In Search of Multiple Colors of Christ: Daniel J. Fleming and the American Protestant Encounter with Asian Christian Visual Arts, 1937-1940

Satoru Kimura

Introduction

1 Daniel Johnson Fleming (1877-1969) was nearly sixty years old, when he decided that he had something to write about visual arts. In 1937, he was approaching the end of his teaching career at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. As Professor of Missions and a former missionary himself, Fleming had written some twenty books on a variety of mission-related topics during his nearly three-decade career at Union. But visual arts was a topic he had never worked on up to that point. What nonetheless convinced him to venture into this new territory was the beauty of Christian visual arts in missionary fields across the world. Observing the growing diversity of Christian paintings, architecture, and other material objects in Asia, Africa, and other regions over the previous few decades, Fleming compared the situation with the events of Pentecost as depicted in the Book of Acts: just as the Holy Spirit had enabled the diverse linguistic expressions of the gospel at Pentecost, the spirit was now inspiring non-Western Christians to express their faith in "new forms of beauty" with "[their] own brush."[1]

2 To record this historic phenomenon, Fleming gathered photos of non-Western local, or what he called "indigenous," Christian material objects from all over the world through his missionary connections.[2] This project resulted in the publication of three books from 1937 to 1940: *Heritage of Beauty* (1937); *Each with His Own Brush* (1938); and *Christian Symbols in a World Community* (1940), which respectively focused on architecture, paintings, and symbols.[3] Of the 339 total photos collected in the trilogy, roughly 81 percent came from Asia, 12 percent from Africa, and 7 percent from other regions.

3 Fleming's art trilogy offers a fascinating glimpse into the dynamics of American progressive Christianity, visual arts, and cultural pluralism in the interwar period. Recent scholarship has highlighted liberal Protestants' contributions to cultural pluralism in the early to mid-twentieth-century United States. As the works of David Hollinger, Christopher Evans, Michael Thompson, and Sarah Griffith show, American missionaries, YMCA officials, and social gospelers fought against nativism, imperialism, and anti-immigration policies in the interwar period, and in so doing built a foundation for liberal internationalism, racial equality, and the civil rights movement.[4] In these existing studies, however, the material dimension of liberal Christian engagement with cultural pluralism remains largely understudied. By focusing on Fleming's effort to introduce non-Western Christian visual arts to the American audience during the 1930s, I intend to fill this scholarly lacuna.[5]

4 This article consists of three parts. The first part gives an overview of Fleming's trilogy,

situating it within a broader context of the missionary art movement after World War I. In the second part, I discuss the racial dynamics of Fleming's trilogy, with a special focus on his collection of Jesus portraits from Asia. Fleming's project is significant, as this era in American history has generally been considered a moment of peak saturation of images of a white Jesus. In a time when Jesus was, as historians Edward Blum and Paul Harvey point out in *The Color of Christ*, most commonly visualized as a white man with blond hair and blue eyes, Fleming brought numerous images of Jesus with a non-European appearance, challenging the popular entanglement of whiteness and Jesus at home. Lastly, the third part explores how Fleming handled the problem of "syncretism" in paintings of Jesus. How much latitude did Fleming allow Christian artists in their adoption of symbols associated with non-Christian religions? Could Jesus in a painting wear a Buddhist robe? Should Jesus be presented with a white lotus, a divine symbol in the Hindu tradition? Analyzing Fleming's commentary on several paintings, I will point out the deep ambivalence of interwar American liberal Protestantism regarding religious pluralism.

Fleming's Trilogy of Non-Western Christian Art: An Overview

5 Daniel Johnson Fleming was born into a Presbyterian family in Xenia, Ohio in 1877. After graduating from the College of Wooster, he spent eleven years in total in India—first as a teacher of math and science at Forman Christian College in Lahore (1898-1901) and then as a missionary for the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (1904-1912). After returning to the United States, Fleming studied at the University of Chicago Divinity School and completed his Ph.D. in 1914. Then he started a long-term teaching career at Union Theological Seminary in New York City where he first served as Director of the Department of Foreign Service (1915-1918) and later as Professor of Missions (1918-1944).[6] A progressive missiologist, Fleming authored a few dozens of books throughout his career, addressing diverse topics in foreign missions, such as education, social service, imperialism, and ecumenism. Yet toward the end of his career at Union, he abruptly undertook a project on visual arts, architecture, and devotional materials, which culminated in the publication of the trilogy from 1937 to 1940.[7]

6 Although he had done nothing notable related to visual arts before this, his interest in the subject was deeply rooted in a cause he had pursued throughout his career: ecumenism. Art was, for Fleming, a medium for promotion of the unity of Christians worldwide. In the deepening global chaos of the late 1930s, Fleming stressed the necessity for "Christian world fellowship" beyond racial and ethnic boundaries.[8] It was for this reason that Christians must get ready to embrace more culturally diverse expressions of Christianity, whether in paintings, architecture, and other religious materials. "As long as we of the West continue to associate our religion only with European or American modes of expression of the Christian experience," he warned, "we continue to be medieval and to fail to enter into the full meaning of Christian unity—a unity so strongly centered that it can welcome diversity."[9]

7 A pioneering effort in this field, Fleming's trilogy nonetheless did not emerge *ex nihilo*. It was rather a culmination of the "missionary art" movement in both Protestant and

Catholic churches, which developed especially after World War I. As World Christianity scholars Dana Robert and Andrew Walls point out, Anglo-Protestant organizations, such as the Committee on Christian Literature for Women and Children in Mission Fields (CCLWCMF), began to promote what they called "indigenous" Christian visual arts in missionary fields during the interwar period.[10] In India, for example, under Clementina Butler's leadership, the CCLWCMF supported the production and distribution of Indian-style Christian paintings (some of which ended up reproduced in Fleming's collection), and hosted annual competitions for such works.

