



Boston University School of Theology

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Boston University School of Theology 2023

Inside:

USING BIG DATA
TO TRACK THE GROWTH OF
CHINESE CHRISTIANITY

CLERGY WHO'VE FOUND
A SPIRITUAL HOME
IN POLITICS

A PROGRAM HELPING
CHURCHES NAVIGATE
COMMUNITY TRAUMA

Conductor Bill Banfield ('88) is building a faith-fueled jazz sanctuary in Boston (page 26).

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Daniel Bonner, Jr. ('82)

Daniel (right) and Sue (left) Bonner with their grandchildren, Ashley and Reece



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Dean G. Sujin Pak

DEAN'S MESSAGE

A 'SCHOOL OF PROPHETS,' A SCHOOL OF BRIDGE-BUILDERS

BY DEAN G. SUJIN PAK

The School of Theology has long inhabited a vocation as a “School of the Prophets.” There have been multiple expressions of this across the school’s life and work, such as STH’s attraction of civil rights advocates in the early 1900s; the early activist work of the social ethicist Walter Muelder (’30, GRS’33, Hon.’73); the impact of the pioneering leaders Anna Howard Shaw (1878, CAMED 1886), Howard Thurman (Hon.’67), and Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS’55, Hon.’59); the cooperative partnership with the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium; and the founding of key STH centers and programs, such as the Anna Howard Shaw Center, the Center for Practical Theology, the Center for Global Christianity & Mission (CGCM), the Tom Porter Program on Religion & Conflict Transformation (RCT), Faith & Ecological Justice Program (FEJ), and initiatives in theology and Latinx studies and in theology and the arts.

Looking at this legacy, it is clear to me that STH has long been about the vocation of fostering teaching, research, practices, and programs at the intersections of theologies (Christian theologies in particular), religion (interfaith commitments), and public life (“to seek peace with justice in a diverse and interconnected world”). This has been its legacy. It is the heart of its current work. It is the continuing challenge and magnetic pull of its future.

STH’s “bridging” work captured our imaginations for this issue. STH seeks to foster leaders who bridge faith and pol-

itics and bridge key challenges of racial/sexual/gender discrimination, climate change, immigration, and healthcare. Such is evident in the transformational research of our alumni (page 5), the profiles of STH alumni on the cutting edge of public theology in the Boston area (pages 7 and 12), and the vocations of our PhD students, as they apply theology to Black maternal healthcare (page 30) and immigration (page 38). It is further affirmed in the amazing support of alumni and friends to endow our FEJ, RCT, and CGCM programs (page 10).

Such bridging also has global and interfaith dimensions, witnessed in the interfaith and intercultural legacies of former faculty John Berthrong and Chai-Sik Chung (’64, GRS’64), remembered on page 9; the exciting work of the China Historical Christian Database project (page 3); and the offering of travel seminars (page 4).

Furthermore, STH embraces a call to bridge church and academy (page 34), as its faculty cultivate hubs that equip trauma-responsive congregations (page 18) and facilitate congregational responses to racial justice (page 7), and its alumni translate their learning to ministries of hospitality to marginalized communities (page 22). We are reminded that we may well see God less clearly through theological constructions and more clearly in the faces of our neighbors (page 42).

Lastly, this issue points to the revitalizing gifts of the arts. Sacred arts are another beautiful bridge between theology, religion, and public life, seen in the life and work of Bill Banfield (’88) on page 26 and STH’s burgeoning Theology & the Arts Initiative (page 48). □

BIG DATA MEETS RELIGION

MAPPING THE EXPLOSION OF CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

BY MARC CHALUFOUR

What led to the Christian community in China growing from 1 million to 100 million over the past four decades—centuries after the first Christian missionaries arrived there? Daryl Ireland, research assistant professor of mission, and the BU scholars behind the China Historical Christian Database aim to find out.

The project, which enables researchers to picture the history of Christianity in modern China, links web-based visualization tools with a database packed with the names and locations of missionaries, churches, schools, hospitals, and publications. The team—which includes Ireland, Alex Mayfield (’21), and Eugenio Menegon, an associate professor of history at the BU College of Arts & Sciences—launched the project in 2018 with seed money from BU’s Rafik B. Hariri Institute for Computing and Computational Science & Engineering. In August 2021, the project received a \$100,000 Digital Humanities Advancement Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Version 2.0 of the database, which is hosted by BU’s Center for Global Christianity & Mission, is scheduled for release in

Principal investigators Eugenio Menegon (left), a CAS associate professor of history, and Daryl Ireland, STH research assistant professor of mission. Alex Mayfield (’21) is not pictured.



2023. The new version will double the amount of data previously available, providing approximately 4 million data points—names, occupations, locations, dates, and more—spanning four centuries (1550–1950).

Ireland spoke with *focus* about how the database could help scholars understand the relationships between China and the Western world.

focus: Why China and why Christianity—is there something about that convergence that’s conducive for a digital project?

Ireland: The length of history—400 years—and the strong recordkeeping over that time period, both in European languages and in Chinese. It’s an incredibly rich body of material and gives us a really good picture of the relationship between China and the West.

What is the data you’re collecting and where is it coming from?

Our objective is to map every Christian institution in China, whether it’s a church, school, hospital, publishing house, orphanage, or convent. Then we try to identify who worked inside them. We use all kinds of records and sources. One of the simple ones is a Protestant directory of Christian missionaries in China that was published annually in the 20th century. Other times, we are looking through diaries or the preface of a book.

How close are you to the goal of mapping all of these entities?

In terms of foreign missionaries, I think we are probably about 90 percent done. We’ve got a pretty good dataset of around 30,000 foreigners who were in China during that 400-year period. The much more difficult question is what about the Chinese [missionaries] we’re looking for? How well are we going to be able to piece together the Chinese story?

(Continued)

How do you hope people will use this data?

We’ve imagined this to be a resource primarily for scholars, but also for students and the general public. We have tried to make the data as accessible as possible. The general public probably uses it most often for genealogical research. Students or teachers use it in the classroom for a quick visual, like a heat map representation to show where Christianity was most prevalent in China. And scholars use it for all kinds of fascinating things. There is a team at Oxford that is trying to use the data to look at how religions have responded to climate change. They look at times of famines and droughts and watch, on our map, what happens with Christians—do they move into locations that are devastated or do they move out of them?

The study of religion doesn’t necessarily call to mind data science and big data. Why does this melding of fields make sense?

Digital scholarship and digital tools can enhance our scholarship and our understanding of history and human life. This is a way of doing scholarship that allows us to take massive amounts of data and begin to synthesize them in some really fun and creative ways. And one of the great things about digital resources and digital scholarship is that, when done well, it empowers the user to become the author of history. □ *This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.*

IN WESLEY’S FOOTSTEPS

ON STUDYING METHODISM’S ENGLISH ROOTS

BY MADISON BOBOLTZ (’23)

In the summer of 2022, I had the pleasure of accompanying alumni and fellow students on a two-week travel seminar in England. The trip was organized and led by Christopher Evans, professor of the history of Christianity and Methodist studies, and PhD candidate Emily Nelms Chastain (’25), who challenged participants to consider the relevance of “The Wesleyan Tradition in a 21st Century Context.”

With Manchester as our base, we visited a number of cities and sites that are significant to Methodist history, such as the Wesley family’s rectory in Epworth, the Museum of Primitive Methodism in Englesea Brook, and the John Rylands Research Institute and Library in Manchester.

Our group also met and worshipped with prophetic scholars and faith leaders who have adapted their theologies and ministries to serve their evolving contexts. Reverend Ian Rutherford, minister at Methodist Central Hall in Manchester, explained how, in his efforts to address hunger and homelessness, he utilizes the hall’s location and building space to partner with the city’s lawyers, social workers, and politicians. John Witcombe, dean of Coventry Cathedral, walked us through the



A Wesleyan landmark in modern Manchester.

ruins of St. Michael’s Cathedral, which was bombed by Germany in 1940. He then took us through the new cathedral, built beside the ruins, which symbolizes the community’s commitment to peace and reconciliation, even amidst tragedy.

This trip afforded me, a Methodist, the meaningful opportunity to become more acquainted with my tradition’s roots and ongoing impact. When I graduate with my Master of Divinity in the spring of 2023 and return to central Texas to pursue provisional eldership in the United Methodist Church, I am hopeful that the knowledge and inspiration gleaned during the travel seminar in England will equip me to provide a faithful witness to Christ and the church as a step into vocational ministry. □

TRANSFORMATIONAL RESEARCH

ALUMS’ RESEARCH PRIORITIES ROOTED IN THEIR IDENTITIES AND LIFE EXPERIENCES

BY STEVE HOLT



Onaje X.O. Woodbine’s scholarly pursuits are deeply rooted in his experiences growing up in Boston’s

Roxbury neighborhood in the 1990s. In a time when a scourge of gang violence afflicted the city, Woodbine (’04, GRS’14) found peace—and “a pass” from gang life—on the basketball court: “It was assumed that you had an opportunity to move beyond the short life expectancy that most people just assume for young Black men.”

Success on the court and in the classroom took Woodbine to Yale, where he earned all-Ivy League honors and majored in philosophy before returning to Boston to pursue an MTS in philosophy, theology, and ethics, followed by a PhD in religious studies, from BU. Woodbine’s doctoral dissertation at STH explored the ways in which street basketball serves as a bodily and spiritual escape—a sort of “street religion”—for young Black men, as it had for himself. Woodbine parlayed that research into his first book, *Black Gods of the Asphalt: Religion, Hip-Hop, and Street Basketball* (Columbia University Press, 2016), which

Photos courtesy of subjects.

earned praise from national religious and sports media.

Woodbine’s research wasn’t always understood by BU’s mostly white faculty at the time. But Woodbine—whose 2021 book, *Take Back What the Devil Stole: An African American Prophet’s Encounters in the Spirit World*, continues to explore street religion through the eyes of Black women—realized his research had to make sense to the community from which he came. “I just couldn’t be a disembodied professor,” Woodbine says.

Embodied, transformational research is one reason schools of theology across the country are hiring new faculty members who come from diverse backgrounds. At STH, 43 percent of full-time faculty members are now Black, Asian, Asian American, or Latinx, according to Nicolette Manglos-Weber, an assistant professor of religion and society and director of the school’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. “We have a long way to go on this front, especially in making sure we retain and support faculty of color and those with young families in the very challenging city of Boston,” Manglos-Weber says. “But we are seeing some progress in this area, which will dramatically shape the school into the future.”

Stephanie Budwey, Luce Dean’s Faculty Fellow Assistant Professor of the History and Practice of



Christian Worship and the Arts at the Vanderbilt University Divinity School, says her identity as a lesbian has led her to

pursue research on discrimination in the church tied to sex, gender, and sexual orientation. She says she’s especially committed to breaking down cisheteronormative assumptions—that a male will identify as a man, or a woman will marry a man, and so on. “As a liturgist and church musician, I am particularly concerned about how these cisheteronormative assumptions appear in worship, including in the language that is used for humans and God in the prayers prayed and songs sung,” says Budwey (’04,’12).



