

Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015. 182 pp. \$25.00. ISBN: 9780802872999.

I have been carefully reading and mulling over the complex, rich, and compelling content of *Embracing the Other* for several weeks, and today I've finally started putting together my thoughts. Today is November 9, 2016—the day after the United States' presidential election. Other commentators on this work have called it prophetic, and I echo these sentiments. Kim, with unrelenting clarity and precision, touches on many of the issues—racism, misogyny, economic inequity, and so on—that are being felt more keenly today by the established North American church than in some time. In continuity with the best of the prophetic tradition, Kim draws our attention to the sins of the people and calls us to a different way.

Embracing the Other is a hard book. Hard because it is technical, detailed, and academic. Hard also because it is unrelenting and determined in its analysis of race- and gender-based oppressions and the toxic theologies that support them. And the book is made even more difficult, and compelling, by the fact that the issues explored are all deeply personal to the author. Kim first emigrated to Canada with her parents in 1975 and moved to the United States in the early 2000s. She is no detached author. She has a stake in the issues, for they have “cost” her and the community she belongs to.

In the first chapter, “The Lives of Asian American Immigrant Women,” Kim states, “The advent of Asian immigration was neither easy nor pleasant. . . .” This is, of course, putting it mildly, as she makes clear just how terrible her experience was as an Asian immigrant. As a Canadian Christian, I found it unsettling (but not surprising) to hear Kim's description of our racism and exclusion. The church I identify with is not, Kim makes plain, as welcoming as we would like to imagine (32).

To help us grapple with the profound violence that Asian women have experienced, such as the abuse inflicted on Korean “comfort women,” (i.e., women forced into sexual slavery) Kim explores the Korean concept of *Han*: “*Han* arises when institutions, communities and nations create laws, policies, and institutions that cause subordination and subjugation of groups of people” (39).

For Asian American women, and women more broadly, *Han* manifests itself as misogyny. *Han* is produced by so many parts of life—work, marriage, even images of God (see pages 82, 84, 136, and 146)—that you eventually get the feeling that misogyny is produced by so many embedded narratives, theologies, and structures that it's currently inexorable. It is certainly overwhelming.

There are two key parts of the book that deserve special attention. First is Kim's treatment of the problem of “whiteness.” She addresses this problem in a way that

does not leave much wiggle room for those who would like to see themselves as not-racist because they don't (so they think) perform overtly racist acts or behaviors. One of the most powerful ideas about race—championed here by Kim and echoed by many others—is that racism is a sickness that sits deep within us and, as such, cannot be easily disavowed.

Race functions as a category of human classification, identity, and differentiation for the benefit of some and the detriment of others. . . . To identify someone as “racial” is to say they are not white. . . .

. . . *Because whiteness is seen as nonracial, white privilege is upheld systemically through favorable rules and practices toward those racialized as white.* . . .

Because whites often fail to recognize their power and privilege, it is sometimes necessary to prompt their awareness in order to work towards justice. (43–44; emphasis mine)

The *Han* that Kim and all racialized people experience will not be eliminated by postures of inclusivity—namely, being nice to people who are different. Whiteness and white privilege is a fault line that runs too deep for such facile responses. So how should one respond?

This is the second part of the book that requires attention. Kim's proposed response to all this racism and misogyny—the “Spirit of Love”—sounds like an idea everyone can get behind. But this Spirit is not some nebulous feel-good panacea. Kim means something specific and something that will be hard for many to embrace. This love is a transformative one and is identified as *eros*—intimate subjective engagement. “The erotic bridges the passions of our lives—the physical, emotional, psychic, mental, and spiritual elements” (141). And why is this kind of love hard to embrace? It's because our beliefs about love, its nature and appropriate role, have been shaped by the sinful theologies we inhabit. In mainstream conceptions, “Eros denotes the disorderly and the source of temptation that could drive humans to insanity. . . .⁴ However, much of this negativity can be attributed to a dualism that works to benefit a white Eurocentric male perspective. Therefore it is no surprise that some perceive reason to be superior to emotion, male to female, logos to Sophia, and logic to Eros” (143).

This is where Kim takes us: theologically and ecclesiastically, we must recover a genuinely erotic love. That's the key to eliminating our sinful misogyny and racism. And how are we going to do this? By embracing each other through acts and emotions that are intimate, messy, and vulnerable.

⁴ At this point, Kim references Diarmuid O'Murchu, *In the Beginning Was the Spirit: Science, Religion, and Indigenous Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis: 2012), 157.

Discomfort is a hallmark of the prophetic. If we are concerned about systems that mask and perpetuate misogyny and racism, we need to be open to courageous alternative thinking and practices that disrupt and resist patriarchy and whiteness. Kim's offering is a way into this. She is pursuing a theology that will liberate not only the oppressed but also unwitting oppressors like me.

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Catherine Vialle, Jacques Matthey, Marie-Hélène Robert, Gilles Vidal (*sous dir.*), *Sagesse Biblique et Mission*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2016, 278 pp. 30 €. ISBN : 9782204105637.

Sagesse Biblique et Mission contient les actes du colloque œcuménique de missiologie du même nom. Ce dernier a été organisé par l'AFOM et s'est tenu en mai 2014 à l'université catholique de Lille.

Il contient dix-sept articles auxquels s'ajoutent une préface et une relecture. Les auteurs proviennent aussi bien de la théologie biblique vétéro- et néo-testamentaires que de la systématique, la missiologie, voire même la philosophie.

Les articles sont regroupés en trois parties : sagesse biblique et sagesse des nations, figures de la sagesse biblique et missiologie de la sagesse.

La première partie regroupe des articles qui font entrer en dialogue sagesse biblique, sagesse des nations et mission. On y étudie par exemple les traces supposées ou avérées de sagesse des nations dans le matériau biblique (par ex. Job et Pr), la confrontation entre ces deux sagesse (Ac 17), les diverses manières dont les missionnaires ont appréhendé les sagesse locales, notamment en Océanie, ou les nouvelles sagesse qui émergent de la confrontation entre sagesse ancienne et évangile.

La seconde partie concerne des figures de la sagesse biblique. Elle contient des articles concernant certains sages de l'Ancien Testament (par ex. Salomon, Joseph), mais aussi un article sur Jésus, qui se révèle Sagesse en mission en Matthieu 11 et deux consacrés aux réflexions de Paul concernant la sagesse de Dieu (notamment en 1 Corinthiens et Colossiens), qui met en échec les sagesse humaines, devenues folie en comparaison. Il contient également deux articles stimulants l'un sur la sagesse biblique elle-même, l'autre sur la remise en cause par certains livres bibliques (c.-à-d. Job et Qohélet) d'une sagesse traditionnelle, montrant par là que contrairement à la révélation qui est donnée/reçue, la sagesse, confrontée au réel, se construit, parfois de manière dialectique, même si l'Esprit et sources des deux (sagesse et révélation) et les nourrit.