8 Yet the contemporary event that was by far the most relevant to Fleming's trilogy was, as he acknowledged it himself, the 1938 meeting of the International Missionary Council at Tambaram, India, which promoted "indigenous" expressions of Christian faith. Its official report declared: "We strongly affirm that the gospel should be expressed and interpreted in indigenous forms, and that in methods of worship, institutions, literature, architecture, etc., the spiritual heritage of the nation and country should be taken into use."[11] Fleming's project clearly resonated with this general sentiment in the ecumenical Protestant circles. Quoting this passage, Fleming further argued that just as non-Westerners had their own "verbal tongue," they had their own "artistic language," by which they had expressed their spiritual sentiments for centuries. If there was no problem with the Bible being translated into various languages, neither should it be a problem for Christian faith to be expressed in aesthetically diverse ways.[12]

9 Yet comprehending Fleming's trilogy also requires looking beyond the scope of the Protestant missions. The ecumenist Fleming was a close follower of the Catholic Church's latest efforts in the artistic terrain.[13] The Catholic missionary art movement was, as Fleming knew well, far more advanced and systematic than the Protestant counterpart in this era. The idea of cultural accommodation had been emphasized time and again throughout the history of Catholicism, but after World War I this became a more urgent matter. Celso Benigne-Louis Costantini, who was appointed by Benedict XV (Pope: 1914-1922) as Apostolic Delegate to China in 1922, played a crucial role in this process. In China, where the public's skepticism toward Christianity's complicity with imperialism was growing during the New Culture Movement, the Catholic Church hurried to promote inculturation and native clerical leadership. Advocating "Sino-Christian" art and architecture, Costantini recruited talented local artists, such as Ch'en Yuandu (Luke Ch'en), and organized Chinese Christian art exhibitions in multiple cities. The art department of Catholic University of Peking (Fu Jen University) became a hub of this movement under Ch'en's leadership beginning in 1930.[14] Deeply admiring such Catholic efforts, Fleming included numerous contemporary Catholic artists' works in his trilogy, making his collection a truly "ecumenical" enterprise.[15]

Multiple Colors of Christ: Confronting the Image of the White Savior

10 Fleming's trilogy presented a variety of material objects, including architecture, paintings, sculptures, and liturgical arts, in Asia and other missionary fields. Among them, nothing may better illustrate this era's complex interplay of race and religion than his collection of Jesus portraits. From a historiographical point of view, what makes

Fleming's Jesus collection so significant is its chronological correspondence with the peak of white Jesus images in American popular culture. According to Blum and Harvey, whose 2012 pathbreaking work *The Color of Christ* showed the ubiquity of whiteness in American depictions of Jesus over the centuries, the period between the Civil War and World War II was particularly crucial to the circulation of such images. The end of slavery, the arrival of new immigrants, and America's imperialist expansion in this era urged Anglo-Americans to reassert their racial superiority at home and abroad, and in that context, white or Nordic Jesus images emerged as an effective tool.[16] Meanwhile, industrialization facilitated the mass production of religious pictures, resulting in a rapid dissemination of the images of white Jesus and other biblical figures to Sunday schools, living rooms, and other corners of American society. "[I]n American Sunday schools," say Blum and Harvey, "the whiteness of Jesus became a religious fact in the psyches of children long before they could experience conversion."[17] Famed painters also joined the production of Jesus images in this era: Henry Stanley Todd's *The Nazarene* (1932) and Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* (1941), both of which depicted a masculine Nordic Jesus with blue eyes and blond hair, were among the most popular images in this era (Fig. 1).[18]

