

Review of  
*BUT FOR THESE:*  
A Memoir of Helpers on My Way  
To a Cohort of Preachers  
by  
Rev. William E. Alberts, Ph.D.

Rev. Theodore Lockhart's *BUT FOR THESE* is a unique blending of prose and poetry that illuminates his struggle to "daringly become whosoever I could." With searing honesty Ted takes us into his confidence, and tells what it was like being raised in the oppressive Jim Crow South, the obstacles he faced in pursuing a college and seminary education to become a minister in the white-controlled Methodist Church, and the critical role cohorts played in supporting him as he pursued his ministerial calling. A calling dogged by guilt and personal doubt about, "I'm not cut out for that." He describes his rise in the Church's New England Conference -- and his fall at the hands of hierarchical "ecclesiastic politics" -- a "cast-away tossed under the bus in a sacrificial offering to the gods of Saving Face and Incompetence." Sharing his intense anger in response and how he handled it provide a humanizing service for anyone overcome by anger. The book ends with Ted's rise again in the same Conference, culminating in his pastoral leadership in a church that became the first racially mixed United Methodist congregation to *fully* welcome LGBTQ persons into its membership. *BUT FOR THESE* is an inspiring down-to-earth story of a man seeking to be upright. There is much information and insight in Ted Lockhart's 147-page book -- not only for Methodists, but for anyone who believes that honesty and integrity are the two sides of the same humanizing coin.

Ted Lockhart grew up with obstacles we white people don't have in pursuing our dreams: dangerous, confining Southern Jim Crow laws and customs. Revealing is his saying that his and other black children's "cultural hero was none other than Brer Rabbit -- the one who was constantly oppressed by powerful forces, yet managed to overcome and survive for another day of living by drawing on his native

wit and skillful cunning.” The “powerful forces,” his mother and grandparents and others taught him, were “painful and ugly things that befell black boys and girls, black men and women, through the hands and whims of white folks.

Anyone committed to racial justice would want to know the first lesson Rev. Lockhart and other black persons had to learn as children – and many still have to learn: “How to live and cope in a social environment that assaulted your humanity and human dignity and worth as a person.” He reminds us that “it is in response to that assault by white culture and its socio-political economy, that the institutions of the black family, religion, education and culture took root.”

Beyond the approval of Jim Crow educational authorities and long before the 1960s rise of “Black consciousness” . . . Negro public school teachers taught “Negro history and culture” *year round*. Here is a snapshot of Ted’s inspiring poem, “Before Blackness”:

Before ‘blackness’ arrived, there were teachers.  
Teachers in the tribes,  
Teachers on the ships.  
Teachers without the books and degrees;  
Teachers despite the books and degrees  
Of slavery, segregation and racism. . . .  
Teaching the fine arts and sciences of staying intact  
In an untidy world . . .  
What gifts do you bring them?  
What color do you paint them?  
I bring praise coloring them worthy  
Before blackness.

Readers will appreciate the candor with which Ted tells his story of “becoming whosoever” he “could.” His mother bore him at age 16, and had to get married, to an indifferent man who was drafted into the military and left her. She chose to raise Ted instead of giving him up to her grandparents. Then Joseph

Nathaniel “Nattie” Adams became her partner – for 12 years. Ted’s poem, “He Ain’t My Old Man,” reveals how love transcends convention. Here’s just the last stanza:

He ain’t my old man!  
They say, I say.  
My old man is never around  
But this man’s always been around  
Some folks say it’s sinful!)  
I can him my Jonathan.  
A good man. He saves us.  
Maybe one day I can be like him.

Ted got much of his honesty from his mother, who instilled in him the humanness about which a seminary could only theologize. As a young man, Ted’s relationship with Miss Mary Walker had grown intimate. When Mary told Ted she had become pregnant, he assumed he would “have to quit school,” get a good job and “forget about studying for the ministry.” His perceptive mother intervened, telling him to talk with the minister of McCabe Memorial Methodist Church, Rev. James H. Woods. “Cause,” she said, “this may be the Lord’s way of making sure you know what you are talking about when you get up in the pulpit to say, ‘thus saith the Lord.’ “

*BUT FOR THESE* provides a confessional that offers therapy for anyone who has promised to do one thing, and does the opposite. Mary gave birth to a daughter, Celeste. Later she and Ted married, and also had a son, Teddy, Jr. But in time, Ted and Mary got divorced, and thus he lost his “long wrestling match with a sacred cow” that he “had been idolizing . . . since childhood.” He said, “I would not be like my biological father: marry a woman who gave birth to our child and leave .” In his poem, “Not Me!” – the flavor of which follows -- Ted himself knows he is in denial:

I say it now.  
I am divorced. . .  
I have two children  
(Not me! No! Not me!)  
I wonder what they say?