Chicano author and leader in theological education, **Patrick B. Reyes** (’11) was raised by his Mexican grandmother, who

was a *curandera*—a healer. In his role as senior director of learning design at the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE), he works to create pathways for students of color to find meaning in theological education. “FTE continues to support the next generation of BIPOC students to center their imagination of vocation more broadly,” Reyes says. “The future needs more scholars, not less. We need more healers and educators, not less. That is our work.” □

STH WELCOMES THREE NEW FACULTY MEMBERS

Dean G. Sujin Pak describes STH's new faculty members as "innovative, inspiring game-changers," who bring "interdisciplinary depth, an exquisite balance of academic excellence and profound practices of care, passionate pursuit of peace with justice, and heightened capacities for interfaith and intercultural engagement."



Eunil David Cho

Cho, an assistant professor of spiritual care and counseling, studies spiritual care and pastoral theology, with a focus on immigrant and refugee communities—a passion he developed during graduate school while working with immigrant and refugee youth in the Atlanta suburbs. Cho's research looks at the religious experiences of young undocumented immigrants in the United States, including, he says, "how they appropriate their traumatic experience of migration and how they engage in spiritual practices of coping, healing, and meaning-making." He hopes his research will help religious professionals shape their spiritual care practices.

At STH, Cho wants to facilitate important experiential learning opportunities for his students and help them explore and grow as religious professionals. "As a teacher of practical theology and spiritual care, I foremost focus on *formation*," he says.

"I hope to invite and accompany our students to think deeply about their journey of becoming: how and what they think, what emotions they feel, how they build and cultivate relationships, what gifts they have, what challenges they experience, and the ways they respond to God in and for the world."



Peng Yin

Yin, an assistant professor of ethics, considers religious ethics, Chinese theology, and religion and sexuality in his research. During his first semester at STH, Yin taught the courses Comparative Religious Ethics and Queer Theology. "I am invigorated by my students, who confirmed my sense that STH is at the forefront of our collective reflection on race, sexuality, religious difference, and economic inequality," he says. "I want to shape those conversations." He looks forward to developing new courses that examine topics such as the rise of innovative forms of ministry, unifying moral action and spiritual formation, and using ethical reasoning to inform social activism.



Jimmy McCarty

McCarty's research lies at the intersection of peace studies and Christian ethics. While working for the US military as a civilian contractor after 9/11, he says, "I became convicted that Christians are called

"I am invigorated by my students, who confirmed my sense that STH is at the forefront of our collective reflection on race, sexuality, religious difference, and economic inequality. I want to shape those conversations."
—Peng Yin

to a life of nonviolence and peace-building." He also felt a call to ministry, and became inspired to study the theological ethics of figures such as Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS'55, Hon.'59), and Desmond Tutu.

McCarty, an assistant clinical professor of religion and conflict transformation and director of the Tom Porter Religion and Conflict Transformation Program, hopes to build upon the legacies of Tom Porter (LAW'74), a retired STH lecturer, and Judith Oleson, a lecturer in conflict transformation who led the program until the summer of 2022. Under McCarty's leadership, the program has placed more emphasis on community organizing and nonviolent direct action, in addition to mediation and restorative justice. His primary goal as a new faculty member, he says, "is to teach students who will become leaders in their communities who can transform conflicts toward justice and peace."—Mara Sassoon □

Facing page: Dave Green (x3); This page: Dave Green, Courtesy of David J. Young

CREATIVE CALLINGS

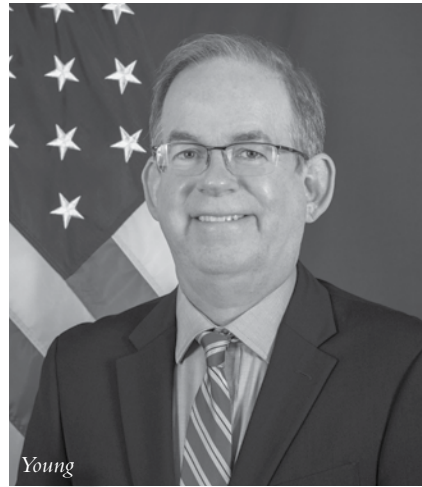
HUB SUPPORTS CONGREGATIONS' RACIAL JUSTICE ACTIONS



The Creative Callings hub—launched in 2018 out of STH's Center for Practical Theology with a \$1.5 million Lilly Endowment grant to help leaders and communities discern their own faithful callings—is currently working with leaders from several congregations who have embraced antiracism work as a core calling, says Claire Wolfteich, a professor of theology and the project's director and principal investigator. Congregations in the hub are responding to calls for racial justice in different ways, Wolfteich says; one issued mini grants to "find your purpose, fund your breakthrough," while another is giving direct reparation payments to Black families in its community.

"For some congregations, this means addressing economic inequities and educational access disparities that make it more difficult to actually live the callings one discerns," Wolfteich says. "STH [master's and PhD] students have been important parts of our team as we think with congregations about how they can dynamically advance racial justice in their own communities while sustaining leadership in the face of exhaustion and trauma." —S.H. □

ALUM APPOINTED AMBASSADOR TO MALAWI



In March 2022, David J. Young ('87, Pardee'88) became the US ambassador to the Republic of Malawi. Young, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, has spent more than three decades working internationally in countries such as Guatemala, Panama, and Vietnam. For the past decade, he has held posts around Africa, including in Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, South Africa, and Zambia.

Young's journey in foreign policy began while he was getting his Master of Divinity at STH, where he says he became passionate about US policy in Central America. "I was very angry," he recalls. "I thought, 'That's not who we are,' and my values and my faith led me to start getting involved in politics and policy." Young says his foreign service highlights include working to uphold democracy in Zambia through its 2021 presidential elec-

tion; helping free dozens of political and religious prisoners during a post in Vietnam earlier in his career; and supporting the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program in Africa, which is estimated to have saved more than 20 million lives.

"I have a very blessed life," says Young, who also holds a master's degree in international relations from BU's Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies and a

"I've been able to connect my faith, my love of writing and communications, and my passion about the world, policy, and politics. This job is so refreshing, and it keeps you educated and growing through learning languages and cultures and meeting people all around the world."
—David J. Young

bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri. "I've been able to connect my faith, my love of writing and communications, and my passion about the world, policy, and politics. This job is so refreshing, and it keeps you educated and growing through learning languages and cultures and meeting people all around the world. It's been really amazing." —M.S. □



R. Preston Price (from left), Michelle Graveline, G. Sujin Pak, and Dorlimar Lebrón Malavé at the 2022 Matriculation service at Marsh Chapel.

STH HONORED FOUR DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI IN 2022

School of Theology Dean G. Sujin Pak describes the 2022 distinguished alumni awardees as “change leaders, each in their own way.” Over his 50-year ministry career, **R. Preston Price ('70)** served 10 United Methodist churches in California and Illinois. Price and his wife, Jean, have financially supported many STH students through their Rev. Dr. Robert P. Price II

Scholarship, named for his father, who received his PhD from BU in 1958. **Michelle Graveline (CFA'74, '76)** taught music at Assumption University in Worcester, Mass., for 35 years, leading her chorales on 15 national and international concert tours before retiring in 2019 as professor emerita of music. **Howard-John Wesley ('97)** (at left; read his sermon on page 42) is senior pastor of the 10,000-member Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., and only



the eighth pastor in the congregation's 219-year history. Wesley has led actions around important social issues, including community protest marches following the death of Eric Garner at the hands of New York City police officers. **Dorlimar Lebrón Malavé ('18)**, the recipient of STH's Emerging Leader Award, is lead pastor at First Spanish United Methodist Church, also known as “The People's Church,” in Spanish Harlem. Through its People's Food Project, the church fed about 500 families affected by the financial fallout of COVID-19. —S.H. □

IN MEMORIAM



JOHN BERTHRONG (1946–2022)

“A rare colleague who became a fast friend.”

That's how Robert Cummings Neville, a former dean of STH and University chaplain, remembers longtime administrator and faculty member John Berthrong, who died August 31, 2022. Berthrong served the School of Theology for 21 years as associate dean for academic and administrative affairs and an associate professor of comparative theology. He was a “very serious scholar too,” says Neville. Berthrong's research and teaching often centered on interfaith dialogue. Notably, he and Neville were instrumental in advancing the study of Confucian–Christian dialogue.

“There were several years when our combined publications were more than all the rest of the school's,” Neville recalls. “[John's] intellectual life is a permanent part of the historians' and comparativists' contributions to Chinese philosophy.”

After finishing a PhD from the University of Chicago, Berthrong returned to his native Canada to become director of interfaith dialogue at the United Church of Canada in Toronto. He retired from BU in 2010 and moved to British Columbia. He and Neville—“separated by a

continent”—would frequently touch base after New England Patriots games.

Berthrong is the author of many books and articles on Eastern religion and interfaith relations. He was also a founding member of the North American Interfaith Network and a member of the Interfaith Relations Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ and the Forum on Religion and Ecology. —S.H. □



CHAI-SIK CHUNG (1930–2022)

Chai-Sik Chung was BU's inaugural Walter G. Muelder Professor of Social Ethics from 1990

to 2011. Chung died in Boston in April 2022 at 91.

A social ethicist, sociologist of religion, and scholar of comparative religions, Chung ('64, GRS'64) was a pioneer in the study of social and ethical problems arising from East Asia's modern transformation. His numerous works on social and ethical issues involving globalization and encounters between East Asian religions and Christianity have been published in English and Korean.

“As a colleague of Professor Chung's for many years, I can attest to his brilliance, his productivity, and his collegiality,” says Dana L. Robert, the William Fairfield Warren Distinguished Professor and director of BU's

OBITUARIES

STH publishes alumni obituaries online at bu.edu/sth/category/alumnae-deaths

Center for Global Christianity & Mission. “It is a privilege to remember Professor Chai-Sik Chung and to support his legacy for the School of Theology, past, present, and future.”

Chung's son, Eugene, has generously established a scholarship in his father's name to provide annual need-based scholarship

“As a colleague of Professor Chung's for many years, I can attest to his brilliance, his productivity, and his collegiality.”

—Dana L. Robert

awards to one or more students at the School of Theology, with a preference for students with an interest in social ethics. Gifts to the Dr. Chai-Sik Chung Endowed Scholarship in Social Ethics can be made online at bu.edu/sth/alumni/giving/ or by check, payable to “Trustees of Boston University.” Please add “Dr. Chung Scholarship” to the memo field. Mail to Boston University, Gift Processing, c/o JPMorgan Chase & Co. PO Box 22605 New York, N.Y., 10087-2605. —S.H. □

Facing page: Dave Green; This page: Courtesy of STH

PHILANTHROPY AS THE 'LOVE OF HUMANITY'

As religious and ethical leaders called to serve and care for communities across the world, we celebrate the various ways BU alumni embody what it means to be philanthropists, which at its root means “lovers of humanity.” Your continued giving directly impacts STH’s capacity to achieve its mission.

This year, we’re excited to announce that the Faith & Ecological Justice (FEJ) Program Fund and the Center for Global Christianity & Mission have recently been endowed and will generate new support for research, teaching, and contextual learning opportunities. These join the other center and program funds that are endowed, but the need for support—whether endowed or not—remains to reach \$1 million each, which would provide each program or center an annual budget of \$50,000.

