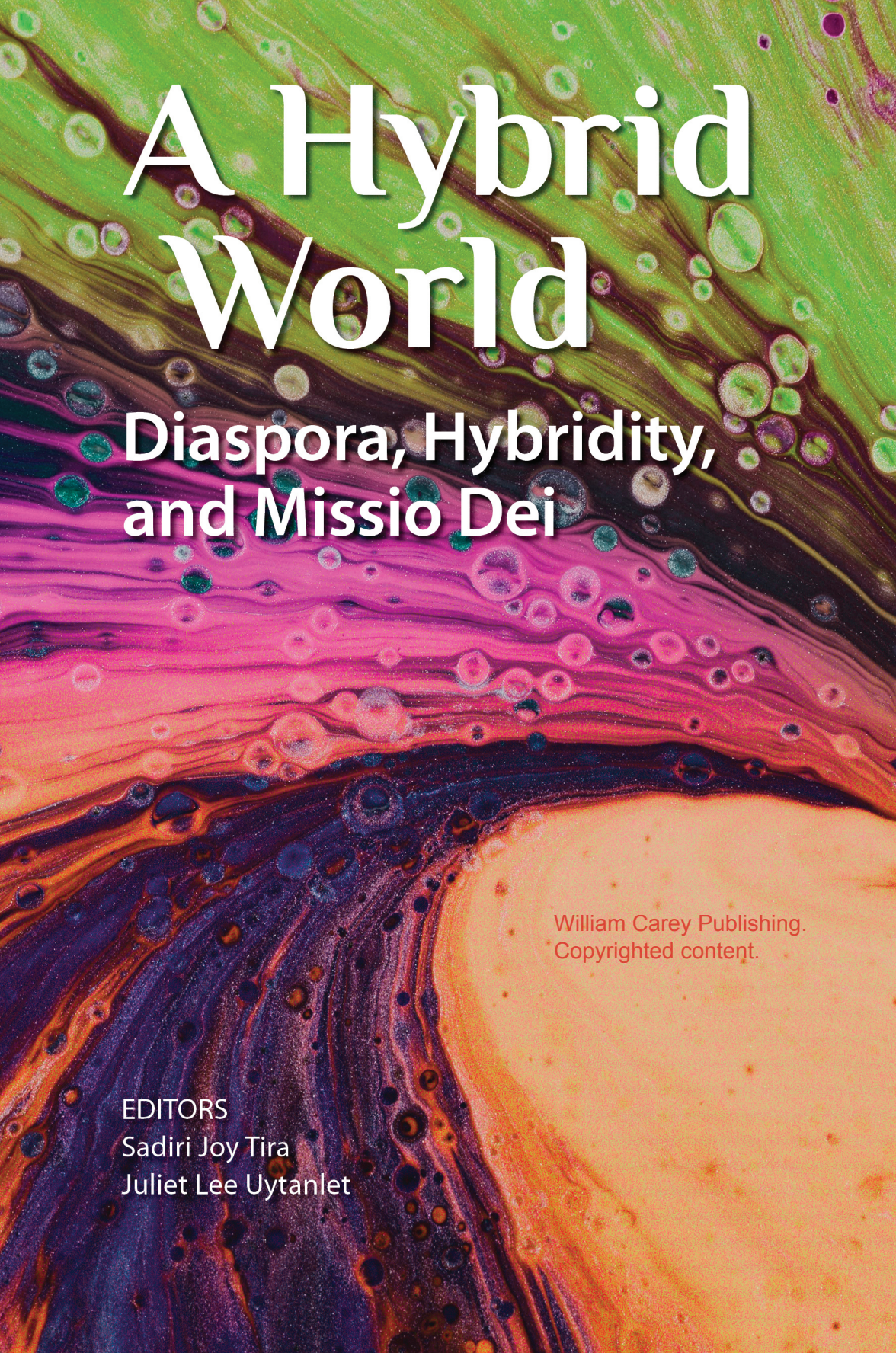

A Hybrid World
Diaspora, Hybridity, and Missio Dei
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A Hybrid World: Diaspora, Hybridity, and Missio Dei
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CHAPTER 1 | Joseph Shao

Hybridity in the Old Testament

Hybridity is an important topic for missiology and specifically for a new field of missiology called diaspora missiology. Since we live in a globalized world, hybridity is easily observed anywhere in the world. As it is more convenient and faster to traverse in the world, the speed of hybridity will definitely intensify in the near future. With migration, whether it is voluntary or involuntary, different nationalities and people groups will be living in diaspora. The *Missio Dei* in the post-truth era differs from what we have faced before in the missionary task. Previously, we emphasized a "go" strategy, sending missionaries to the ends of the earth. Now with hybridity and diaspora, it is a "from anywhere to everywhere" approach, since many people groups are constantly migrating and they are in our midst in any city, and in any region or country. It is a joy that hybridity, diaspora, and the *Missio Dei* are discussed in this significant consultation.