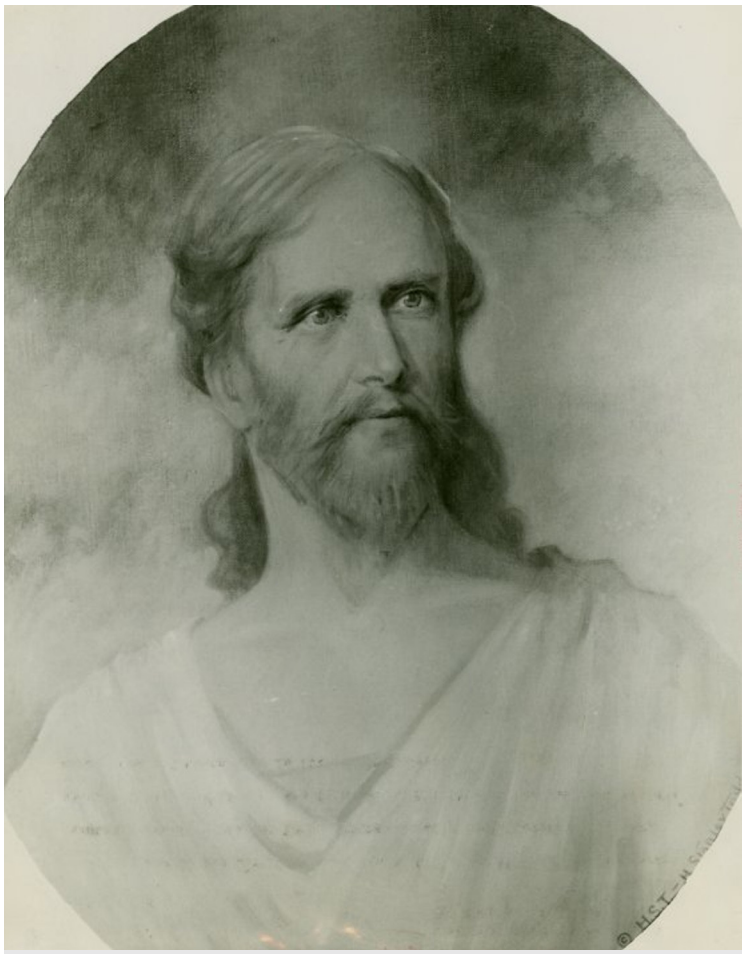

Fig. 1 New York World's Fair (1939–1940) publicity photograph of Henry Stanley Todd, *The Nazarene*, painting, 1932. Photograph: Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections.

11 It is against this background that the significance of Fleming's Jesus collection is fully understood. *Each with His Own Brush*, for instance, included sixty-eight examples of "indigenous" Christian visual art (fifty-eight paintings and ten sculptures), thirty-nine of which depicted Jesus in one way or another. Common to virtually all of them was a non-European appearance, which reflected the nationality of each artist. *Babyhood of Our Lord* (Fig. 2) by Japanese Catholic artist Kimi Koseki (1903-1985) is a good example. Koseki, a female artist trained at the Imperial Art School, Japanized the baby Jesus and other figures with black eyes, black hair, traditional local clothes, and serene facial expressions. The snowy mountains behind the scene further help to create the distinct countryside atmosphere of the Tohoku region in northern Japan, where Koseki herself was from. This piece, as Fleming noted below it, "represents the motherly care in Bethlehem as it would have occurred near Sendai."[19]

Fig. 2 Kimi Koseki, *Babyhood of Our Lord*. (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 43, picture insert).

12 *Gethsemane* (Fig. 3) by Luke Ch'en (1902-1967), professor at the art department of the Catholic University of Peking, transformed the famous biblical scene described in Mark 14:32-42 into a distinctly Chinese event. As Fleming noted in his comments on the illustration, in this Chinese garden of Gethsemane, the praying Jesus and the sleeping disciples all look Chinese—and so does the angel—wearing traditional costume and with long black hair flowing down their backs.[20] The posture Jesus takes out of respect to the angel—one knee down, hands put together in front of his chest, and head bowed—also reflects traditional Chinese court manners. Fleming considered *Madonna and Child* (Fig. 4) by Lé-van-dé (1906-1966), a Vietnamese Catholic artist trained at the Hanoi School of Fine Arts, as an equally fascinating Asian effort to indigenize Jesus and Mary. Having studied in Europe during the 1930s, Lé-van-dé most likely knew European paintings of the same subject, and this piece's composition particularly resembles that of the Renaissance artist Raphael's paintings of the Madonna and Child. But the dark skin and black hair of Mary and Jesus in this piece set it apart from European religious paintings.

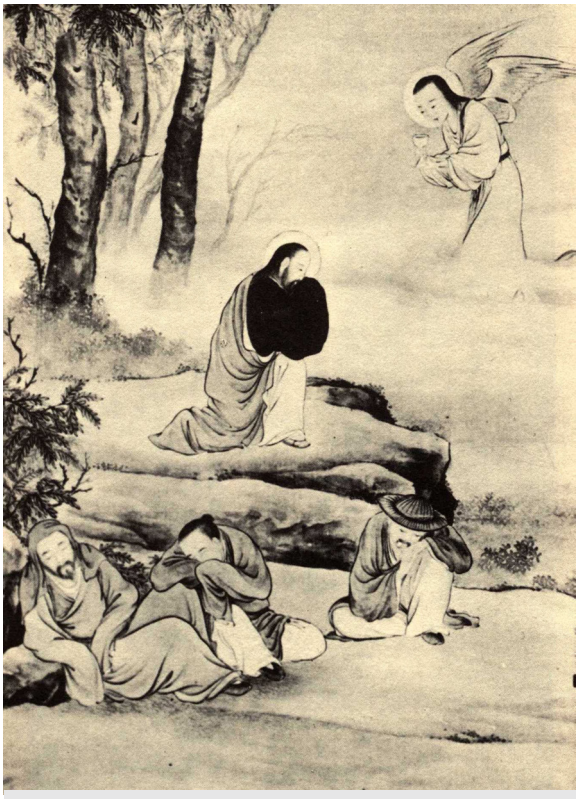

Fig. 3 Luke Ch'en, *Gethsemane* (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 26, picture insert).

Fig. 4 Lé-van-dé, *Madonna and Child* (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 80, picture insert).

13 Compared with Asia, Africa was, in Fleming's observation, far behind in the production of Christian art. "Too little has been done," Fleming wrote, "in the way of consecrating to Christian use Africa's gifts of painting, wood-carving and sculpture."[21] His collection of African works was accordingly much smaller than that of Asian ones. Out of the sixty-eight pieces collected in *Each with His Own Brush*, only eight were from Africa.