CENTER OR PROGRAM NAME	Fund Established Date	Fund Endowment Date	Fund Total*
ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER	2011	2015	\$183,065
CENTER FOR GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY & MISSION	2017	2021	\$179,767
CENTER FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY	2016	2016	\$140,127
FAITH & ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE PROGRAM	2020	2023	\$141,044
RAÍCES LATINAS PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY, LEADERSHIP & RESEARCH	2020	Not yet endowed; needs to reach \$100K.	\$42,551
TOM PORTER RELIGION & CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM	2015	2018	\$615,029
THEOLOGY & THE ARTS	2021	2021	\$106,500

*as of March 2023

Help us elevate teaching and research at STH

The **Faculty Research & Teaching Fund** at the School of Theology will provide support for research, writing, and other projects solely for the Boston University School of Theology faculty including, but not limited to, salaries and stipends; conferences, workshops, community outreach, and events; and curriculum development. “Faculty teaching and research are at the heart of everything we do,” says Dean G. Sujin Pak. “My hope is that this fund will continue to support and expand their scholarly leadership!”

Your gift will help elevate the research and teaching strengths of faculty at STH.

Email sthdev@bu.edu, call 617-353-2349, or visit bu.edu/sth/giving



ACTING ON CLIMATE CHANGE: THE FAITH & ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE PROGRAM FUND

“My late wife, Jan, and I have treasured both Christian service and action through our years in ministry. We are urgently aware that the future of life on this planet is at existential risk by ecological abuse resulting in global warming and its present and growing catastrophes. I long for a global life support system that nurtures my grandchildren, their children, and all future children. Our faith contains the prerequisite beautiful compassion and prophetic courage. We simply need

leaders and people to implement such into a groundswell to save our planet. My prayer is the School of Theology’s Faith & Ecological Justice ministries will be an important part of such a groundswell. That is why I am endowing this fund in Jan’s memory.”



—Rev. Tom Harry ('68) is the former copastor, with his late wife, Jan Harry, of Normandy United Methodist Church in Dayton, Ohio.

“The Faith & Ecological Justice Program equips STH students to tackle ecological justice issues including deforestation, toxic

pollution, environmental racism, and climate change using political activism, theological development, educational programming, and spiritual practices. Your generous giving to the FEJ Program ensures that we can keep preparing future leaders to tackle some of the most significant public health, social justice, and environmental issues we will face in the 21st century.”

—Rebecca Copeland is an STH assistant professor of theology whose research and teaching interests center around the intersection of religion and ecology.



CULTIVATING PEACE: THE TOM PORTER RELIGION & CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM FUND

“Even as divisions among us are becoming more pronounced, the truth remains that we are all connected one to the other and to all of creation. Conflict among any of us and the suffering of any, as well as the suffering of our planet, affect us all. We need to learn again and again how to listen to one another and to resolve conflicts peacefully and equitably. We want future generations to live in a world where civil discourse is the norm, and we want them to have skills to

resolve ongoing conflicts. This is what the Tom Porter Religion & Conflict Transformation Program teaches. A small program can have a lot of power, and we want to see the efforts bear much fruit and thrive. Won’t you join us in supporting it?”



—Joan Murray (Questrom '82) is a retired United Church of Christ minister and founder of Waltham-based homeless ministry

Chaplains on the Way. Rev. Murray is a member of the Dean’s Advisory Board at STH. Bob Murray is CEO of Taxbridge Financial Group Inc. The Murrays have pledged a dollar-for-dollar match of up to \$250,000 for this program.

“The Art and Spirit of Conflict Transformation introduced my classmates and me to a profound framework of thought and real-world practices for the healing and repair of our broken relationships and our hurting world. In the years ahead, I look forward to my continued study and practice of this rich tradition with [program director] Jimmy McCarty. I felt at home in his classroom, enveloped by his warm hospitality and the company of like-minded seekers as we journeyed purposefully



toward our shared intention of beloved community.” —Kelly (Kel) Alford ('26) is a Master of Divinity student.

Courtesy of subjects and the School of Theology

A PUBLIC THEOLOGY

A DIVINE CALLING LEADS STH ALUMS INTO POLITICS, FROM ADVISING A US REPRESENTATIVE TO ADVOCATING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

BY RICH BARLOW

US Representative Ayanna Pressley has come to Cambridge's Urban Hearth restaurant this October day

to honor a constituent: owner Erin Miller, the first woman and Bay Stater to win the Great American Seafood Cook-Off. In the intimate dining area with an open kitchen, Pressley (D-Mass.), confidently conversational, shows how to work a room. She makes small talk about the large number of expat Brooklynites living in Cambridge. She asks Miller about her business. She compliments the savory aromas and the decor. ("Your restroom is cozy.")

In contrast to her gregariousness, a Pressley staffer in a blazer and jeans stands off to the side, unobtrusively scanning his phone. The Rev. Art Gordon ('16) is no wallflower when he takes the pulpit as senior pastor at Roxbury's St. John Missionary Baptist Church. There, he sways at the lectern, his impassioned sentences tailgating each other with barely a breath between them, as in a 2021 sermon about bad things befalling good people: "God, why me? Why do I have to go through this? God, I've been treating everybody right!"

But when he's on the clock as a senior advisor to Pressley (Hon. '21), Gordon blends into the background, modeling Christian humility: *blessed are the meek*. You'd never know that

the 34-year-old was part of the event's glue, having coordinated Pressley's visit with the Massachusetts Restaurant Association.

Gordon exemplifies School of Theology graduates who practice politically what they preach, advancing justice through the affairs of God's people. These clergy bridge two worlds, the partisan rancor of politics and the we're-all-God's-children inclusivity of faith. Gordon hustles early out of Urban Hearth and catches the MBTA's Red Line to a Central Square coffee shop, where he reserves space for a get-to-know-you meeting later that day between Pressley and Cambridge's new city manager. Once the tête-à-tête begins, he fades away again, this time to prepare for the commute home.

In addition to arranging such individual constituent meetings, Gordon stage-manages bigger events around matters of regional and national import: working as Pressley's staffer to help coordinate Boston's COVID-19 response, arranging meetings with religious leaders last fall on student debt relief, organizing a November town hall in Roxbury with Pressley and voters.

The man in the spotlight on Sundays doesn't mind stepping out of it in his political job. "There are times you're able to be onstage and speak and lead people," he says. "And then there are times you have to take a back seat or



Art Gordon ('16) is a powerful presence in the pulpit as senior pastor at Roxbury's St. John Missionary Baptist Church. He plays more of a supporting role as a senior advisor to US Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.) the rest of the week.

step back to let somebody else get to shine."

Federal law prohibits tax-exempt churches from endorsing specific political candidates. But *any* political work by clergy, like Gordon's, discomforts some. In 1980, five-term US Representative Robert Drinan (D-Mass.), a Jesuit priest, obeyed Vatican orders to give up his seat. (Canon law bars priests from elective office. And that was decades before today's partisan warfare forced ministers to tread

even more gingerly before flocks whose members may hold divergent political views.)

Gordon and his classmate, the Rev. Vernon Walker ('16), muse about seeking office themselves someday. Both field occasional objections to their current activism—in Walker's case, as program director of Cambridge-based Communities Responding to Extreme Weather (CREW). Walker has been instrumental in building the nonprofit's nation-

wide institutional web—libraries, churches, schools, nonprofits, and local businesses—that helps communities, especially low-income and of color, spread information about and fortify against climate change. He's also studying for a master's in public policy at Tufts.

"I do get asked sporadically why I am involved in political matters," Walker says. "We, as people of faith, should care enough about political matters that govern our lives to organize with our local



Mariama White-Hammond ('17) is the City of Boston's chief of environment, energy, and open space and founding pastor of Dorchester's New Roots AME Church.

community, to stand up for just policies, and organize against unjust policies. ...

There are over 2,000 Bible verses that talk about justice and poverty. It seems it is important to God how the poor are treated."

Blowback against political work is less of an issue for the Rev. Mariama White-Hammond ('17), who ministers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church—historically the most politically active in the Black Christian church, she says. White-Hammond has served as the founding pastor of Dorchester's New Roots AME Church since 2018 and, since April 2021, has held a full-time, appointed government role as the City of Boston's chief of environment, energy, and open space.

Her portfolio includes helping to implement the city's new carbon emissions targets for large, existing buildings.

She doesn't preach about the nitty-gritty of addressing such problems. "But I do [preach about] this question of whether or not we meet the climate crisis," White-Hammond says. "These are life-and-death issues," and tip-toeing around them "ultimately makes the church less relevant, and I think it has a lot to do with why the church is losing young people," who, increasingly, check "none" when polled about their

religious affiliation.

White-Hammond comfortably dons both cleric's stole and politician's hat as a pastor in the AME denomination and with a young flock that's passionate about social problems. Police reform, for example, engrosses her congregation. "I've got parents in my church who are worried about their children, whether or not they will be profiled. That's a real, lived reality," she says. "If we as a church are involved in the core moments of people's lives—marriage and birth and death—how do we not have an opinion if people are dying prematurely? How do we not have an opinion if policies make a decision about whether or not people can get married?"

"If you are ministering to people who consistently throughout history have received the brunt of legal and political decisions, how do you minister to them without talking about these things that impact their lives?"

THE ROOTS OF THEIR ACTIVISM

Church-state mingling has vital historical roots. All three of these clergy are heirs to, and conduits of, the Black church's tradition as spiritual balm and political advocate for the oppressed. It affirmed enslaved people's humanity before the Civil War and became an essential engine in the 20th-century's civil rights movement. Houses

"I've got parents in my church who are worried about their children, whether or not they will be profiled. That's a real, lived reality."
—Mariama White-Hammond

of worship occasionally have been made literal battlegrounds by white supremacists, as with the 1963 Alabama bombing that killed four children or the murders of nine Black South Carolinians at Bible study in 2015.

A history of producing "prophetic, moral, and politically influenced pastors, Black pastors in particular," says Gordon, attracted him to BU. That history would include the University's most famous alumnus, Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS'55, Hon.'59).

By the time Gordon matriculated, his life had long twined religion and politics. He was born, the youngest of six children, to a religious family "living in the projects, a three-bedroom house" in Georgia. His father is also a

Baptist pastor. The political bug bit Gordon in his college years, when he interned in Washington, D.C., for one of Georgia's US senators. Gordon began his own congregational ministry the year after his STH graduation. He later worked for the 2020 reelection campaign of US Senator Ed Markey (D-Mass.), then was invited to join the senator's staff—but only if he devoted himself exclusively to that job.

He couldn't. "Deep down, I'm still a pastor," he says. "I didn't want to give up the church." When he later applied to work for Pressley, he mentioned his spiritual role up front. This time, it wasn't a deal breaker.

"Our office aims to govern in close partnership with those we represent, and building a team with deep ties to our communities is a critical piece of that work," says Pressley, who studied at BU's College of General Studies. "Art has a proven track record in community, and his work as a pastor gives him a keen sense of issues affecting families and individuals in the district. He has been deeply involved in supporting our most vulnerable communities, and he understands how important it is to engage our faith community in our work for justice, equity, and our collective liberation. As someone whose journey in service began in my granddaddy's storefront church on the South Side of Chicago, I'm proud



The Rev. Vernon Walker ('16) works for a national nonprofit to help marginalized communities protect themselves from the effects of climate change.

to have Art on our team.”