How should we define hybridity? Should we define it as a mixture of culture, language, and ethnicity? It is quite easy for any people group that would prefer to hold on to purist ideology in maintaining their own uniqueness to separate from others for a time. Is it possible for any people group to maintain its own distinctiveness and exclusivity at all times?

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Let us look at hybridity in the Old Testament and see how the people of God handled the condition. With so many people groups surrounding the people of God, are there any principles that we can learn and apply to the *Missio Dei* today? From the nomadic lifestyle during the patriarchal era to the forced diaspora of the Israelites in the Assyrian period and the experience of the exiles in the Babylonian era, are there any challenging values facing the people of God? What should be learned from the experience of the returnees from the exiles? What are the concerns of the post-exilic community, and how does their creativity bring people in multi-cultural contexts back to faith in God?

The purpose of my presentation on hybridity is to provide a diachronic study of hybridity and diaspora in the Old Testament and to explore the *Missio Dei* implications that would be relevant for our twenty-first century.[1] The character and action of God in relation to each era is presented.

Patriarchal Era: Walking with the God Who Leads

There are many examples of hybridity even in the early parts of the book of Genesis. Should we assume that the language, culture, and ethnicity of the people groups represented in the book of Genesis are all the same? Culturally, the people groups, though named differently in the book of Genesis, seem to have some affinity to each other. Biblically, the differences in languages and perhaps ethnicity and even culture come after the dispersion at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:7–8). In linguistic studies, there is a difference between West Semitic language and East Semitic language.

God walks in the Garden of Eden to search for Adam and Eve. Both Enoch and Noah walk with him (Gen 15:22, 24; 6:9). With the Lord's blessing and command, Abram "walks" as the Lord asks him to do (Gen 12:4). Likewise, the Lord would like Abram to walk with him (Gen 17:1). The action of "walking" implies the intimate relationship of Abraham with the God who leads. The life of the patriarchs is a life of sojourning in the land of Canaan. Their nomadic lifestyle compels them to move around their environment, shepherding their flock. Unless they are aware of their own culture and make a clear decision to separate themselves from

1 For studying the Old Testament theme, we can either use diachronic or synchronic approach to bring out the leitmotif. The diachronic approach is usually associated with Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Vol 1–2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962–65). In the case of hybridity and diaspora, the diachronic approach is the best method to bring out the key themes in the Old Testament.

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their environment, it is quite natural for the patriarchs to assimilate the cultures and religious beliefs around them. Hybridity can easily happen in such a context. From Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Canaan, the Lord chooses Abraham to follow him. When Abraham leaves behind the pagan gods, he worships and serves the God Almighty, El Shaddai. God reveals himself to Abraham with promises of land, heir, and heritage (Gen 12:1–3). Even as Abraham expresses his faith in the Lord, the presence of people groups is a reality. The chosen people are living in the midst of a multi-cultural environment and are easily influenced by the religions of the day. The "sins" of the Amorites constantly influence the patriarchs (Gen 15:16). In principle, Abraham lives in a multi-cultural society.

The first test case of hybridity and diaspora is the incident of Jacob bringing his family with him as he runs away from Laban. Jacob, as a single man, is dislocated to a place other than his paternal home for fourteen years. As Jacob and his family are about to migrate, Rachel his wife steals the household gods and puts them inside her camel's saddle (Gen 31:30–35). With the narrative of how Abraham is so concerned with the faith of Isaac that he arranges the marriage of Rebekah to Isaac (Gen 24:1–4), we would have thought that Laban, who is the brother of Rebekah, would have transmitted true faith to his two daughters Leah and Rachel. The traditions and beliefs in the surrounding culture shaped and influenced Laban, Leah, and Rachel. Rachel steals the household gods of Laban. As Jacob and his family return to Bethel, Jacob leads his family in removing the hybridity of pagan beliefs by burying the foreign gods and the superstitious rings that the family members possessed. True faith in the pluralistic world must remain solid and secure in the One True God. No hybridity is allowed to compromise the worship of the Lord God!

As Joseph rules in Egypt and his father and brothers migrate to Egypt, Joseph makes sure that they settle in Goshen (Gen 46:31–47:3). In light of the Egyptian cultures, Goshen is a place of safety for them. This might be seen as a protection of ethnicity as the Egyptians detest the shepherds (Gen 46:34). With the blessings from God, the place where the Israelites eventually settle is the best part of the Egyptian land. The seclusion allows the people of God to practice their faith without fear.

