

*America's Unholy Ghosts: The Racist Roots of our Faith and Politics* is not a simple read. It is, however, an important one. Author Joel Edward Goza discusses the philosophical scaffolding that perpetuated slavery and birthed the modern understanding and acceptance of white supremacy. We continue to contend with the demons of this Enlightenment project that possesses so many of the paradoxes of our humanity and life in the modern world. Indeed, the work of the philosophers Goza highlights--Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith--provide the foundation for the founders of the United States to develop a Constitution, a Bill of Rights, and a framework for economic growth and development, while also fueling the barbarity of slavery and the delusion of white supremacy. What Goza illustrates functions to remind us that our best intentions and our seemingly highest ideals can, ultimately, betray us. At times, they create a Frankenstein's monster of morality. What was intended to uplift, destroys. What was intended to liberate, enslaves. What was intended to promote equity, seeds injustice.

One of the helpful frames that Goza develops in *America's Unholy Ghosts* is that of the development of thought over time. He formulates it this way: Hobbes's thought allowed for the *imagination* of the slavery and white supremacy that would follow, Locke's thought *institutionalized* it, and Smith's thought *ingrained* it. *Imagination*. *Institutionalization*. *Ingrained*. The terms are symbolic expressions--words--of the creeping reality that would offer rational reasons for an irrational system, with many none the wiser or concerned. The work of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith provides justification for that which we know cannot be justified. Nonetheless, it became the conventional wisdom that destroyed the life of so many, while being the *de facto* logic of so many for so long, abhorrently even expressed today.

Again, this frame reminds us that our best intentions may possess undesirable consequences at best and horrendous ones at worst. Consequences that we might not ever have envisioned. Remembering this truth in our own lives is critical to navigating the maelstrom of modern life. Particularly, when polarization and taking sides become the normative way that many react in society. Names, titles, and terms become weaponized. We cease conversing and engage in emasculating. While the humility of understanding the limits of our thought will not immediately solve the problems of our time, perhaps it will allow for engagement with people whom we might not otherwise meet or interact.

During this week's *Seeking the Beloved Community: Faith Through the Eyes of Race* program, Pastor Nestor Gomez responded to a question regarding engagement with the intolerance of more conservative and fundamental Christians. Basically, the question categorized these believers as Non-Christian. Gomez called the group away from essentializing the belief or practice of others. He noted that we need to move beyond the categories that we have created. How do we see others as children of God? How do we engage them from that perspective? He was not Pollyana in his appeal. Indeed, he knows the hard reality of discrimination and injustice. He spoke eloquently--and painfully--of the prejudice that he experienced as an immigrant from

Colombia. Yet, he also embodied a hope in a world where we engage others humbly, in holiness, so that we might move to a more sustainable place of life together.

To that end, I would propose the frame of *imagination*, *institutionalization*, and *ingrained* that Goza developed in *America's Unholy Ghosts* as a model going forward, yet with a very different starting and ending point. While Hobbes's, Locke's, and Smith's thoughts were used to justify oppression and injustice, we can nevertheless use these aforementioned frames to develop justice, equity, and peace. Indeed, we need to be able to imagine what Nestor Gomez was pointing to in seeking understanding, and the world is in sore need of work that will institutionalize it and ingrain it into society. What does the world look like if this is the operative narrative for society? What types of changes occur if these are the principles that bind us together and ground us? What world is created if these are the ingrained ways we engage? If something like redemption is even possible, given the history of our country, then it starts with this type of imagination, work to institutionalize it, and efforts to ingrain it.