“Not me!” and “Not me either!”

I have become my own knot . . .  
Now weeping,  
No! Oh no, not me!  
Not me! Not me!

*BUT FOR THESE* pays tribute to people “who, Ted writes, “helped shaped the route of my journey through the maze of my ignorance.” While in the Air Force and stationed in Japan, Ted describes receiving a “calling to preach, teach, and help others.” A “call” he struggled with because being a “preacher . . . did not fit” him.

Here Ted invites us white people into his world – a world so different from the one we live in and take for granted. He needed to talk with “a Negro Air Force chaplain, ideally” one “affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church” -- like back home. But there weren’t any. So he was “faced with a hard dilemma – talking to a white person about a gut-shaking experience who might hear, but not grasp, the significance of my report within his perspective.”

Ted decided to do the “unthinkable” and talk with white Methodist chaplain, Rev. Lawrence Zellers, who heard -- and *grasped* -- his struggle. Chaplain Zellers helped direct him to The Methodist Church’s Boston University and School of Theology, where Revs. Joe Brown Love and Rev. Ray Fedje, Ph.D. and others were waiting for him – as was Rev. Louise C. Beaty, minister of First Unity Church in St. Petersburg, Fla.

The assistance these white ministers provided may not be seen as significant, since white people have access to power. But in the case of Ted’s white cohorts, their use of power was guided by The Golden Rule. Ted’s tribute to Boston University Methodist Campus Minister, white Southerner Rev. Joe Brown Love speaks to the transcending power of human caring: “He was my walking stick through the

courtyards and landscapes of BU's Charles River Campus. Without him, I would not have made it through to tell this story."

One could say that Rev. Ted Lockhart helped to integrate the New England Conference of The Methodist Church – a Herculean task indeed. He became the second Negro minister in the Conference. Thus the all-white male Board of Ordained Ministry wondered where to put him, as the only other Negro minister, Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell, "was already serving 'our Negro church.' " Ted quotes one Board member, who asked if he were "applying for membership to serve black persons." Ted replied, "No, I was applying for membership to serve as minister to all people." Such discriminatory experiences and his later teaching of Black Studies at Boston College fueled his poem , "What Color Is You, Lawd:

What color is you, Lawd?  
Colored folks been wondering.  
Now they're asking out loud.

What color is your face, Lawd?  
No never-minding 'bout this thing,  
Colored folks demanding out loud.

What color is you lawd?  
If I were you, I'd say something.  
'Nstead of laying dead or playing cool

Like some high-strutting Bad Nigger –  
Shiftless, riotous, and all trouble.  
Lawd a-mercy, ain't you got no tongue?

Your color is the trouble of the world.  
So quit shucking and jiving  
And bring it down front!

Now Lawd knows what the Lawd said.  
"Tell those cats demanding my color  
That I am The No-Dozen Player

I am the Front

I am What's Happening  
(Jeremiah knew me as The Fury)

And if you are wise,  
You'll quit asking  
Unhip questions. Dig?"

Of critical interest to United Methodists and other people should be Rev. Lockhart's description of how, in the early 1970s, The United Methodist Church in New England continued to act as if the "Lawd's" color was white. Black ministers were bypassed as a white minister was appointed to Boston's racially-mixed Church of All Nations. The Black Methodists for Church Renewal alleged discrimination in the appointment and, in 1971, called for the Conference to have the denomination's Commission on Religion and Race conduct an investigation. During the investigation,, newly elected Bishop Edward G. Carroll, an African American, who was appointed to head up the then Southern New England Conference, replaced white bishop Rev. James K. Matthews. Ted quotes another black minister as saying about Bishop Carroll, "They have just elected a boy to do a man's job for the work on white racism that needs to be done here in New England."

Rev. Lockhart himself was quite involved in assisting the investigation. He fathered and successfully lobbied the Conference to pass the Resolution on Racial Inclusiveness in the appointment of ministers while chairing the Conference's Board of Christian Social Concerns, and later chaired the Conference's newly created Commission on Religion and Race. Ted's involvement in the investigation of alleged discrimination in the Conference possibly caught up with him.