Climate activist Walker’s calling to ministry came in Philadelphia in the early 2000s, where, attending and working through Deliverance Evangelistic Church, he ministered to prisoners and fed unhoused people. Developing what he calls “a heart for the poor and serving the poor,” he pursued chances to preach in pulpits across the City of

Brotherly Love. “During this time, I felt the Lord calling me to the ordination process,” Walker says.

It was Massachusetts that ordained him to politics. In 2013, he had moved to the commonwealth and was interning for a Worcester city councilor, doing community outreach as he’d done in Philadelphia. The experience taught him “how important it is

for people of faith to be involved in political organizing,” he says. At STH, his studies expanded his understanding of social justice and community engagement as never before: “I was able to take a trip to India and learn more about conflict there. I was able to take classes that helped me understand the roots of the Christian faith from an academic perspective. I

was also able to meet classmates who were like-minded and had a heart for social justice.”

White-Hammond says STH gave her time off from activism, as a person who was *born* to it. Her father, the Rev. Ray Hammond (Hon.’99), cofounded the Boston TenPoint Coalition, which works to curb gang violence, and her mother, the Rev. Gloria White-Hammond (CAS’72, Hon.’09), has campaigned against genocide in Sudan. Their daughter’s first social justice campaign came at age seven, when she gave up Coca-Cola to protest the company’s investment in apartheid South Africa.

She participated in community organizing for environmentalism before STH gave her time off to immerse herself in Bible study and understand “the issues that Jesus was raising, the structures that he was up against that we miss when we don’t have a historical understanding of the scripture,” she says. “I was able to get excited about what is possible if we were to just ask, what would Jesus do?” Her preaching spurred one congregant to tell her, “You’ve made me want to go back and read the Bible because there’s a lot of stuff that you’re talking about, I just didn’t see in there.”

TOWARD PEACEFUL POLITICKING

The contrast between the sour vinegar of America’s divided politics

and the inclusive oil of religions does not escape any of these alums.

“Politics is very polarizing,” says Walker, “and it does not bring out the best of people . . . division, meanness, and rude behavior.” To defuse tension with those he disagrees with, he points out to them “the impact a policy will have on underserved communities,” and “that if we are going to love our neighbors as ourselves”—per the command of Leviticus and Jesus—“we need to elect people who will have the heart of social justice at the root of their political agenda and policymaking.”

For White-Hammond, the reverse is often true. In blue-state Massachusetts, she doesn’t have to cross swords with climate change

deniers in her city role; she got on well with environmental officials under former Republican Governor Charlie Baker. But “I’m not sure that the church always is treating people with the kind of respect and basic human dignity that I would expect those people who call themselves scholars of Christ to at least attempt to live up to.

“I do not take for granted that the church *will* step up to the moment, because things are not looking great for us right now,” she laments. “The church universal has not been active enough on climate change. The church universal has not been active enough on immigration. I don’t think we have stood up for the least of these in the way that we are called to.” □

“I was able to take a trip to India and learn more about conflict there. I was able to take classes that helped me understand the roots of the Christian faith from an academic perspective. I was also able to meet classmates who were like-minded and had a heart for social justice.”
—Vernon Walker

FIRST RESPONDERS



Shelly Rambo



Ylisse Bess ('17)

STH'S TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE CONGREGATIONS PROGRAM HELPS CHURCHES EXPAND THEIR SPIRITUAL CARE CAPACITY

BY MARC CHALUFOUR

About half of the members of Living Water Church of the Nazarene in downtown San Diego have experienced some form of homelessness. And, says Pastor Chris Nafis, “almost everybody that’s been on the streets has experienced some form of trauma.” But with a small staff, limited funds, and no specific training, the church didn’t have much to offer those people. “You don’t want to do trauma work badly because you can open up a lot of hurt,” he says.

Nafis likes to read books with his colleagues at Living Water and, about five years ago—not long after their church opened—they read *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* by Shelly Rambo, an STH associate professor of theology. Nafis had the idea of creating healing circles to help members of their community who were dealing with trauma, and he thought Rambo’s book might help. He emailed her, and the two traded messages, but without the resources to train his staff, Nafis couldn’t make any progress on his plan.

MEETING A CONGREGATIONAL NEED

Rambo teaches a course on trauma and theology and, she says, it’s always overbooked. “When people are coming to seminary, they are recognizing that this is something they’re going to need,” she says. “But then I’m seeing this gap when people are out in minis-

try—they’re struggling.” She wanted to help urban church leaders address the trauma created by crises like food and housing insecurity, displacement, and street violence.

Rambo’s academic background in the intersection of religion and trauma, and a related focus on the work of chaplains—she contributed to the design of STH’s chaplaincy MDiv program—helped to shape her vision for Trauma-Responsive Congregations. Recalling Nafis’ email five years earlier, she says, “He had a vision.” He simply had no way to execute it.

And she knew he wasn’t alone among congregational leaders. “They are just overwhelmed. They’re working all the time,” she says. Her hope, in applying for funding, was to provide leaders like Nafis with a helping hand.

In November 2020, the Lilly Endowment funded Rambo’s proposal for Trauma-Responsive Congregations—which is being conducted in partnership with the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab and ACPE, a professional development organization focused on spiritual care professionals—with a four-year, nearly \$1 million grant.

INSPIRED BY CHAPLAINS

As Rambo set out to launch Trauma-Responsive Congregations in 2020 and early 2021, she considered what she’d been learning from chaplains. Working in hospitals, prisons, and the military,



Chris Nafis pastors a congregation with many members who have experienced homelessness.

chaplains are often “first responders to trauma,” she says. “I wanted to translate some of their insights into thinking about congregational leaders.”

One way she did that was by recruiting a staff of people with chaplaincy experience, starting with Ylisse Bess ('17). A former chaplain at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Bess is the Trauma-Responsive Congregations program director.

“Chaplaincy is accompanying people, being with people, listening, and then supporting people by noting their own strengths and inner resources,” Bess says. And that’s

the approach that she and Rambo have emphasized. In phase two of the grant, project advisers—many of them with chaplaincy backgrounds—have been paired with congregations to accompany them through a specific project.

Living Water, along with four other congregations in Massachusetts and San Diego, participated in phase one, which spanned 2022. Each church set out to address trauma in their own way. Nafis and his team used their grant to train church leadership to lead small group sessions. Two churches focused on creating safer spaces for the LGBTQ+ community, another

worked to support young people exposed to gun violence.

“We’re not here to swoop in and save anybody,” Bess says. “We’re here to learn from our communities, and where there are opportunities to support, connect, collaborate, and provide education, we will do that.”

The success of individual projects won’t be the grant’s only legacy: Rambo plans to write about their results. She’s also overseeing the development of online training modules that could be used in classrooms and to help other congregations deal with trauma.

Because the program was split into two phases, a new group of congregations is benefiting from the experience of those in phase one. One lesson the first group learned was that congregational leaders would benefit from more trauma education from mental health experts, Rambo says. So monthly learning sessions are now available to phase two congregations, helping them develop specific skills for responding to trauma.

Phase two launched in November 2022 with seven new congregations plus Living Water. Among the phase two participants, Calvary Baptist Church in Lowell, Mass., wants to develop resources to support young first- and second-generation immigrants; Harbor

“[The program] gave us a kick in the butt. The program gave us funding and gave us direction and advice. It put people [who could help] directly in our path.”

—Chris Nafis

Online, a virtual community, wants to help church leaders practice self-care so they’re better able to serve their online congregation; and St. Luke’s North Park in San Diego hopes to enhance their assistance of former refugees from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Others are working to support people facing food and housing insecurity, and substance abuse.

EARLY RESULTS

Although Trauma-Responsive Congregations wasn’t inspired by the pandemic, Rambo says the timing was fortuitous. “What happened in 2020, with the mixture of the pandemic and racialized violence—there was what I call a diminishment of our moral horizon, of our sense of goodness toward other people,” she says. That confluence of events, she adds, created layers of trauma

for many people.

For Living Water, the invitation to participate was just the push they needed to realize a long-imagined goal. The church might have been able to “stumble through” the process of creating healing circles on its own, Nafis says, but Trauma-Responsive Congregations made it much easier. “It gave us a kick in the butt,” he says. “The program gave us funding and gave us direction and advice. It put people [who could help] directly in our path.”

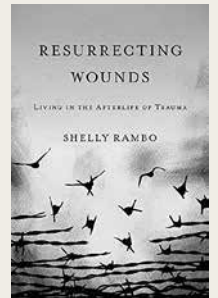
Two of those people were expressive arts therapists Sook Kyoung Kwon and Jamie Harris Rosen. The grant allowed the church to hire them to help develop a curriculum and train staff to lead trauma healing groups in the future. The curriculum includes discussions about connectedness, forgiveness, and grief, as well as group activities and art projects.

Rambo was so impressed with their work that she added Kyoung Kwon and Harris Rosen to her advisory team for the second phase of the grant.

“When we first imagined it, I was thinking we would process people’s trauma with them—finding camaraderie in that and telling stories,” Nafis says. But, he learned, “It’s not really helpful with trauma to resurface those things.” Instead, the staff at Living Water discovered that they were already doing a number of things that are helpful for people with trauma, including singing, chanting, and praying. With the help of the expressive arts therapists, “we’ve been learning how to do that with a little more intentionality toward people who have experienced trauma,” Nafis says.

Having trained group leaders in phase one of the program, Living Water has launched the first of its healing circles during phase two. They’ll meet for 12 weeks, after which Nafis and his team will see what’s working and what isn’t, then launch another round. “I think Living Water is developing a trauma-responsive model that can go national,” Rambo says.

Nafis is eager to share what he has learned with other congregations, but it’s the impact in his own community that he’s most excited about. “The results will hopefully be that a lot of our people who just struggle in life—they’ll be a little more confident and a little more at peace,” Nafis says. “They’ll walk through the world with a little more sense of belonging.” □



THE WOUNDS WE ALL CARRY

In her 2018 book, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Baylor University Press), Shelly Rambo recasts the upper room narrative from John’s gospel to focus not on the triumph of Christ over death but rather the wounds that remained on his resurrected body. In that upper room, Jesus invites his bewildered disciples—including “doubting Thomas”—to engage with and even touch his wounds, ultimately leading to a deepening of their cohesion. Rambo examines the way formative thinkers, including John Calvin, have attempted to erase wounds and woundedness from the Christian narrative. Others, like Gregory of Nyssa, reveal the renewed life that can exist after we have been wounded.

These stories carry implications for the ways in which individuals and churches engage with societal wounds like racism and sexism—and how individuals carry our wounds and heal from trauma. —S.H.

