

# Book Review: *Coming Together in the Twenty-First Century*

By Curtiss Paul DeYoung (Judson Press, 2009)

REVIEWED BY MAE ELISE CANNON



In *Coming Together in the Twenty-First Century: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity*, Curtiss Paul DeYoung writes a foundational work about the necessity of diversity in developing a holistic Christian theology of community. This book reengages questions introduced in the first publication of *Coming Together* more than a decade ago. DeYoung uses the Scriptures as a tool of liberation while highlighting historic ways they have been used op-

pressively as tools of Western thought and colonialism. His writing responds to contextual changes in the United States from the election of the first African American president to the growing challenges of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments since the tragic events of September 11, 2001. DeYoung does not write from a place of discouragement or despair, but, rather, identifies the twenty-first century as an age of hope for authentic reconciliation. He reminds his readers of our need to be set free from narrow and sometimes oppressive ways of interpreting the Scriptures and to be challenged to embrace a multicultural approach to understanding the core message of the gospel.

Throughout *Coming Together*, readers are given the opportunity to glean insights from Christian history, theological reflection from different racial and ethnic voices, and DeYoung's prescriptive responses to their reflections. DeYoung highlights the intertwined nature of justice and addresses the negative effects of Western colonialism and the suppression of culture and diversity. He emphasizes that the Bible and Christian faith are about liberation and empowerment. Thus, the interpretation and application of Christian faith must not be void of understanding both the saving power of Christ and the necessity of directly confronting unjust social systems such as sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. For DeYoung, Christians must be rescued from the world of a white Jesus with blond hair and blue eyes and learn to understand Jesus from his own cultural identity, as an Afro-Asiatic Jew. DeYoung writes:

A truth-telling Christ would be honest about the history of systems based on theories of white superiority. . . . The system has been called by different names—colonialism, slavery, apartheid, segregation, genocide, racism—regardless of what it is called, it has the same effect. A white Jesus would honestly admit that institutional forms of Christianity were often used to support this system, causing a spiritual illness that still affects the church today. (72)

Jesus brings the gospel's message of liberation, which applies to both the spiritual deliverance of the soul and to confrontation

of injustices within corporate society. The community of Christ manifests both reconciliation and justice in a diverse and unified community where all are empowered. In biblical community, the gifts and competencies of individuals are not only used for the benefit of others, but self is sacrificed for the sake of the whole.

*Coming Together* is a great resource for scriptural insight and references of what the Bible has to say about sexism, classism, racism, colonialism, and other injustices. DeYoung's examples of reconciliation include discussions of Israel and Palestine, the apartheid in South Africa, the African American experience in the United States, and a Native American perspective on forgiveness and restitution. Many discussions of diversity and multiethnic ministry neglect to take into account the question of how gender fits into the equation. While gender justice is not the primary purpose of this work, DeYoung does a good job of acknowledging the oppression and limitation placed on women within the Christian world. Mimi Haddad contributes a voice on behalf of gender equality and liberation. Her chapter encourages a thorough and comprehensive reading of Paul (specifically, Gal. 3:28): a biblical call to mutual submission through a glorious picture of the multiracial, multiethnic community of God. Haddad reminds readers that the power of Christ's kingdom triumphs over gender stereotypes and cultural limitations placed upon women. DeYoung responds and affirms that, despite the historical grips of sexism, "God kept calling and empowering women as equals and as sources of God's power." In addition to embracing a multiethnic community of diverse voices and identities, he welcomes women as equal partners to men in the human endeavor of responding to the call of Christ.

*Coming Together* is a wonderful and thoughtful engagement about how the gospel may be better understood through the eyes of a diverse community. DeYoung touches on some of the challenges and conflicts that may arise when diversity is pursued and embraced; however, he does not offer specific paths, options, or alternatives in pursuing diversity. Nonetheless, *Coming Together* is a foundational treatise on both the theology and ideology of diversity within the body of Christ. One might ask, "Where do we go from here?" This book is a great place to start in terms of raising awareness and challenging assumptions. Following DeYoung's lead, the body of Christ must now move forward into the twenty-first century with passion and conviction as we seek to live out our faith in an age of diversity.

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