

when the Ford felt they did not serve his aim? Where are the ‘workings out’ that felt a distraction to the author but would have been fascinating to student and colleague? It is possible that some will appear in different forms in the future and possible, too, that we have some of them already in the six books that David Ford wrote alongside this one. But, like John’s Gospel, our eyes should be less on what was not written or what we wish had been written, and more on what will be written in the testimony of the church by those who – with the help of this commentary – will go on reading John and testifying to Jesus because of John.

The legacy of the commentary will also be seen in further study of John and of the community in which this gospel was formed. For my part, the commentary made me want to know more about that community, which claimed to know well the authorial source of the Gospel, the one who knew what it was to be loved by Christ, and especially among them, Mary, whom that disciple took to his home. The style of John repeatedly reflecting on ‘grace upon grace’ seems like the way of the mother who, according to Luke, pondered so much in her heart. Her place among the witnesses and testifiers seems seldom considered among the commentators, and it is only just alluded to here.

Other readers will have different questions raised in their minds by this book, and many others will have stirrings in their souls which will take them on new journeys of enquiry, theological and spiritual. All of that is to be welcomed as evidence of what Ford calls the ‘continual theological questioning’ (p. 209) provoked by John, the ‘potentially limitless’ (p. 213) capacity of John to generate reflection on the deepest realities of Christian faith. The test of those enquiries, and the writings and sermons they provoke, will be whether they maintain the same sort of discipline to search out the ‘deep plain sense’ (p. 389) of John to which this commentary commits itself, so that John’s readers and hearers, students and scholars, will find themselves saying of the one around whom this majestic text is constructed, ‘It is the Lord’, and will hear him say, ‘Follow me’ (John 21:7, 22).

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Jessica Wai-Fong Wong, *Disordered: The Holy Icons and Racial Myths*

(Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021), pp. xi + 222. \$ 49.99

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In the face of the horrific killing of George Floyd – an African American man at the hands of a white police officer – public protests exploded across the United States. In this historically significant wave of America’s racial reckoning, many raise important yet often-unspoken questions. How are Black bodies perceived? Why are Black bodies seen as inherently threatening? How does the image of whiteness come to communicate what is civilised, virtuous and pure, while the image of blackness communicates uncivilised, barbaric and perverse? In *Disordered: The Holy Icons and Racial Myths*, Jessica

Wai-Fong Wong aptly tackles these timely questions by exploring how and why these racialised images, myths and stories of whiteness and blackness are so 'deeply embedded within Western ways of imagining the world' (p. 3). This 'modern western social imaginary' not only shapes our imagination, but also informs 'how we come to see ourselves, others, and the world around us' (p. ix). From the Middle Ages, the Christian church has also played a vital role in forming and sustaining western modernity's oppressive racial hierarchy. Particularly, the early Gentile church leaders distorted the doctrine of God's election, 'making it into a fundamentally white, European, and later, American condition' (p. 4). Because whiteness transmutes itself into God's holy people, Wong argues that 'Whiteness [has] become the idealized form of Christian discipleship' (p. viii).

Chapter 1 explains how this western social imaginary has constantly privileged and presented white masculinity as 'the ideal manifestations of human existence' and 'the proper telos of humanity' (p. 15). In this modern context, as the antithesis of white masculinity, non-white and non-male individuals embody 'the disorder of their marginal social location, polluting society with their chaotic nature' (p. 16). The Black population, specifically, was perceived as 'the enemy of values ... absolute evil', according to Frantz Fanon (p. 17). Wong pertinently identifies the role of Christianity in reinforcing this modern western imagination's understanding of racial hierarchy. The Christian religion has long been used as a tool to create certain theological assumptions indicating a profound association between whiteness and God's holy order. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate how this racial logic of the modern world influenced the medieval conception of Jesus as a white European male. Wong contends that Christ's 'European-like body suggests something important about perfect complexion and its related spiritual order' (p. 35). Because this holy image of Jesus Christ with a white, European-like appearance represents the sacred order, members of God's kingdom then must embody whiteness that is iconic. In contrast, the darkness of blackness is seen as 'a disordered condonation' rooted in spiritual corruption and indicates 'a fundamental ontological incompatibility' with white Christian beliefs, values and society (p. 50). Even in the present day, the black body continues to be anti-iconic.