'GOD DIDN'T LEAVE ME ALONE'

REV. JINWOO CHUN LEFT HIS COMFORT ZONE AND EXTENDS HOSPITALITY TO IMMIGRANTS, ADDICTS, AND THE PREVIOUSLY INCARCERATED

BY STEVE HOLT

The call to become a pastor came to Jinwoo Chun at around six years old—an age when most of his peers would have been preoccupied with the newest toy or cartoon. Chun had watched his father lead and minister to Methodist congregations of thousands across South Korea. His father's lifestyle, one he characterized in Korean as "sharing and caring," was most attractive—a lifestyle Chun's father learned from *his* father, also a Methodist pastor.

"I can say if my father was a police officer, I probably would have dreamed of becoming a police officer at the time," says Chun ('01). "If I became a pastor, probably I would be able to live like him. But I knew nothing about the pastor's life at the time."

More than four decades after that first call to ministry—romanticized as it may have been—Chun has pastored churches from Boston to Coventry, R.I., to Belfast, Maine, to Acton, Mass., where he now serves St. Matthew's

United Methodist Church as its lead pastor. It's a congregation he says is developing a reputation for hospitality to those from all walks of life, including refugee families, individuals reentering society after incarceration, those who are LGBTQ+, and those suffering from

food insecurity. His role, he says, is to help parishioners—many of whom work in academia and skew white and wealthy—exit their comfort zones and build relationships with neighbors who are hurting or marginalized.

"The church started with a passion to do something," he says. "My role is to transform it into something relational, so it's not about just fulfilling needs:

'this is something I have, and this is something you don't have.' [These acts of mercy are] based on Jesus Christ's greatest commandments: loving God and loving others."

OUT OF THE GREENHOUSE

There's a Korean word for a child being raised in a sheltered, overprotective

environment that translates to "greenhouse" in English. Chun characterizes his younger years as a greenhouse, untouched by the harsher realities of the world. As a preacher's kid, he attended megachurches his father led in mostly affluent communities in Seoul. But once he began to pursue a life of ministry and mission, "God didn't leave me alone to continue living in the greenhouse," Chun says. He attended Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul, and after briefly considering a move to India to become a missionary, Chun entered the MDiv program at BU.

One of his earliest memories of stepping out of the greenhouse came during an internship at the historic Church of All Nations in Boston's South End, where Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS'55, Hon.'59) once trained while studying at BU. One day, Chun was volunteering with the congregation's feeding ministry and sat to eat with one of the guests—who was unhoused—only to become physically ill at the unshowered man's stench. He left sick and in tears, ashamed of his reaction to a fellow human who God loves. His perspective expanded further when he met a young woman working through the trauma of being trafficked to a drug dealer by her father, and encountered a mother and her young son running away from an



Jinwoo Chun ('01)

abusive father who was addicted to drugs. "Is this real?" he remembers thinking. "I thought that was only in extreme, violent movies."

These experiences, along with gentle nudging from his mentor, Rev. Gary Shaw ('78), led Chun to consider staying in New England after graduating from BU to pursue a ministry appointment here. In

2009, he was ordained into the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church. Coming from Christianity in South Korea, where some churches had hundreds of thousands of members, Chun didn't know if he'd mesh with New England's smaller congregations. In the end, he says, "God really touched my heart."

Courtesy of Jinwoo Chun

"God chose me for St. Matthew's...to do my best to help people understand how your faith works in that process—why we are doing what we're doing."

His transformation didn't end there. Chun was appointed pastor and elder at Belfast United Methodist Church in Belfast, Maine, in 2010, where, in addition to traditional preaching and counseling duties, he began attending a Narcotics Anonymous group that met in the basement of the church building. Not being an addict himself, Chun felt like an imposter at times. Still, he continued to show up, week after week, to sit with and learn from neighbors who were on their own journeys from brokenness to healing.

"I saw myself as broken," he says. "But being broken, I had the faith and hope that they would have a different ending in their story, either on the earth or in the life beyond this life." He never tried to get his new friends to attend services upstairs; if anything, he worked to make the congregation's worship services

more reflective of the authenticity he experienced at the NA meetings. Over five years, members of the NA community became his friends, and Chun would spend time with them outside of meetings. "Sometimes I got looks from my own congregation: 'Why is our pastor hanging out with the guys with tattoos who are swearing all the time?'" he recalls. "But that's kind of normal to Jesus's life. That became my second home."

A HOME FOR THE MARGINALIZED

In July 2020, Chun was appointed lead pastor at St. Matthew's United Methodist Church. Leaving the friends he'd met at NA was one of the hardest aspects of the move, he says. Every now and again, someone on his NA group chat will suddenly stop responding, and Chun knows they have succumbed to the disease they fought so bravely.

Moving to a new congregation in the middle of a pandemic presented other challenges and opportunities—beyond the implications of uprooting his family. (Chun's wife, Hyeweon, works as an organic chemist, and his son, Joshua, studies biochemistry at Northeastern University.) The first services Chun presided over were remote because of the COVID-19 pandemic, making group worship and congregational cohesiveness difficult. At the same time, Chun scheduled one-on-one and small group sessions with each member,

where he focused on spiritual formation and relationship-building. "I think that's one of the reasons God chose me for St. Matthew's," Chun says. "We had a lot of different outreach programs because they have passion for justice, and I've been trying to do my best to help people understand how your faith works in that process—why we are doing what we're doing."

And under Chun's leadership and inspiration, the congregation is doing a lot. Despite the relative affluence of Acton—and many of the parishioners at St. Matthew's—the area still has plenty of opportunities for social justice work. St. Matthew's members minister to individuals being released from prison through their WELCOMEBACKpack program, which provides bags full of everyday necessities to those who are reentering community life. As he went from room to room in the church building, putting items like toiletries, notebooks, and books in the 48 backpacks the congregation gave away in 2022, Chun says, he was reminded of the metaphorical journey incarcerated neighbors have taken to and away from prison. "I was praying for them, and I was able to participate in their hurt, their journey," he says. Chun says he would like to now help lead the church's new mission, outreach, and advocacy to expand beyond meeting material needs to making

Courtesy of Jinwoo Chun



St. Matthew's United Methodist Church in Acton, Mass.

more relational connections, like traveling to prisons to visit inmates.

The congregation's commitment to refugees and migrants is also near to Chun's own heart, in part because it's his story. Chun preaches regularly what he sees as a clear scriptural directive to welcome "strangers" and "aliens" in a foreign land and reminds parishioners that even Jesus was an immigrant. In early 2022, the congregation adopted two Afghan families who the International Institute of New England helped resettle in nearby towns. Members, including Chun, would drop by to say hello, take them out for ice cream, and generally ensure they had what they needed as they settled into their new lives in the

United States. A few parishioners who work in higher education are helping an older teenager in one of the families plan for life after high school, whether that's college or something else.

The outreach has made an impact. Last summer, after Chun dropped off an air conditioner for one of the families as temperatures soared in Massachusetts, the father sent him a text asking how old the pastor is. When they realized Chun was a year older than the Afghan father, the man started calling Chun "big brother."

"My big brother," Chun recalls the father writing, in broken English, "we cannot thank you enough. It's more than just one air conditioner, it's our heart." □

JAZZ, FAITH, AND COMMUNITY



Bill Banfield ('88)

FOR BILL BANFIELD, MUSIC FEEDS THE MIND, BODY, AND SOUL—AND SAVED HIS LIFE

BY JOEL BROWN

Jazzman Bill Banfield is breaking ground at the corner of music and community.

“I’m building the arts church, my brother,” says Banfield (’88). “When you come there, your soul is gonna get fed.”

Banfield is a jazz guitarist, composer, pianist, recording artist, teacher, conductor, and arranger. He taught at Berklee College of Music for 15 years, retiring in 2020, and is now senior scholar in residence at Longy School of Music of Bard College in Cambridge, Mass.

If all goes as planned, this year he will open Jazz Urbane Café—a 200-seat performance venue, restaurant, and community space—in a 7,800-square-foot space in the city-owned Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building in Boston’s Nubian Square.

The pandemic delayed the project, but a lease with the city has been in place since 2019, he says. Architectural plans have been drawn up, renderings made, funding arranged. Banfield says Mayor Michelle Wu’s administration is on board.

The venue shares its name with Banfield’s long-running record label and jazz-based performance series involving Berklee friends and other collaborators. He says hammers could swing this spring, with hopes for a soft launch in the summer and a grand opening in the fall.

Banfield is also a lay minister and “exhorter”—a role within the African

Methodist Episcopal Church whose function is to employ their talents to teach and encourage members—with the Bethel AME Church Jamaica Plain. The interweaving of music, community, and faith is the deep current that unites his many projects, including Jazz Urbane Café.

“Your mind is gonna get fed and your stomach is going to get fed, and the community is being fed by all those through-lines of art, culture, community, commitment, and care,” he says.

“You have to create a space for that and a kind of ideology that people participate in. So the musicians play, they bring all of that spirit and identity in, and love and care.”

RENAISSANCE MAN FROM DETROIT

At Berklee, Banfield was a professor of Africana studies/music and society and founding director of the Center for Africana Studies/Liberal Arts, and taught in the department of composition. As a composer, he has completed operas and symphonies; his *Symphony 10: Affirmations* was commissioned by the National Symphony and premiered at the Kennedy Center. His latest effort is a jazz guitar record he’s working on with the duo Tuck & Patti.

In addition to his Master of Theological Studies from BU, Banfield received his Bachelor of Music from the New England Conservatory of Music, and a Doctor of Musical Arts



Banfield directs his Imagine Orchestra at a November 2022 performance.

in composition from the University of Michigan. He has served three times as a Pulitzer Prize judge in American music, most recently in 2020. Renowned academic Cornel West has called him “one of the last grand Renaissance men in our time.”

But Banfield’s first college of musical knowledge was his hometown of Detroit, where Motown was in the air and his friends included rising jazz star Earl Klugh. He attended Cass Technical High School, alma mater of Regina Carter, Donald Byrd, Paul Chambers, Diana

Ross, and many more.

His faith also has deep roots in Detroit; his parents were devout members of Detroit’s Second Baptist Church, where his father was a head deacon and oversaw its Sunday School. “I was born in the Christian faith, and I have a love of God in Christ and am led by the Holy Spirit,” he says.

He also learned about Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS’55, Hon.’59), whose time at BU led Banfield to the Charles River Campus.

“One of the things I wanted to go to theology school for was that it would

Facing page: Sydney Scott; This page: Jake Belcher

“He is a great bridge-builder. Just who he is as a musician—I want [students] to be able to rub elbows with that. Wherever Bill goes, wherever he lands, he builds community around him.”

—Karen Zorn, Longy School of Music of Bard College

train me and give me the tools to be able to understand how to navigate my faith and my art,” he says.

But his “African notion” of wisdom and spirit coming through musical performance, while commonplace in ethnomusicology today, got his first thesis rejected by his BU thesis committee, he says with a slight smile—which added a year to his studies. Then it was on to the University of Michigan for his doctorate.

The first class he taught, at Indiana University, was the Theology of American Popular Music. He held up John Coltrane and Aretha Franklin, Bob Dylan and Woody Guthrie as popular priests.

“Music and arts was their way of preaching in the world,” he says. “So the arts have this social-political-spiritual embodiment to it. People come to it like a ritual, like a church. So there’s the arts-church idea.”