Hybridity is part of the challenge for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as they settle in the land of Canaan. Joseph has married the daughter of an

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Egyptian priest On. This might influence the religious beliefs of Joseph. But even with the possibility of hybridity factors that may influence his walk with God, Joseph holds on to his faith, trusting the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Gen 50:20). The patriarchal story ends with Joseph walking with the God who leads.

Mosaic Era: Trusting the God Who Delivers

The sojourning of Israelites in the land of Canaan describes their lives in Patriarchal era, whereas diaspora and migration depict their existence in the Mosaic era. In the Mosaic era, God delivers his people and would like them to trust him wholly. Since he knows their predicament, sees their misery, and hears their cry, God shows his greatness through the ten plagues in Egypt and his deliverance of the people at the Red Sea. During the exodus event, aside from the Israelite men and women, many other people follow them (Ex 12:37–38). These "other people" include many non-Israelites. The mixing of races is not an issue, as long as other people groups follow and trust the Lord. At Mount Sinai, he discloses his will for them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:3–6). He reveals his ten commandments and the Covenant Code, giving them a clear instruction on how to live a life pleasing to him in the midst of multi-cultural societies (Exodus 20:1–24:7). Monotheistic faith is demanded. The purpose and reason for such disclosure is to ensure that their faith is in the Lord God who delivered them from Egypt.

The forced diaspora of the Israelites, settling in Egypt, deeply impact the theological practices and beliefs of the people. With Moses staying on the mountain forty days and forty nights, the prevailing Egyptian beliefs come through in the request of the people to make gods who may lead them forward. Casting the shape of a calf is the result of hybrid learning in Egypt. At Mount Sinai, God clearly commands that they shall not have any idols before him. Aaron even explains it as a simple act of throwing all the gold into the fire and the golden calf comes out (Ex 32:22–24). Yet the crafting of a golden calf would take a long time. Is this not the influence of Egyptian beliefs concerning concrete symbols that influence Aaron?

With a new generation about to enter the land, Moses gives them serious teaching on the greatness and love of God. The whole book of Deuteronomy is the sermon of Moses to the younger generation to encourage them to love God. God shows his love by giving them the land that he promised to the patriarchs. The people of God have to remind

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themselves of the *Shema*, and they are to love the Lord with all their heart, their soul, and their might (Deut 6:4–5). The people of God have to live a different lifestyle than the inhabitants of Canaan. Facing the challenges of the hybridity of cultures, they are to trust the God who delivers.

Pre-Monarchical Era: Serving the God Who Gives

God gives the land to the people. With Joshua leading them into the land that the Lord has promised, they are able to settle in the land and find rest (Josh 21:43–45). The issue facing the people of God during this era is the lifestyle of the Canaanites. As the servant-leader of the people of God, Joshua reminds them to make the right decision to follow and serve the Lord faithfully. He gives them a choice on the issue of hybridity in their beliefs by referring to the gods of the Chaldeans, the gods in Canaan, the gods in Egypt. He sets an example himself with the words: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord (Josh 24:15).

During the time of the judges, the people live among the Canaanites. Everyone did whatever pleased them in their own eyes. Hybridity is so prevalent as the people intermarry with the Canaanites (Judg 3:5–6). The religiosity of the Ammonites influences the vow of Jephthah as he sacrifices his own daughter just like what the Ammonites would do for some special request to their gods (Judg 11: 31–35). In the midst of darkness, Ruth, a Moabite widow, dares to proclaim, "Your people will be my people, your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16).

Facing a strong Philistine culture in the land of Canaan, the people of God trust the power of the Ark rather than the God who created the Ark. The way the Israelites treat the Ark shows the influence of the hybrid culture of the Philistines. At Mizpah, Samuel confronts them to put away their Baals and Ashtoreths and serve God only (1 Sam 7:2). Even as they hope to follow the culture of the day in having a king, Samuel challenges them to take on the right attitude within a hybrid culture. The prophet reminds them to fear, serve, and follow the Lord their God (1 Sam 12:6–17).

The sedentary life differs from the nomadic life in the Patriarchal and Mosaic era. It might be easier for the Israelites to face the onslaught of cultures and beliefs with a patriarch who would be a model for them to follow or with a servant of the Lord like Moses to guide them. With sedentary life, even with the leadership of Joshua and Samuel, the influence of Canaanite cultures brings about hybridity in their religions.

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