Yet Fleming saw much value in works like Job Kekana's *A Bantu Calvary* (Fig. 5) and Nthenge Nthula's *An African Crucifix* (Fig. 6), as he felt they would speak more effectively to the hearts of Africans than European artworks could. With Nthula's piece, Fleming asked his American readers rhetorical questions: "Compare it, for example, with Rubens' 'Christ between Two Thieves.' Which *to Africans* would convey more meaning? Which would better touch *their* minds and consciences?"[22]

Fig. 5 Job Kekana, *A Bantu Calvary* (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 72, picture insert). About this twenty-inch wooden carving, Fleming noted that "Our Lord is an African native with wooly hair. . . . In the background are African huts on the veldt."

Fig. 6 Nthenge Nthula, *An African Crucifix* (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 74, picture insert).

14 Taken together, these and dozens of other Jesus images in Fleming's collection show that the "color of Christ" in the 1930s was far more contested than usually assumed. In a period when the most prevailing image of Jesus in the United States was a white-skinned, blond-haired, and blue-eyed man, Fleming showcased multiple colors of Christ across the world, challenging the American entanglement of whiteness and religious images.[23] Although his work was too modest to shake the powerful dominance of white Jesus images in the United States, each volume of the trilogy was reviewed by various religious magazines, including *The Review of Religion*, *Liturgical Arts*, *Books for Africa*, and *The Journal of Religion*, in a generally positive manner. One reviewer lauded Fleming's *Each with His Own Brush* for giving a "pleasurable shock" with its impressive collection of paintings featuring "the old familiar [biblical] stories in an exotic and unfamiliar garb." The book made a compelling case, according to this reviewer, that "Christianity no longer belongs to the West, but is truly at home in many lands and cultures."[24] This and other favorable reviews of Fleming's work suggest that he convinced at least some readers at home that the color of Christ should not be fixated solely on whiteness.

The Problem of Syncretism: Or, What to Do with Non-Christian Symbols

15 But visualizing Jesus in an "indigenous" way was a more complex practice than it might appear. In his search for racially diverse images of Christ, Fleming faced several delicate issues, among which was the challenge of syncretism.[25] Producing an "indigenous" artwork involved the incorporation of local landscapes, objects, and habits that were often deeply associated with a local religious culture. To what extent should such non-Christian religious symbols be brought into a portrait of Jesus? The dilemma here was where to establish a boundary between "non-Western" culture, which artists were encouraged to bring into their works, and "non-Christian" elements, which the artists might better avoid using.

16 Although Fleming did not give clear guidelines about this issue, his commentaries on specific paintings reveal a certain pattern of thinking. On the one hand, Fleming welcomed paintings with non-Christian motifs placed somewhere other than Jesus's body. In other words, Fleming was generally fine with artists putting non-Christian objects or figures into their paintings' backgrounds. He found value in that kind of artistic endeavor, because it could help to illustrate the proper relationship between Christianity and other religions. Chinese painter Hsü San Ch'un's piece titled *Visit of the Magi* was one such work that pleased Fleming (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7 Hsü San Ch'un, *Visit of the Magi* (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 18, picture insert).

Fig. 8 Alfred D. Thomas, *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (Fleming, *Christian Symbols in a World Community*, 59, picture insert)

17 Depicted in this traditional Chinese-style work is the biblical narrative of the visit of the magi to the infant Jesus (Matthew 2:1-2). Yet what is unique here is the personification in the three wise men of the three major religious traditions of China: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. As Fleming noted below the piece, "The kneeling figure is a Buddhist monk, as his shaven crown indicates. To the extreme right is a Confucianist, formal and correct in his dignified demeanor. Laotze, with a long beard and with a bottle of the water of mercy in his hand, represents Taoism."[26]

18 This unique composition embodied the idea of inclusivism, which the painter Hsü San Ch'un (and Fleming himself) seem to have considered as the ideal Christian approach toward other religions. On the one hand, it refuted the old exclusivist idea that non-Christian religions were so corrupted that they possessed no valuable truth to offer. The scene's peaceful atmosphere also seems to highlight the virtue of mutual respect between religions. On the other hand, the piece also confirmed the subordinate status of these Asian religions to Christianity. In his annotation of this painting, Fleming wrote, "Each [of the three Magi] brings his gift to the infant Jesus. This was meant to symbolize that the old revelations [in the non-Christian religions] are not wholly

discarded."[27] Nicely put, this is just another way of affirming the so-called "fulfillment" theology, which holds that non-Christian religions possess some truths but lack others, and therefore, they are to be assimilated and eventually superseded by Christianity. As this position is generous enough to see at least some value in non-Christian religions without compromising Christianity's superiority, it was particularly popular among liberal Protestants in the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries.[28] The point Fleming intended to make through Ch'un's work was that Christianity, the final and highest religion, would receive the positive values from other traditions, and in doing so, complete or "fulfill" their missions.[29]

19 Numerous other paintings in Fleming's collection embodied this line of theology. He was clearly fond of paintings that, by having non-Christian symbols or figures somewhere nearby or behind Jesus, illustrated the hierarchy of Christianity in relation to other faiths. The Indian artist Alfred D. Thomas's *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (Fig. 8) depicted shepherds offering a white lotus, a symbol of divinity in the Hindu tradition, to the infant Jesus. As Fleming noted on the piece, "The lotus is the traditional offering of a Hindu to his god, implying a rendering up of one's own existence to its Source—a resignation of one's own nature and ground for separate existence."[30] *Christ the Dawn* (Fig. 9) by the same painter featured Jesus preaching to a crowd in an Indian village. With Muslims and Hindus depicted in the crowd, the painting illustrated the ways in which "Jesus Christ, the Light of the World" could dawn upon "folk of every caste and creed."[31] In both pieces, the non-Christian symbols or figures are put somewhere around Jesus, serving as instruments to visualize how Christianity would fulfill and supersede these religions.