Longy President Karen Zorn has known him since they both taught at Berklee. His Longy residency is open-ended, and his Imagine Orchestra is also

ensemble-in-residence.

“At Longy, we have this wider view of the role of the musician in society and how to prepare our students for that wider role,” Zorn says. Longy was already thinking about issues such as diversity in repertoire, she says. Banfield’s wide and deep knowledge of African American music and its place in our culture made him a perfect fit.

“He is a great bridge-builder,” she says. “Just who he is as a musician—I want [students] to be able to rub elbows with that.

“Wherever Bill goes, wherever he lands,” she adds, “he builds community around him.”

A COVID ORDEAL

In early 2020, Banfield went to New York for deliberations on the Pulitzer Prize that was awarded to Anthony Davis for his opera *The Central Park Five*.

“When I came back to Boston I was sick with COVID and had to be hospitalized.

“I was in a coma for a month,” he says. “My wife and my family thought that I was not gonna be here. I mean, I went to sleep April 3 and woke up April the 20th. God, who decided in her great wisdom that I had some more work to do, brought me out of that.”

While he was comatose, his family decided that the only way to reach him was through music. They put a boom box by his bed that played music he loved by Miles Davis, Norah Jones, and Lionel Richie.



Banfield speaks to the audience before his orchestra’s November 2022 performance.

“A favorite song of mine is a tune by Lionel Richie called ‘Love Will Find a Way.’ There’s a line in there that says, no matter what you’re going through, no matter what the difficulties are, just remember, love will find the way,” he recalls. “And the tune that I heard in those coma nightmares constantly, helping me to be alive and to breathe, was ‘Love Will Find a Way.’”

Still, he puts his survival down to God, not the former Commodores singer.

“In that kind of horrible fight with COVID,” Banfield says, “I just made a promise to the Spirit that I would really double down on this if I was gonna be brought back to life, that I’d continue to do some good.”

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Saxophonist Greg Groover was a Boston seventh grader when he first met Banfield through Berklee’s City Music Preparatory Academy, run by Banfield’s wife, Krystal Prime Banfield, vice president of education outreach and social entrepreneurship at Berklee

College of Music.

Later, as a high school student, Groover heard Banfield give a talk on the “cultural context of music, and why that was important,” Groover says. “‘Why are you playing this? What was the time period? What did it look like? What was the scene? Who was involved? What was going on socially?’ At a young age, it was important to me, and I realize it really did create a theme in my later work.”

Groover is now assistant chair of ensemble at Berklee and a recording artist. He also performs with the Imagine Orchestra, including recently at Longy, where Banfield conducted a setlist of jazz classics and his own compositions.

Don’t be surprised to see Groover’s band playing Jazz Urbane after it opens. The café will offer family-friendly dining and two stages for all kinds of events, from spoken word to a scene from *Hamilton*, from a neighborhood meeting to a Boston Symphony chamber group. And don’t be surprised to feel, upon leaving Jazz Urbane, as if you’ve been to church, given the spirituality Banfield has found around and through music.

Banfield is “kind of an incubator for thinking talent, creativity, community,” Groover says. “That’s the magic of Dr. B, that he could be in so many spaces and be thinking and doing so many things so well with so much care, and create opportunities for people to add into that. He’s got a lot going on.” □



A WHOLE-PERSON APPROACH TO CHILDBIRTH

How conceptions of the divine can inform
society's protection of Black birthing persons

BY SHAUNESSE' JACOBS PLAISIMOND ('23)

Six years ago, shortly after graduating from my master's programs, I began a job at a sizable healthcare consulting firm in Atlanta. Each month I was assigned data from a new hospital and tasked with digging into erroneously paid hospital claims and following up with insurance companies to learn what missing information was needed to process payments correctly. Despite all the healthcare procedures performed, a pattern emerged, and startling insights became increasingly apparent to me. Giving birth in the United States is complicated, risky, and expensive, and women of color had far more complications than their white peers. At first, I thought it was city- and hospital-specific. But the same patterns emerged regardless of location.

Women of color, especially Black women, repeatedly admit themselves into hospitals experiencing the same medical conditions: high blood pressure, extensive clotting, anemia, and diabetes.¹ The more I dug into medical records, read notes of quick discharges and repeated admissions, and found cases of maternal deaths, my observations transitioned to desperate questions. How does the wealthiest healthcare system in the world have such a dangerous trend of pregnancy and birthing care? How long have communities experienced such life-threatening care? How are hospital ethics committees and medical educators advocating for these people's lives? My questions exploded as the high-profile deaths of Black

(Continued)

1. Chen, J; Cox, S; Kuklina, EV; Ferre, C; Barfield, W; Li, R. "Assessment of Incidence and Factors Associated with Severe Maternal Morbidity after Delivery Discharge among Women in the US." *JAMA Network Open*. 2021

women began making headlines and women who barely survived giving birth began telling their stories. I needed to be somewhere that would allow me to pursue answers, if not ask more questions that could potentially lead to changes in our healthcare system. This deep personal need led me to STH, a place where I could build bridges and gain the skills of doing the translational work I desire to define my research and larger vocation. Since 2018, I have been privileged to build my own bridge between the School of Theology and the School of Public Health by studying scientific approaches to theology and feminist theology, Black southern church values and New England intellectualism, birthing people’s needs, and moral frameworks that allow us to pause and consider the philosophical underpinnings of the care we provide to those around us.

As I have engaged in bridge-building at BU, I have experienced a vocational and ethical formation that has allowed me to delve deeply into my own research relationship between religion and healthcare. My relationship begins by choosing to view culture through the lens of religion. Many of the philosophical and ethical values upheld in US society are deeply rooted in religious traditions, and these values

inform many of the choices we make as a society.

In relation to healthcare, religious cultural values are far more prevalent than the role of chaplains. For example, clinicians and patients alike constantly weigh personal religious commitments as they decide courses of action in healthcare. Ethics committees revisit concepts of personhood and humanity to determine cost-benefit analyses of treatments for critically ill patients. Community members turn to

conceptions of the divine as a guiding light in their activism against unjust treatment of individuals who enter healthcare facilities seeking protection and life. And healthcare policy analysts and researchers seek religious partners to learn of community needs and address their concerns on systemic levels. We have even seen the relationship between

religion and health at a judicial level with the US Supreme Court’s 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*.²

I believe such social implications rooted in religion’s influence on healthcare can have an increasingly important impact on Black birthing people’s lives. In 2020, the Black maternal mortality rate was “55.3 deaths per 100,000 live births, 2.9 times the rate

“How does the wealthiest healthcare system in the world have such a dangerous trend of pregnancy and birthing care? How long have communities experienced such life-threatening care? How are hospital ethics committees and medical educators advocating for these people’s lives?”

2. https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf

3. Hoyert, DL. “Maternal mortality rates in the United States, 2020.” *NCHS Health E-Stats*, 2022. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:113967>

4. Maritain, J. 1942, *Les droits de l’homme et la loi naturelle*, New York: Éditions de la Maison française. [*The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, Doris C. Anson (trans.), New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943.]

for non-Hispanic white women,” an increase from the previous year.³ Data scientists and public health practitioners continue to identify the disparities and breaks in systemic infrastructure that contemporarily contribute to this public health crisis. But the academic study of religion can offer us another approach, another lens.

Through an examination of a Maritainian conception of personhood, I believe that religion and theology can provide a positive framing to the maternal mortality crisis that both centers Black birthing people and provides new, whole-person approaches to their care. To offer some brief background, French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain followed in the footsteps of Thomas Aquinas in developing a moral philosophy that made a distinction between humans as individuals and persons. As individuals, humans are physical beings who participate in and maintain obligations to a common social order. We are persons because we are whole, spiritual beings endowed with dignity to be treated as ends and not means to an end. Our personhood endows us with a destiny informed by intelligence, free choice, and participation in the common good. Our personhood elevates us beyond mere participants in a social order.⁴

Reclaiming Maritain’s concept of personhood rooted in human dignity and applying that concept to the lives and care of Black birthing people requires a different social recognition and response. No longer would we approach Black birthing people as a harmed demographic but instead as persons entitled to live out their destinies. As spiritual beings endowed

with dignity, we would provide them with just and dignified treatment, a far cry from dismissive and quick remedies that bring them repeatedly to hospitals with the same conditions that threaten their futures and those of their future children. Recognizing individuality and personhood in ourselves and in Black birthing people, our care would honor the common good in which we all participate, going beyond the minimum obligations of participating in a common social order.

Trends in data led me to STH, and moral and ethical inquiries have allowed me to thrive and be molded during my time here. While my questions led to more questions and more interlocutors, I have become confident in the unique questions, answers, and tools representation of the divine brings into the public square. And that confidence encourages me each day to continue advocating for the lives, well-being, and personhood of a community that has the right to transition from crisis to dignity. □

About the Author



shaunesse’ jacobs plaisimond (’23) is a fifth-year PhD candidate in constructive theology and ethics. Her work centers bioethics and feminist/queer theologies to aid in shifting healthcare and health policy toward a whole person-centered approach, and away from our current disparity-driven orientation. Her specific research niches are death and dying and parental care.

JOURNAL

NOT A BRIDGE, BUT A TUNNEL

Reaching out to the limits of
what we (want to) know

BY LUIS MENÉNDEZ-ANTUÑA

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The longest bridge on Earth runs a bit over 102 miles. The Danyang-Kunshan Grand Bridge, between Shanghai and Nanjing, China, is a railroad engineering marvel that has cut travel in the region from four and a half hours to just two. Here in the United States, we have the Delaware Aqueduct, a water supply construction unsuitable for human traveling that spans 85 miles. In Norway, the Lærdal tunnel pierces the mountains for 15 miles and offers the driver all kinds of distractions (such as stops, signposts, and illuminations) to ease traveler claustrophobia. In the central Alps, the longest railway tunnel—the Gotthard Base Tunnel—extends nearly 36 miles. I am not an engineer, but these numbers suggest that digging a tunnel is costlier and considerably more complicated than constructing a bridge.

In the humanities, as in theology, we frequently resort to the metaphor of the bridge. The image of a bridge (a powerful if hackneyed symbol) conjures up the peaceful, almost fairy-tale notion of a construction swaying over a calm river, sweeping over tranquil waters, perhaps with a beautiful town on each side. Theology bridges the gap between the human and the divine, as well as the gap between different aspects of the human experience. In more mundane ways, we talk about bridging different dimensions and aspects of our own identities. Parents refer to bridging their professional and familial lives. In theological education, the tensions between the life of the mind and of the spirit manifest in the frictions between the interests and goals of the church and of the academy. The academic and the believer need not be at odds, but they are

not loving bedfellows either.