Here he offers all faith groups a psychological clinic on projection. He writes that his separation from his wife and divorce led Bishop Carroll and his district superintendent, Rev. Simon P. Montgomery to become preoccupied with fantasies about his sex life. They reveal a common condition of many Methodist ministers and other clergy: their repressed sexuality leads them to defend against their own

unresolved sexual wishes by unconsciously projecting their desires on to others, who are assumed to be acting out sexually and thus punished for doing what the bishop and superintendent -- and other ministers -- themselves would like to do. Ted's lesson here: Integrated self- understanding would go a long way to liberate sexually repressed ministers and save others from becoming their scapegoats.

In time, Ted was run over by the hierarchical Methodist Conference bus. While serving as minister of First United Methodist Church in North Andover, MA, he discovered illegalities in that church's management of its parsonage. When he shared the problem with then superintendent Rev. Richard Harding, he was told, "Leave it alone, Ted." Ted didn't "leave it alone." Bishop Carroll's immediate response was to call and tell him that his job at the church was terminated and that he should leave the parsonage immediately. The Bishop offered him no other church appointment, which is required if a Conference minister was "in good standing." Ted faced what he called his "existential crisis" -- with "the betrayal of friendship" and the lack of basic needs for survival -- food, shelter & clothing, alone amidst hostile forces."

It is here that I became one of Ted's cohorts: writing that I "saved" him from his "existential crisis." I knew what he was going through as I had been there. A few years earlier I was forcibly retired by a vote of a majority of Conference ministers, after Bishop Carroll and his five white district superintendents presented "eight" character-assassinating "reasons" why I had become un-appointable to a church. (My story appears in [Counterpunch](#))

When Ted was "tossed under the bus," I had just become minister of the Unitarian Universalist-affiliated Community Church of Boston, which at that moment was without a custodian. I offered Ted the position, as it provided a small stipend and, most important, a place to lay his head: an apartment above the one in which my wife, Eva and I and our three-year-old daughter Amy lived in Boston's Copley

Square. It was Briar Patch Time again for Ted: how he maintained his dignity as a custodian, after being a minister, provides a lesson in humility and inner strength.

Ted's openness leads him to include a climatic incident as custodian. Bishop Carroll's office was just a few doors up the street from The Community Church of Boston, where Ted now lived. One day, as Ted was standing in front of CCB, Bishop Carroll walked by. Ted writes: "I came close to punching him, choosing instead to grab him by the lapels of his coat as he passively submitted." Afterwards, a very anxious Ted Lockhart came to our apartment and told Eva and me what he has just done. He feared the police would come. None came.

After three years as custodian of CCB, Ted returned to his home state of Florida. He affiliated with Travelers Rest Missionary Baptist Church, and there he met Minnie Jean McBride Strickland, his "encourager and eventual wife," who became the final cohort in his journey to "becoming whosoever" he "could."

In Florida, Ted dealt with his rage over the betrayals suffered in the New England Conference, especially the betrayal of his liberal white friend, Superintendent Rev. Dick Harding. Ted "cussed," took long walks and "cussed" some more, and sang "Negro spirituals." And "cussed" some more. Finally peace of mind broke through, and he reached out to Rev. Harding and they restored their relationship.

Here Ted reveals the universal meanings of grace and love. He tells the Afro-American folklore story of "the time when all of God's children were gathered in the heavenly place, but God, the Father stood at the gate, looking out at the great distance beyond the Gates of heaven. When asked why He was standing there, the Great God Almighty said, 'I am waiting to welcome Judas home.' "

In that spirit, Rev. Ted Lockhart, with the encouragement of his wife, Minnie, returned to the New England Conference. There he led Boston's Union United Methodist Church to become the first racially-



mixed United Methodist congregation to unconditionally welcome LGBTQ persons to their church home -- persons, who have been branded as Judas-like by United Methodist Church polity itself -- a discriminatory polity from which, at this very moment, The Church is seeking to liberate itself.

*BUT FOR THESE* ends with an inspiring homily on “The Lord Has a Controversy with His People,” which provides an inspiring reminder that all of us, near and far, need -- and are worthy of -- each other.

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A Unitarian Universalist minister with a past United Methodist affiliation, Dr. Alberts was a hospital chaplain at Boston Medical Center from 1992 to 2011, which experience led him to write, [\*A Hospital Chaplain at the Crossroads of Humanity\*](#). He is also author of [\*The Counterpunching Minister \(who couldn't be “preyed” away\)\*](#), which is a compilation of his articles in [\*Counterpunch\*](#), where his writings continue to appear.