Fig. 9 Alfred D. Thomas, *Christ the Dawn* (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 65, picture insert).

20 On the other hand, Fleming's comments on one of the works he illustrates suggest that he felt certain reservations when non-Christian elements came onto Jesus's body, for they could more directly affect the representation of Jesus's character itself. Fleming hesitated to embrace Yokei Sadakata's *The First Temptation* due to its Buddhistic presentation of Jesus (Fig. 10). Sadakata (1882-1966), a Japanese Protestant artist trained by the prominent Buddhist painter Shoseki Kose in Kyoto, produced a unique mixture of Christian and Buddhist elements in this piece.[32]

Fig. 10 Yokei Sadakata, *The First Temptation* (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 45, picture insert).

21 Although the figure depicted here is Jesus, his meditative pose, calm facial expression, and the rippling folds of his robe make him look like Buddha as depicted in East Asian artworks for centuries. In other words, in this painting (unlike the previous few works above), Buddhist elements characterized and defined Jesus's own body rather than the space around him. This apparently concerned Fleming. Instead of embracing the piece outright, he noted—in a manner uncharacteristic of him in the trilogy—that at least certain "critics" would consider it to be a "precise illustration of the dangers of syncretism." Such critics would argue, he continued, that despite this painting's message

otherwise, "Jesus [in actuality] did not separate himself from the world in passive meditation; he did not attempt to eliminate all desire as did Buddha; he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."[33] In other words, because of the contemplative and otherworldly appearance of Jesus, Sadakata's painting would seem to some people to be a distortion of the essence of Jesus's ministry. Jesus had been someone who powerfully committed to this world, and therefore, his body should be visualized as such in artworks.

22 Though Fleming did not articulate whether he personally agreed with the opinion of these imagined "critics," there are reasons to read this passage as a manifestation of Fleming's own unease about Sadakata's painting. After all, Fleming himself was a liberal Christian with a social gospel inclination, who believed that a genuine religion should aim to save not just individual souls but also society as a whole. As he had stated in his inaugural address as Professor of Missions at Union back in 1918, the purpose of the mission was to "give Jesus Christ his full opportunity with every human being and every aspect of organized society." While reaffirming a necessity for individuals' "inward renewal" through Christ, he emphasized, "[God's] purpose is social.... His interest is not merely in the individual but in the great unit—the human family." In this address, after listing seven categories of human needs—the "hygienic, economic, educational, social, aesthetic, moral and religious"—Fleming argued that reforming "each of these aspects" would be integral to the "reign of God on earth."[34]

23 As a man of such conviction, Fleming must have found Sadakata's portrait of the meditative Jesus theologically dubious for its effect of obscuring the ideal of social gospel moralism. Fleming was very likely expressing his own feeling when he let the imagined "critics" go on to conclude, "this picture is definitely in the axis of Buddhism, not in the axis of Christianity, and therefore, is a type of picture not to be encouraged in the indigenous church."[35] The negative perception of Buddhism as a nihilistic and passive religion expressed here was nothing new in American culture. As historian Thomas Tweed points out, such discourse on Buddhism had emerged in the nineteenth century.[36] Fleming's reaction to Sadakata's piece may only confirm the discourse's endurance even among liberal Christians in the late 1930s. In the case of Fleming's project, however, the irony or hypocrisy of having this prejudicial understanding of Buddhism is even greater. He encouraged non-Western Christians to visualize their faith in a way they would feel most comfortable with, but at the end of the day he judged the legitimacy of such artworks based on his own criterion of what Christianity essentially was. Only when an "indigenous" motif aligned with the core principles of Christianity as defined by the American liberal Protestant or social gospel norm was its usage in an artwork fully acceptable.

24 Fleming's reaction to this painting illustrates another key assumption widely held among American Protestants in this era. According to David Morgan, American Protestants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to think that an image of someone's body (especially the face or head) had a formative impact on the morality and character of the viewers, which was the reason Jesus portraits became an essential part of Protestant devotional life in this era in the first place.[37]

This might explain part of the reason Fleming wanted to keep Jesus's body itself free from non-Christian influences, despite the greater tolerance he showed toward non-Christian motifs placed in the backgrounds of portraits. Since Jesus's posture and facial expression in a painting could shape the feelings and behavior of those who saw it, Fleming was likely afraid that Sadakata's otherworldly-looking Jesus would shape the viewers' faith in that image.

Conclusion

25 Fleming's trilogy illustrates the complex dynamics of race, religion, and visual arts in the interwar United States. Though the extant scholarship highlights the increasing Anglo-Saxonization of Jesus's body in American visual culture in this era, Fleming's story reveals a virtually opposite impulse in liberal Protestantism: to search for multiple colors of Christ. By introducing to the American audience numerous non-white images of Jesus from Asia in particular, Fleming attempted to challenge the entanglement of whiteness and religious images in American popular culture. At the same time, his project was not without its own biases. Fleming's approach to non-Christian religious symbols, for example, shows a quintessentially American liberal Protestant assumption underlying this project. While he tolerated or even welcomed non-Christian motifs in the paintings' backgrounds, his response to Yokei Sadakata's *The First Temptation* suggests he took a more careful approach to Jesus's body itself lest non-Christian ideas should alter the fundamental character and ministry of Christ. Not surprisingly, in this process, what counted as a "right" way of visualizing Jesus's body hinged on Fleming's own understanding of Christianity as a socially engaged missiologist.