Discontinuities between academic and ecclesial traditions manifest prominently in the way we live our daily vocations. When I consider my own vocations as a believer, intellectual, activist, educator, et cetera, I surprise myself by either smoothing over the frictions between the sharp edges of these different identities or building bridges between them so they illuminate and communicate reciprocally. A few vivid, admittedly personal, examples: I am at once a Catholic Christian teaching at a mainline Protestant institution. I am a queer man who makes a living teaching the New Testament, a political activist in the academic world, and a migrant who has recently become a US citizen. It would be disingenuous to say that Catholicism, Methodism, queerness, intellectualism, and activism combine in me without significant inner conflicts. It is rewarding to experience, however, that the gaps and fissures between these seemingly conflicted parts have made

(Continued)

About the Author



Luis Menéndez-Antuña is an assistant professor of New Testament. He is interested in liberation theologies, cultural studies, and critical theory. His current research explores the queer and postcolonial afterlives of the biblical texts. Menéndez-Antuña has also worked in community organizing, HIV advocacy, homeless shelters, prison, and with kids on the street.

me a better theological educator. In other words, the bridges I have been able to build within myself have had consequential pedagogical payoffs.

Of course, it is not hard to imagine how inner bridge-building (mediating between our supposedly conflicting identities) improves external bridge-building (in this case, establishing productive connections across difference). For one, although I have described different aspects of my own identity in personal terms, they are just an epiphenomenon of much broader cultural and social trends. Many students in theological education experience similar needs to bridge their own different and conflicting identities. At STH, more than 40 percent of incoming students self-identify as sexual minorities. One need not be notably perceptive to imagine the amount of bridging that many of these students must do to reconcile their queerness with their religious inquiries or theological vocations. Our school, I would like to think, is a place where such bridging occurs organically and productively: our students are entitled to a healthy spiritual life and, reversely, theology as an academic field urgently needs their experiences if it is ever to

“Theology bridges the gap between the human and the divine, as well as the gap between different aspects of the human experience.... In theological education, the tensions between the life of the mind and of the spirit manifest in the frictions between the interests and goals of the church and of the academy.”

disavow its homophobic and queer-averse roots.

The metaphor of the bridge is fitting in cases like the one described above. But, like any metaphor, its clarifying potential is limited. There is one area in theological education where I sense that the bridging metaphor misses explanatory potential. It is a cliché to say that the demographic landscape of theological education is shifting. For instance, at STH, the number of international students from the global South increases every year. I worry about theology’s unreadiness to address such new demand. For all the gaps we are bridging, the sources, traditions, methods, and theories of theological thinking in the West remain embedded and informed by colonialist thinking. Boaventura de Sousa Santos thinks about the gap between the ways of knowledge in the North and in the South as epistemicide.¹ If homicide refers to the killing of another fellow human being, epistemicide captures the idea that ways of knowing (epistemologies) produced in the West have eradicated indigenous wisdom. De Sousa Santos terms such a gap between knowledges as “abyssal.” With this term, the Brazilian thinker expresses the idea that the fissure between both

1. De Sousa Santos, B 2014. *Epistemologies of the South*. London; New York: Routledge; and De Sousa Santos, B 2018. *The End of the Cognitive Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press.

worlds and their ensuing epistemologies is so deep that a bridge will not do.

Let me briefly offer an example from my own field of inquiry. As a biblical scholar, I have been trained to analyze and interpret texts. Western biblical interpretation has inherited a scientific model whereby the interpreter acts as the subject, and the text becomes an object. Like a scientist, the interpreter—using all types of science proof methods—extracts an original meaning from her object of analysis (the biblical text, in this case). In this model, a disinterested, value-neutral critic embodies the ideal interpreter; almost like a surgeon, scalpel in hand, the reader dominates and masters the text to withdraw all usable information. De Sousa Santos considers this way of proceeding “extractivist” because it “learns from others” rather than “learning with others.” The difference

may seem subtle at first sight, but it has ground-shattering consequences for our intellectual task. “Learning with others” means, for starters, that the biblical text is no longer an object of inquiry, but a subject in conversation—a dialogical partner.

Is it possible to bridge the gap between these discrete ways of knowledge? Simply put, is the West ready to strip itself of a long-held epistemological arrogance so it may learn from other subjugated wisdoms? Such a task, I suggest, can only happen if our cherished ways of doing theology are willing to break through, and even destroy, the assumptions on which they have been built. In terms of knowledge, what stands between the global North and South is our own scientific arrogance. Before we build a bridge, we ought to destroy such obstacles. Or, rather, drill a tunnel instead. □



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HOSPITALITY, NOT HOSTILITY

Building bridges to our immigrant neighbors

BY DANIEL MONTAÑEZ ('18,'25)

The border wall separating San Diego, Calif., from Tijuana, Mexico.

1. Eph 2:12 (NIV)

2. Minard, Matthew, "Gentiles," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al. Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

What are the walls of hostility we erect to exclude our immigrant neighbors? Walls can be physical, such as the 1,954-mile wall along the US-Mexico border. Hard and heavy walls made of bricks, metals, wires, and wood represent a division between people, culture, and national citizenry. Walls can also be mental or emotional, often resulting from difference in thought or feelings of fear toward those whom one may disagree with or not understand. In this way, walls can serve as a means of self-preservation and protection from the "other." Finally, walls can be spiritual, as all too often Christians have excluded those who hold differing beliefs and convictions on religious matters. There is no shortage of reasons that feed the human proclivity to build walls; however, there are several reasons Christians are called to rise above the walls we build.

The book of Ephesians introduces us to a Christian ethic of bridge-building. In chapter 2, verses 14–18, Paul writes,

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."

The two groups Paul describes are Jewish and Gentile believers. There was much hostility between these two people groups in the Old Testament, as the Jews were considered God's chosen people, according to the covenant relationship established with the nation of Israel. The practice of circumcision served as a physical sign of Israel's covenant relationship with God and operated as a means of citizenship into the Israelite community and inheritance of God's promises. Because the Gentiles were uncircumcised, they did not belong to the covenant community, as they were, as Paul describes, "without hope and without God in the world."¹

However, while the Gentiles were not included within the promises of the Mosaic covenant, this is not to say that God was not at work building bridges between Jews and Gentiles in the Old Testament. The Greek word for Gentiles is "ethnos," meaning nation or people.² It is within the Abrahamic covenant that God promises to Abraham that "through your offspring all nations" (Continued)

About the Author



Daniel Montañez ('18,'25) is a PhD student in theology, ethics, and philosophy, and the coeditor of *The Church and Migration: A Theological Vision for the People of God*. His research interests include migration studies, social ethics, public theology, and peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

on earth will be blessed,”³ signaling the coming together of Jews and Gentiles through a messianic figure from Israel.⁴ Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this messianic promise and the one who builds bridges between Jews and Gentiles, establishing a model and an ethic for Christian living.

Many biblical scholars believe the wall Paul was referring to in this passage was “the Mosaic law itself with its detailed holiness

code.”⁵ It served as an ideological fence around Israel, keeping outsiders and foreigners from participating in the social, cultural, and religious life of the community. The crucifixion of Christ served to destroy the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles from fellowship with one another. Furthermore, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross served as the atonement for humanity’s sins and

the restoration of their relationship with God the Father. For this reason, it can be stated that Jesus Christ did not come to build a wall, but a bridge between God and humanity, and between Jews and Gentiles. It was a project so costly that only the riches of heaven could pay for this bridge through Christ’s blood on the cross.

What, then, are the implications of a Christian ethic of bridge-building

for our world today? First, it calls us to move from an ethic of exclusion to embrace. In *The Church and Migration: A Theological Vision for the People of God*, which I coedited with Wilmer Estrada-Carrasquillo, Estrada-Carrasquillo posits an ethic of hospitality as a necessary component for embracing our immigrant neighbors. He writes, “Hospitality to migrant communities can take many shapes and forms. But

to serve them well, we must look beyond the surface. We must make a concerted effort to know them and develop intentional relationships.”⁶

It is only by embracing an ethic of encounter with our immigrant neighbors that we discover the common ground on which we stand, and the prospect of embracing one another as members of the kin-dom of God.

Second, a Christian ethic of bridge-building calls us to move from a mindset of scarcity to opportunity. All too often we hear negative rhetoric of immigrants stealing American jobs and the economic burden immigrants have on the US economy. While these claims are often unsubstantiated, what is frequently overlooked is the revitalization immigrants are bringing to the life of the church. The Latino

“It is only by embracing an ethic of encounter with our immigrant neighbors that we discover the common ground on which we stand, and the prospect of embracing one another as members of the kin-dom of God.”

3. Gen 22:18 (NIV)

4. Paul affirms this interpretation in Galatians 3:16 (NASB) stating, “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.”

5. O’Brien, Peter Thomas, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 196.

6. Montañez, Daniel and Estrada-Carrasquillo, Wilmer, eds., *The Church and Migration: A Theological Vision for the People of God* (Cleveland, TN: Centro para Estudios Latinos Press, 2022), 124.

7. Winter, Meaghan, “The Fastest-Growing Group of American Evangelicals,” *The Atlantic* (Atlantic Media Company, August 5, 2021), <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/07/latinos-will-determine-future-american-evangelicalism/619551/>.

8. Montañez and Estrada-Carrasquillo, *The Church and Migration*, 137–138.

9. Montañez and Estrada-Carrasquillo, *The Church and Migration*, 90.

10. Montañez and Estrada-Carrasquillo, *The Church and Migration*, 21.

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A sign invokes Jesus at an immigration protest in Boston.

immigrant church, for example, is rapidly growing in the United States, buoyed by a Hispanic population that is expected to grow to 110 million by 2060.⁷ Carolyn Dirksen argues, “If the American Church can embrace their spiritual brothers and sisters in this great migration, they will reaffirm their commitments to Christ and invite a kind of rejuvenation the Church has seldom seen.”⁸ To move from scarcity to opportunity means to believe that not only are there enough materials for building bridges, but that we can also partner in the work of building a better future together.

Finally, a Christian ethic of bridge-building demands that Christians move from a place of fear to faith. According to Alejandra Guajardo-Hodge, “Fear

may be a natural response to these modern-day challenges but is not the response that God demands of us. Love is the only way to face the challenge of the shifting world in God-honoring ways.”⁹ To choose faith over fear means to tear down the hostile walls of partisan politics that divide our nation, and to cast a new vision for the role of the church in the public square—“not to further exacerbate the problems of this world, but to become a part of the solution,” as we write in *The Church and Migration*.¹⁰ The social ethic that Christ sets before us is a call to *embrace the opportunity by faith* to tear down the walls of hostility that divide us from our neighbors and to build bridges toward a holistic vision of peace, justice, and the flourishing of all humankind. □



SERMON

STOP STARING

What we see
and don't see
when we look
for Jesus

BY HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY

iStock photo

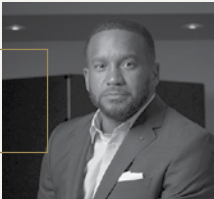
As we contemplate what it means to be stewards of this season, not only in the kingdom of Christ and the church, we realize that we are in the midst of both problematic and opportunistic times. I can't help but hear the words of Mordecai that he whispered to Esther: You've come to the kingdom "for such a time as this." And God has seen fit to call us to leadership in the body of Christ for such a time as this, a time when our nation, our world, and even the body of Christ is more divided than it has ever been. Racially, politically, financially, scientifically, sexually, and even in our understanding, use, and interpretation of the Bible. We are splintered in many ways. Add to that the stress of leadership, exacerbated by the conditions of the pandemic, and the anxiety of not knowing what church is going to look like going forward, and I can say without fear of contradiction that we are in need of a mountain of healing.

