

a shift taking place. With this—the mystery of the incarnation—everything changes. Hospitality is suddenly and surprisingly transformed into eager hospitality. The inside chorus replies, in a burst of familiarity and largesse: "Are you Joseph? Your wife, Mary, is with you? Enter, good pilgrims; I did not recognize you!" In recognizing the hidden presence of Christ borne in Mary's womb, strangers are no longer unknown but called by name. Hospitality is no longer a favor to be granted or refused, but rather a privilege that a host is able to extend (99–100).

We become missional communities when we go out and learn to know the stories of our neighbors, when we share the give-and-take of guest and host, when we open ourselves to be changed through encounter with the Christ present in another. Dierdre Cornell's book helps us enter this mindset and prepares us to look for Christ in unexpected places and faces—and we are assured that the journey will bring blessing.

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Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2010. 384 pp. \$27.50. ISBN: 9780300171365.

Why did Christians accept and underwrite the brutality of colonialism? How was it possible for Christians to square the gospel message of love, unity, and the new humanity under Christ with violence, segregation, and dehumanization? Willie Jennings' award-winning book reveals the social performances by which Christians were able to release the tension of cognitive dissonance. That is, he analyzes how they responded to new encounters—how they cried, laughed, felt, spoke—in order to make sense of that newness while maintaining the European political, economic, cultural, religious, and intellectual status quo. The crux of the matter, Jennings tells us, is displacing bodies and establishing new ground for their identity. Race is the result of this displacement, produced by the need to identify people who moved from an essentially unknown place. Since the sixteenth century, Christian intellectuals have used the racial imagination and have theologically developed it to justify the manner in which dark flesh became a part of European social order.

Jennings does not do a history of the concept of "race" but tells the story of race as the story of place. Before racial identity, the land and its inhabitants facilitated cultural identity. The shift from land to race as the reference for self and society is the obstacle for Christian intimacy. Racial identity was formed as a result of modern Christianity's diseased social imagination. The Christian imagination was infected by an aesthetics that calculates bodies and places according to their capacity for productivity rather than apprehends them as participants in creation.

As Europeans set foot on unknown shores and beheld unfamiliar earthlings, they assembled a scale of existence in order to make sense of new encounters and facts that did not accord with their imagination of the world. The architecture of this scale is a pattern that orders existence between black and white. The primary function of this aesthetic is displacing bodies; instead of being visualized in relation to their place, people become imagined with regard to the market. Instead of understanding identity, landscape, and people in terms of a matrix of mutually informative relationships between spaces and bodies, they are understood in terms of the European as their referential point of meaning. Racial identity develops not when European expansion absorbs differences but when whiteness displaces “the earth as the signifier of identities” (58).

The racial imagination consists in connecting human differences by means of this aesthetic scale instead of by the contingencies of creation. People are first identified as white, mulattoes, and black and then brought into the Christian narrative by virtue of their relation to the church-supported nation enslaving them. This way of identifying subjects displaces their identity from the particularities of tribe, language, and land as well as from the passion of Christ. The aesthetic descriptions also detach European Christians from the theological claims of intimacy made on them in scripture. Instead of viewing slaves as mutual creatures of God’s creation or as equal participants in the salvation story that centers on Israel, the visual comparisons differentiate people while simultaneously connect everyone from black to white. Christological intimacy no longer orients connectivity, which is now based on an identity abstracted from particular places that have in turn become meaningful only in their potential for resource extraction. The racial imagination is an operational aesthetic—a scale of existence that displaces identity from place to bodies with white and black at opposite ends.

Jennings is helpful for thinking about mission in its reflection on the various performances of movement. What is the theological significance of mostly-white Christians from the north going elsewhere to do mission work—that they are not only affluent enough (or have the support of enough affluent people) but are willing and desire to go elsewhere, mostly to engage people who do not have the affluence or desire to be so mobile? Perhaps we need to begin to think about the mobility of missions by contrasting it with another form present in our culture: the movement of migrant workers. Their mobility is made possible because of a lack of financial security not an excess of it. The point is that movement itself—not just what message or commodity is carried along—is a political, economic, and even religious performance that should be reflected upon.

One such reflection would be on the Christianity that moves with missionaries. Does the very fact of its mobility make it “inconsequentially related to its geography” (4)? We often reflect on “Christ and Culture,” usually conceding that faith is culturally expressed. But have we reflected on the way that geography—the

surroundings of people and spaces—also affects how we express and understand our faith? And what happens when we go elsewhere? Can faith be imaginatively detached from its surroundings and still be communicated or performed without loss, without remainder? We might congratulate ourselves on our ambivalence toward our culture; the stronger faith we have the less we depend on specific cultural modes of its expression. The message is more determinative than the medium; indeed, we still think of the two as basically distinct. But the geographical? At what cost is our ambivalence toward the relationship between faith and place? What social imagination is formed and enacted in a faith that moves, that teaches people to be ambivalent about their surroundings and the significance of those surroundings for how faith is lived and communicated. Jennings enjoins us to critically consider the extent to which missions encourages interlocutors to think of themselves as mobile—to detach, disassociate, adapt, be fluid, morph—and that this is a good thing.

Which is the way forward from here? Not upward, to “an idealist account” (288); not backward, in nostalgia to a “different world” (289); not ahead, to a future “time and day in which race will not matter” (290); but downward, toward the soil, to entangle ourselves within the “rhythms of God’s other creatures” and “the possibilities of imagining a joining to other peoples exactly in and through joining their lives on the ground” (290). Freeing the Christian imagination from its suspension over the earth involves coupling it with discourses of placement that facilitate “geographically sustained identities” (63). The task of the missionary is to discover local discourses of placement and let them shape her imagination—how she sees herself, her interlocutors, and their place. As Jennings says, a new “space of communion is always ready to appear where the people of God reach down to join the land and reach out to join those around them, their near and distant neighbors. This joining involves first a radical remembering of the place, a discerning of the histories and stories of those for whom that land was the facilitator of their identity. This must be done to gather the fragments of identity that remain to learn from them (or at least from their memory) who we might become in that place” (286–87).

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