26 Perhaps even greater ironies are found in the aftermath of Fleming's project. Despite what he did, the dominance of white Jesus in American visual culture remained largely unshaken—if anything, it became even stronger. In 1941, just a year after Fleming's trilogy was completed, Warner Sallman reproduced *The Head of Christ* for the mass market for the first time, and through the following few decades, it became arguably the most popular image of Jesus in American history. While the reception of Fleming's work was largely limited to well-educated liberal Protestants, Sallman's Jesus was embraced by a much wider swath of American Christians. As David Morgan notes, Sallman's Jesus became a perfect icon of America's civil religion during the periods of World War II and the Cold War, inspiring the anxious American people with his powerful and righteous appearance.[38] Rather than declining, the reign of the white Jesus thus continued long after the publication of Fleming's trilogy.

27 Another challenge, perhaps a more unexpected one, came from within the Protestant intellectual circles, in which Fleming's work had originally found some strong sympathizers. As Sally Promey argues, there was an important shift in aesthetic taste among the Protestant intelligentsia in the postwar era, particularly under Paul Tillich's influence. According to the Tillichian paradigm, the "authenticity" of religious art was no longer determined by traditional subject matter (such as Jesus and the cross). Rather, it became contingent on whether the artwork's "style" was effective in revealing the deep realities of human existence, such as despair, alienation, and hope. As a result

of this shift, explicitly "Christian" artworks could be now seen as unsophisticated, sentimental, or even as kitsch, whereas works in a more abstract style, such as Picasso's *Guernica*, which revealed the tragedy of human destiny in a metaphorical and prophetic style, could be recognized as higher forms of religious art.[39] This new aesthetic trend likely diminished the appeal of works like those collected in Fleming's trilogy within the intellectual community. During the 1930s, the artworks Fleming collected were innovative, but just a few decades later, their conventional subject matter rendered them outdated or even dull.

28 A similar shift of emphasis occurred among Asian Christian artists themselves. In the second half of the twentieth century, some Christian artists in Asia started to adopt an abstract expressionist style. When, for example, the Asian Christian Art Association conducted a project to collect hundreds of contemporary Christian artworks from Asian countries and published a portion of them in *The Bible through Asian Eyes* (1991), it included many paintings influenced by abstraction, such as the Filipino artist Ang Kiukok's *Crucifixion* (1969) and the Korean artist Yi Choon-Ki's *Work 86* (date unknown).[40] While the paintings presented by Fleming half a century before had directly confronted the whiteness of Jesus by giving him a distinctly Asian body, the abstract painters of the new generation seem no longer interested in that sort of project. At least for certain groups of contemporary artists, the best way to illustrate the divinity of Christ is to make his body and skin color blurred or even unidentifiable—and in so doing they have also blurred Fleming's legacies.

Citation Guide

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Notes

1. Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush: Contemporary Christian Art in Asia and Africa* (New York: Friendship Press, 1938), 1.

2. Some photos came from Fleming's personal acquaintances (missionaries, editors, etc.), while others came from magazines, museums, and institutions focused on non-Western Christian art. For the details of these providers, see the "Acknowledgements" section of each of Fleming's trilogy.

3. Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Heritage of Beauty: Pictorial Studies of Modern Christian Architecture in Asia and Africa Illustrating the Influence of Indigenous Cultures* (New York: Friendship Press, 1937); *Each with His Own Brush: Contemporary Christian Art in Asia and Africa* (New York: Friendship Press, 1938); *Christian Symbols in a World Community* (New York: Friendship Press, 1940).

4. David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017); Christopher H. Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Sarah M. Griffith, *The Fight for Asian American Civil Rights: Liberal Protestant Activism, 1900-1950* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018); Jennifer C. Snow, *Protestant Missionaries, Asian Immigrants, and Ideologies of Race in America, 1850-1924* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006); Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015).

5. The intersection of religious liberalism and visual arts has received some scholarly attention in recent years. See, for example, the first part of Sally M. Promey and Leigh E. Schmidt (eds), *American Religious Liberalism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), which is devoted to "the spiritual in art."

6. My description of Fleming's life and career here is based on Lydia Huffman Hoyle, "The Legacy of Daniel Johnson Fleming," *International Bulletin of Missionary*

Research 14, no. 2 (April 1990): 68-73; Lydia Huffman Hoyle, "Fleming, Daniel Johnson," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), 214-5.

7. Fleming's contribution to interwar missiology has been discussed by scholars in several fields, though far from exhaustively. In the field of American religion, a handful of historians have situated him as a key theorist of liberal missiology. William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 150-156; Grant Wacker, "Second Thought on the Great Commission: Liberal Protestants and Foreign Missions, 1890-1940," in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 291-293; Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 62-63; Lydia Huffman Hoyle, "Making Missions Ethical: Daniel Johnson Fleming and the Rethinking of the Missionary Enterprise" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1987). While these scholars discuss Fleming's engagement with various mission-related issues, they pay virtually no attention to his project on visual arts.