We're given a clear vision of what that mountain of healing looks like through the pen of the prophet Isaiah, where we see God's call to conversion and transformation in Isaiah 2. But what really garners and grabs my attention is not just the call to conversion, but even more so the call to come and be instructed on *how* to make God's vision a reality. The prophet Isaiah calls us to the mountain of healing that we might hear from the Lord how to institute and maintain the vision that God has shown him. What's interesting is that Isaiah gives the call, but he does not share the syllabus. There's no recipe. There are no instructions about how to transform and convert society. And yet, I believe

that there's a little bit of that instruction found in another passage of scripture that I want to partner and parallel with what the prophet Isaiah declares in chapter two: Acts 1:9.

The events recorded in Acts 1 by the same author of the Gospel of Luke paint a glorious scene, setting, and scenario. Jesus has been crucified, but by the glory of God, he has been resurrected from the dead. And his disciples, soon-to-be-named apostles, who were not witness to the resurrection, *had* been witness for 40 days to the resurrected Jesus. They have walked with him and talked with him. And now, after these almost seven weeks, Jesus has let them know that he's about to ascend back into heaven. That's a little bit of bad news, but the sweet news is that Jesus has given them the promise that the Holy Spirit is coming, and with the Holy Spirit will come power to be witnesses in Judea and Samaria, and even all the way to the end of the earth. And so here they are gathered on this day. And they're watching Christ ascend on a cloud back to heaven. *(Continued)*

About the Author



Howard-John Wesley ('97) is senior pastor of the 10,000-member Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., and only the eighth pastor in the congregation's 219-year history. Wesley received a Distinguished Alumni Award from the School of Theology in 2022.

I want you to envision the splendor of this moment: the resurrected Christ ascending on a cloud and the coming of the Holy Spirit. And if the Christ wasn't enough, if the clouds weren't enough, if the coming of the Holy Spirit was not enough, all of a sudden, two angels show up. I want to make certain you see the glory of this moment. Angels have shown up. Christ is ascending. The clouds are gathering. The Holy Spirit is coming. This is God at God's best; this is a glorious sight. This is something to behold. If I were there—if I were Peter, if I were Matthew—I would have said, "Now *this* is why I joined. *This* is why I follow Jesus. Look at the glorious moment we are in. Christ is ascending, the clouds are gathering, the Holy Spirit is coming, and we've got angels all around." It is no wonder why these disciples, soon to be apostles, are staring at a glorious sight.

Likewise, beloved, I would suggest to you that the vision Isaiah paints for us in chapter two is equally worthy of captivating our attention. Isaiah paints the possibilities of what happens when God is in control. Disputes and divisions are settled. Weapons are transformed into tools that feed the hungry. Wars have ceased,

justice is abounding, and compassion is common. The *imago Dei* of all humanity is recognized and respected, and love prevails between brothers and sisters. A vision of me not having to be worried about my unarmed Black sons being killed by police officers. A vision of your daughters being paid equal pay for equal work. A vision of a land where white supremacy

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is a long-gone memory and voting rights are secured for all citizens. A vision of a land where capitalism does not demand colonization nor the denial of communal responsibility. A land where the pandemic is over, the virus has been defeated. And churches are filled from wall to wall with people who, over the last few years, have realized how very much they need Jesus in their lives. That is a vision worth staring

at. That's something that ought to fixate our focus. That's something that ought to grab our attention. And like those apostles, maybe we're staring at this great vision of healing that Isaiah presents. Here they are staring at Christ, the clouds, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the angels show up. And the angels reprove and reprimand them for staring. The angels come, and they ask the question, "Why are you staring into the sky?"



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Why does the Lord reprove them? Why do the angels tell them to stop staring? Let me throw a few ideas out there for consideration and discussion. Could it be, first of all, that the angels tell these disciples, these soon-to-be apostles, to stop staring because we want you to *see someone else*? Why are they staring? Because they want to see Jesus. And beloved, there's nothing wrong with that. That's why we do church, to see Jesus. That's why we build sanctuaries, to see Jesus. That's why we sing praise and worship and hymns of rejoicing, to see Jesus. That's why we wear robes and collars so that they won't see us, but maybe they might see Jesus. That's why we have Sunday school—to teach children and adults how to see Jesus. That's why

we build ministries and have missions around the globe, so that the world might come to see Jesus. There's nothing wrong with staring to see Jesus. But there's some good news and some bad news.

The bad news is this: they're staring to see Jesus. The Bible says in Acts 1:9, that a cloud has hidden him from their sight. Jesus is ascending into the clouds and the clouds are hiding their clear vision of Jesus. They're staring at what they cannot clearly see. All they're getting are glimpses of glory, moments of majesty, and snapshots of splendor. They're staring, but they can't see well. And every now and then we have to be reminded that none of us sees God perfectly clearly. That in our humanity and in our sinfulness and in the frailty

of our flesh, we all suffer with blurred vision when it comes to how we see God. I know you may disagree with me on this, but that’s all right. I’ve lived long enough to tell you that the most dangerous Christians in the world are the ones who have God all figured out. The ones who swear that they see God better than anyone else sees God. The

ones who believe that their theology is always right. The ones who think they have a PhD in God, and they have forgotten that all of us struggle and suffer with blurred vision when it comes to the things of the Lord. That’s why the same prophet that reminds us of the mountain of healing in Isaiah reminds us that as the heavens are above the earth, so are God’s ways above our ways. It is Job, in his arrogance, who demands

to hear from God and is encountered by a God who asks him questions he cannot answer to remind Job, “You don’t know everything about God.” It is Paul who reminds us that we see through a glass darkly and that we are called to be stewards of the mysteries of God, not the certainties of God, not the absolutes of God, but the mysteries of God. And this same Jesus who is ascending in the clouds has just spoken to these

apostles who have asked him, “Will you now restore to us the kingdom of Israel?” And Jesus’ answer is that there are some things you are not given the ability to know. There are some things you will never understand. There are some things about the ways of God that escape your human understanding. And every now and then you need to

be humbled and reminded that you’ve got blurred vision when it comes to the things of God.

A little while ago, I had to go get a new iPhone. I walked into the Apple store and the lady convinced me to get an iPhone 13. She told me how wonderful the phone was. How great the camera, memory, and the functionality were—and all the apps it had. So, I bought the new

iPhone because I was convinced it was the greatest phone in the history of humanity. I’m on that phone the other day, and while I’m driving around, I lose a signal. I call out again and I’ve lost the signal. I’m in what’s called a dead spot. And I realize no matter how phenomenal the phone is, that sometimes in our travels, we reach dead spots where the signal is not working. It doesn’t matter how fabulous the phone is, in your jour-

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ney, inevitably you will come to some places where the signal is not strong, where you cannot hear as clearly as you thought, that it is not as powerful as you thought it was. Every now and then we’ve got to remember that *we’ve* got some dead spots. I don’t care how big your Bible is. I don’t care what seminary you went to. I don’t care how

convicted you are about what you think you know of the Lord, life will put us in some places where our signal is not clear, where our theology is not perfect, where our understanding is not on point. We have to acknowledge our dead spots.

They want to see Jesus. There’s nothing wrong with that, other than the realization that we don’t always see clearly. The bad news is that we don’t always see

God the way we want. But here’s the good news. Jesus has given them some instruction on how they can see him clearly. Jesus has taught these disciples how to see him clearly in the world. Not hidden behind the cloud, not ascending into heaven. But Jesus says, “Here’s how you can see me. You ready? When you come across someone who’s hungry, you’ve seen me. When you come across someone who’s sick, you’ve

seen me. When you come across an immigrant, you’ve seen me. When you come across a refugee, you’ve seen me. When you come across someone HIV positive, you’ve seen me. When you’ve come across the incarcerated, you’ve seen me.” Beloved, the clearest view of Jesus is not granted by us staring in the sanctuary, but rather by us serving

in the streets. And that’s why these angels come and say, “Stop staring”—because what you see up there is confusing, but if you want to see the Lord clearly, he’s not just in the Bible. He’s in that brother with the substance abuse problem. He’s not just in the hymnal. He’s in that family that’s in the homeless shelter. He’s not just in the scriptures. He’s in the struggle of that single mother. We see Christ

most clearly not when we stare in the sanctuary, but when we go out into the world and meet those who’ve been hit by disaster. We see Christ most clearly when we see those dealing with food insecurity, or minister to the immigrant and the refugees and the victims of sexual trafficking and domestic violence and abuse. Are we staring at what we cannot see and missing where we can see Christ most clearly? □

“Jesus says here’s how you can see me: When you come across someone who’s hungry, you’ve seen me. When you come across someone who’s sick, you’ve seen me. When you come across a refugee, you’ve seen me.”

SACRED ART AND THE DIVINE



Professor of Music Andrew Shenton, a noted scholar and conductor, is the James R. Houghton Scholar of Sacred Music and director of the Theology & the Arts Initiative. His most recent book, Olivier Messiaen's Turangalila-symphonie, was recently published by Cambridge University Press, and his monograph on the role of sacred art in secular society is due out in the fall of 2023.

STH'S JOURNEY TO BETTER SUPPORT THEOLOGIAN'S CREATIVE EXPRESSION

BY ANDREW SHENTON

When I arrived at STH in 2004, there was a thriving sacred music program but comparatively little work in the general arts. In the nearly 20 years since, the discipline has developed in many directions. Theopoetics has emerged as a subdiscipline, and sacred art in the public square is now a robust discourse.

STH has responded in several key ways to the increasing desire to engage with theology and the arts. In 2011, we established the Theology & the Arts Initiative (TAI) to demonstrate to current and potential students the extraordinary range of artistic offerings available throughout the University. We built bridges to the departments and faculty at BU (and through the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium), whose courses or lectures are relevant to our students' interests. In addition to providing resources and curating course offerings and arts events, the TAI engages members of the BU community in the creation of art inspired by theology through an annual competition. Through alternating themes—from poetry writing to photography to writing a hymn—these competitions seek to inspire people to consider how different art expressions help them mediate their relationship with the divine. A panel of faculty, staff, and students judges the competition, and the winning entries are displayed at the school. Stay tuned for the next one, which will be in academic year 2023–24.

We have also developed more ways for students to engage with the arts in their degree programs. There is now a theology and the arts track for the MDiv and MTS students and a capstone course that provides students with advanced practical skills in critically engaging the arts in their chosen ministry. In the fall of 2022, I taught a new course—Religion and Public

"STH has responded in several key ways to the increasing desire to engage with theology and the arts."

Engagement through the Arts—that I'd developed for the new online Master of Arts in Religion and Public Leadership.

We are attracting students with a wide range of interests. Second-year Master of Divinity student Priscilla Azaglo ('25), who goes by Dzidzor (*jee-jaw*), brings to her studies experience as a performance artist, a community educator, an author, and an entrepreneur. Dzidzor's wide skill set combines poetry, storytelling, chanting, and affirmation with the goal of "creating a community of people who religiously commit to defining freedom for themselves, in their own lifestyle."

As we look to the future, STH appears well situated to contribute to the rich interplay between theology and the arts and to develop leaders who will be able to speak prophetically through the arts. □

Courtesy of Andrew Shenton