience while reading. I found myself asking not “is this a good book?” but “is this going to work?” Specifically, in light of Kim’s elucidation of the severity of the colonial mentality, I wondered what in the world can lift us out of it. Or, to use the language of the book, through what media and by what means are we best able to yield to the Transformative Spirit?

A few months ago I watched the film *Chasing Ice*, a documentary that also addresses global ecological concerns.<sup>1</sup> One of the moments that stood out to me was the rationale its creator gave for the film project. He stated that he did not believe statistics and arguments change people’s minds. What he aimed to do in the film, rather, was to show people something beautiful vanishing in front of their

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1 *Chasing Ice*, directed by Jeff Orlowski (Submarine Deluxe, 2012), film.

eyes; in this case, the glaciers of the northern hemisphere, rapidly receding due to human-induced climate change. One of the most transformative experiences I've had in the last five years involved a week-long course in southern Ohio, where we walked among what is left of our native forests. I was awestruck, and I fell in love with trees. Kim appeals to this dynamic herself in the latter pages of the book—the Spirit as the presence of erotic beauty charged with life and energy. Is it our longing for beauty and our capacity for awe that will ultimately penetrate our colonial practices bent on destroying beauty? Maybe this book is best read in a place that you find stunningly beautiful—a place that, if it were lost, would cause you great sorrow.

I also think that I, as a reader, would have benefited from a metaphor that functioned as an antidote to *han*. The word provides such a helpful way of speaking about the colonial legacy in which we live—but is there an equally dense metaphor for how to heal *han*? The best suggestion I have come across is approaching our current crisis as a collective addiction, calling on society to undergo an ecological twelve-step process toward a path of recovery: My name is Joel, my name is Columbus, Ohio, my name is the United States, and I'm addicted to gasoline and overconsumption, dependent on violence to sustain my way of life. Step 1: We admit that we were powerless and that our lives had become unmanageable.

I'm grateful for Kim's voice and contribution to this vital conversation. For the sake of future generations and this beautiful planet, I hope it works.

JOEL MILLER is pastor of Columbus Mennonite Church in Columbus, Ohio.

**Jon D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton University Press, Library of Jewish Ideas, Princeton, New Jersey, 2012. 244 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 9780691155692.**

Simply put, Jon D. Levenson is one of those rare scholars whose every word repays careful reading. *Inheriting Abraham* is no exception. In this beautifully written book, Levenson examines how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam depict the figure of Abraham, concluding that “Abraham has functioned much more as a point of differentiation among the three religious communities than as a node of commonality” (9). To be sure, each religious tradition emphasizes the centrality of Abraham. Such broad agreement, though, papers over some very real differences. For instance, both Judaism and Islam stress Abraham's monotheistic turn in ways that Christianity does not. On the other hand, Christianity and Islam have historically detached Abraham from his natural descendants, the Jewish people. Finally, Islam differs from both Judaism and Christianity in the fact that it does not hold the Abraham narrative of Genesis to be authoritative. And, even though Christianity and Judaism share the same foundational story about Abraham, they differ consid-