In chapter 4, Wong analyses how, in the time of European colonial expansion, the Christian colonisers perceived themselves as 'divinely ordered' and 'sanctified' people who are responsible to 'mediate Jesus and his holy order to the colonized' (p. 55). In this manner of misleading God's divine order, while whiteness becomes 'an ontological condition of ultimate spiritual significance', the ontological state of blackness 'threatens to disrupt the proper orchestration of God's divine *oikonomia*' (p. 62). Chapter 5 reveals how in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this white European vision of racial order formed and influenced the racial optic of North America, where black, brown and Asian bodies continue to be alienated, subjugated and criminalised. Finally, in chapter 6, Wong concludes by offering a new theological vision of 'seeing and being in the world' (p. 129). Because the western modern racial optic is 'a blindness born of idolatry' (p. 129), Wong challenges us see that the holy order is at the heart of Jesus' identity. Jesus himself is the holy order of God. He invites and teaches 'a counter-cultural way of seeing and, in turn, a distinct manner of being in relationship with others' that is God's true *oikonomia* (p. 110).

Wong's book is a delightful contribution to the emerging conversation on the intersection of religion and race in North America. Not only for scholars, teachers and students of theological education, but also for ordained and lay church leaders, Wong's deeply theological account of western Europe and North America's long history and

practice of racial discrimination make it a must-read, especially for white readers. While this book can certainly speak to a larger audience, Wong's *Disordered* is a compelling introductory book on theology of race for white Christian readers who might be in the process of making sense of the Christian religion's worship of 'white Jesus' and its role in sustaining the modern racial optic. As such, this book will engage and speak differently to different groups of readers. What would it mean for white bodies to follow Jesus' new way of 'seeing and being' in this racist society? What then would it mean for black, brown, Asian and indigenous bodies to follow Jesus in this racist society? These are two different questions that must be asked and considered critically as all Christians are called to participate in God's divine *oikonomia* in order to heal today's broken world.

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David Bentley Hart, *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), pp. xx + 192. \$24.99.

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Christian theology does not have a coherent concept of 'tradition', David Bentley Hart claims in this essay. That is, it does not have 'a concept of tradition that can simultaneously assure us of an essential immutability in Christian confession while also offering us a credible apologia for all the transformations through which that confession has manifestly gone over the centuries' (p. 5). It is not that Christian theologians have not tried to devise such concept, albeit relatively late, as the most prominent attempts – John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1878) and Maurice Blondel's *Histoire at Dogme* (1904) – stem from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These attempts, however, failed to deliver, Hart claims, because of a fundamental conceptual error: they root the unity and coherence of the Christian tradition in the past. In a long chapter Hart argues that this is not only historically factitious, but that the criteria used to identify this tradition are untenable (pp. 43–94).

Over against the notion that the Christian tradition is rooted in the past, Hart proposes that it is rooted in the future. The continuity of tradition and doctrine are 'the product of the sense shared among believers of a still fuller, more complete, more immediate knowledge of the truth yet to be achieved ... and it is the surd of the as yet unexpressed and inexpressible ... that is the life of tradition, is capacity for the future' (pp. 103–4). Rather than an unfolding of what is *in nuce* already present in the past, Christian tradition strives for what lies beyond the horizon of what is known, and the fact that a tradition is alive and not dead is exactly expressed in the ways in which it can constantly refashion, enlarge and alter its own understanding due to apocalypse: God's final and ultimate disruption of this historical reality as the eschaton is breaking in.