More recently, scholars in the field of World Christianity have noticed Fleming's contribution to Christian internationalism and indigenization movements in the mid-twentieth century. These scholars consider the interwar "mission studies," to which Fleming's work belonged, as an important precursor of the recent academic field of "World Christianity," because of the former's pioneering effort to study and promote diverse expressions of Christian faith across the world. In this context, these scholars have occasionally mentioned Fleming's writings, including those on non-Western Christian art. See for example: Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 183-184; Dana L. Robert, ""The First Globalization?": The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement Between the World Wars," in *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu and Alaine Low (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 116-120; Thomas Coomans, "The "Sino-Christian Style": A Major Tool for Architectural Indigenization," in *Sinicizing Christianity*, ed. Zheng Yangwen (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 197-232 (esp. 219); Dana L. Robert, "Mission Studies and World Christianity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mission Studies*, ed. Kirsteen Kim, Knud Jørgensen, and Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 387; Stanley H. Skreslet, *Constructing Mission History: Missionary Initiative and Indigenous Agency in the Making of World Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023), 307, 329. Overall, however, these works mention Fleming's visual arts project only superficially without digging into its actual contents, let alone contextualizing its racial dynamics in contemporary American popular culture.

8. Fleming, *Heritage of Beauty*, 9.

9. Fleming, *Heritage of Beauty*, 11.

10. On the Committee on Christian Literature for Women and Children in Mission Fields, see Robert, ""The First Globalization?"" 115-117. Andrew Walls also lists a series of efforts by British Protestants to study so-called indigenous art during the interwar

period—articles like "African Art and Its Possibilities" (1927) and "The Arts in the Mission Field" (1931) started to appear in *The East and the West* and *The Church Overseas* (both Anglican magazines), while the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel published *Worship in Other Lands: A Study of Racial Characteristics in Worship* (1933), which offered a collection of liturgical works, visual arts, music, and architecture in missionary fields. (Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 182.)

11. Quoted in Fleming, *Christian Symbols in a World Community*, 3.

12. Fleming, *Christian Symbols in a World Community*, 3.

13. The Protestant effort to learn aesthetic matters from Catholics was nothing new in this era. In the United States, Protestants had started to value visual objects in their devotional life during the late nineteenth century, and in that process, they absorbed a lot from Catholic architecture, liturgy, paintings, and other material objects. On the history of the Protestant-Catholic interaction in the artistic arena in the nineteenth century, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Given that the Protestant-Catholic relationship became increasingly cooperative by the mid-twentieth century, Fleming's inclusion of both Catholic and Protestant artworks in the trilogy seems only natural. On the evolution of the tri-faith or "Judeo-Christian" ideology in the twentieth-century United States, see Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew S. Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); K. Healan Gaston, *Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

14. On the development of the Catholic missionary art movement (especially in China) in this era, see Mary S. Lawton, "A Unique Style in China: Chinese Christian Painting in Beijing," *Monumenta Serica* 43 (1995): 469-489 (see esp. 470-478); Jeremy Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013): 149-174; Gudrun Löwner, "Christian Art and Architecture in Asia," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Felix Wilfred (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 463-464; Coomans, "The 'Sino-Christian Style,'" 197-219.

15. In fact, quite a few of the individuals and institutions whose support Fleming thanked in the acknowledgements of the trilogy were Catholic. See, for example, Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 9 and Acknowledgements (unpaginated). Hermann Heuvers, a Jesuit missionary and the president of Sophia University in Tokyo, for example, provided Fleming with pictures of several contemporary Japanese Catholic artists' works, including Kimi Koseki's *Babyhood of Our Lord*. Fleming further consumed Catholic magazines, such as *Agenzia Fides* and *Liturgical Arts*, where he was

exposed to the latest paintings by non-Western Catholic artists, some of which Fleming reproduced in his books. In his chapters devoted to specific countries like China and Japan, Fleming further discussed the works of Catholic painters and missionaries there in a very appreciative manner. For instance, in the chapter on China in his *Each with His Own Brush*, Fleming gave a historical overview of the Chinese Catholic missionary art, highlighting the recent accomplishments by Celso Costantini, Luke Ch'en, and other artists at the art department of the Catholic University of Peking (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 10-13). As many as five paintings by Luke Ch'en ended up being reproduced in this volume (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 22-27).

16. Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 141-142.

17. Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*, 146.

18. Blum and Harvey, *The Color of Christ*,142-143, 167-169, 208-211.

19. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 43.

20. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 26.

21. Fleming, *Heritage of Beauty*, 85.

22. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 74 (Emphasis original).

23. Despite the progressive intention, Fleming's project was still not entirely innocent. In particular, that the terms "indigenous" and "non-Western" were used as synonyms throughout the trilogy is problematic, since it could give an impression that "Western" Christin artworks were, by contrast, non-indigenous—and hence universal. Several times in the trilogy, Fleming did admit that *both* Western and non-Western Christian material objects were equally particular expressions of the eternal. In *Each with His Own Brush*, he defended the Asian and African efforts to produce indigenous Christian paintings by reminding his readers that Italian artists had likewise painted numerous "Italian Madonnas." (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 7.) Similarly, in *Christian Symbols in a World Community*, Fleming wrote, "Western Christian symbols, though older, are just as national as are Asian or African forms, and should not naively be assumed to be ordained for universal use." (Fleming, *Christian Symbols in a World Community*, 28.) In reality, however, as Fleming made few efforts to push this point further in the trilogy, his readers very likely just missed it. What he presented under the category "indigenous" was a collection of non-Western artworks, ruling out Western artworks from this category. When, for example, Fleming stated that "Indigenous art … is still in its infancy," it is clear that Fleming did not count Western religious art, which had existed for centuries and as such must have refuted this very claim, as "indigenous." (Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 4.) Thus, while Fleming saw non-Western Christian art as a racially or nationally specific expression of Christianity, he did not make enough effort to see whiteness or racial particularity in Western Christian art. What emerges from here is peculiar asymmetry between white people's Christianity, which is *colorless* and *universal*, and other racial groups' Christianity, which is *ethnic*

and *particular*.

24. Review of Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, *The Review of Religion* 3, no. 4 (1939): 502.

25. By exploring Fleming's discussion of syncretism in the context of missionary art, I hope to offer a historical glimpse into the subject now known as "interreligious art." Recently, some scholars in the field of interreligious studies have explored the artistic or material dimension of interfaith encounters. Arguing that the previous interreligious studies and practices have too heavily focused on "dialogue," S. Brent Plate, for instance, calls for a shift to "interreligious aesthetics." S. Brent Plate, "Interreligious Aesthetics: From Dialogue to the Senses," *CrossCurrents* 68, no. 3 (2018): 329-335. Other recent works on interreligious art and aesthetics include: Mary Anderson, "Art and Interreligious Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 99-116; Anne Barber-Shams, "Interfaith Art for Interfaith Chapels," *Faith & Form* 47, no. 2 (2014): 19-21; Melanie Barbato, "Interreligious Art in Light of Hindu and Buddhist Thought," *CrossCurrents* 68, no. 3 (2018): 336-351. Yet the majority of this scholarship focuses on contemporary interfaith artistic endeavors, without addressing the rich history of visual arts with multi-religious motifs (such as those found in early-twentieth-century missionary fields).

26. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 18.

27. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 18.

28. On the popularity of fulfillment theology among liberal and moderate Protestants in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see for example, Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), especially chapter 2; Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East-West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), especially chapter 5; Grant Wacker, "Second Thought on the Great Commission: Liberal Protestants and Foreign Missions, 1890-1940," in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 289-295. James Freeman Clarke, John Henry Barrows, and William Newton Clarke were among the influential American theorists of fulfillment theology in this era.

29. Despite this Christian triumphalist-sounding position, it should be noted that Fleming was a man of pragmatism who understood that non-Christian religions would in reality continue to exist, and that Christians should try to cooperate with non-Christians in practical matters such as social service. As early as the 1920s, he had suggested to regard other religions as allies in a battle against imminent social problems in the modern world, such as wars, racism, and economic disparities. See Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Attitudes toward Other Faiths* (New York: Association Press, 1928);

Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Ways of Sharing with Other Faiths* (New York: Association Press, 1929).

30. Fleming, *Christian Symbols in a World Community*, 59.

31. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 65.

32. In both the United States and Japan, extremely little is known about Yokei Sadakata. The single most reliable source written about him is a Japanese article, Shōko Itō and Takutoshi Inoue, "Sueshichiro Sadakata (Kaiseki)," *Kwansei Gakuin Shi Kiyō* 16 (2010): 183-200. The article offers a short biography of Sadakata with an extensive list of his paintings. *The First Temptation* is, however, not included in the list. As Sadakata's house in Tokyo was burnt in the March 1945 bombing of the city, *The First Temptation* was likely among the many works lost at that time. Interestingly, most of his paintings that can be found on the Internet today are not as explicitly syncretic or multi-religious as *The First Temptation* is, which suggests that this piece was not necessarily representative of his work. Harvard University's Houghton Library also possesses a portrait of Jesus by Sadakata, which was presented at an anniversary event of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1960, but the Jesus painted in this piece is not Buddhistic, either. Harvard University, Houghton Library, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, ABC 85:5, Box 3, File: "Portrait of Christ by Yokei Sadakata."

33. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 45.

34. Daniel Johnson Fleming, "The Inaugural Address by Professor Fleming: Christianizing a World," *Union Theological Seminary Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (1918): 13-16, 20. Fleming repeated such social gospel themes through his writings in the interwar period. See for example, Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Marks of a World Christian* (New York: Association Press, 1919); Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Building with India* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada; West Medford, MA: The Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1922); Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Whither Bound in Missions* (New York: Association Press, 1925).

35. Fleming, *Each with His Own Brush*, 45.

36. Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

37. Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, 10-11.

38. On Warner Sallman's *The Head of Christ* and its reception in the mid-twentieth-century United States, see David Morgan (ed), *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); David Morgan, *Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 248-254. Sallman first produced the piece in 1924 as a front cover of a small denominational magazine, and subsequently made several variations of it, but none gained particular popularity. Only in 1941 when he reproduced the work once more per request of a more popular publisher did it become a huge success.

39. On Tillich and the paradigm shift of artistic sensibility among liberal Protestant intellectuals in the postwar period, see Sally M. Promey, "Interchangeable Art: Warner Sallman and the Critics of Mass Culture" in *Icons of American Protestantism*, 148-80; Sally M. Promey, "Taste Cultures and the Visual Practice of Liberal Protestantism, 1940-1965," in *Practicing Protestants: Histories of the Christian Life in America*, ed. Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Leigh Schmidt, and Mark Valeri (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 250-293.

40. Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady, *The Bible through Asian Eyes* (Auckland, New Zealand: Pace Publishing; Kyoto, Japan; in association with the Asian Christian Art Association, 1991).

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