Spring 5-3-2023

Is This Our Story? Is This Our Song?: Discovering the Formational Experiences of Black Christians in Predominantly White Churches

Christopher Lynn Shields II
Lipscomb University, chrisshieldsII@gmail.com

IS THIS OUR STORY? IS THIS OUR SONG?

DISCOVERING THE FORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF BLACK CHRISTIANS IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CHURCHES

A PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE HAZELIP SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

AT LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

CHRISTOPHER LYNN SHIELDS II

NASHVILLE TENNESSEE

MAY 2023

This Doctor of ministry project is directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Hazelip School of Theology of Lipscomb University In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry

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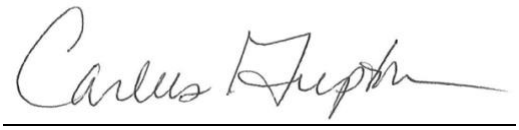


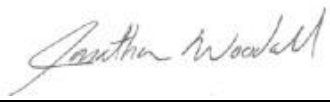
Director of Graduate Program

May 3rd, 2023

Date

Doctor of Ministry Project Committee

Dr. Judy Cummings, Chair



Dr. Jonathan Woodall

Dr. John York

ABSTRACT

This project explores the formative stories of Black Christians in Predominantly White churches. What has become of the Ministry of Reconciliation widely adopted in evangelical circles? What are the experiences of Black Christians in predominantly White Churches, many of whom have mirrored racialization in America? This project focuses on the synthesis of these two horizons and offers a critique, call, and creative reflection for readers of this project.

Chapter one serves as an introduction to the work and provides context of the researcher. Chapter two will theologically reflect on the ministry of reconciliation by considering its relationship to justice and community. Chapter three will further this reflection by exploring the ubiquitous effect of racialization on the American cultural landscape and on Christian efforts of reconciliation. Chapter four offers an explanation of the study of the experiences of Black Christians in predominantly White churches while chapter five will present the interview findings. The sixth and final chapter will analyze the findings and fuse them with theological and formational reflection to elucidate the intersecting meanings of these phenomena.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my dad. I miss you and want to be like you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is dedicated to the faithful servants of Christ who labor to create a loving, just, and transformative church. This project stands upon others' dedication to me.

For the dedication of my wife Kristan Shields, whose belief in me and commitment to my success means the world, I say thank you. I love you.

For the dedication of our children William, Tori, Wyatt, Taleah and Tyra, who have endured long days and long nights of dad needing to work instead of play, I say thank you. Fire up the video games and get ready to do ALL the things.

For the dedication of my sisters (yes, all my siblings are girls), thank you for helping me to learn empathy and practice intuition. It has served me in this work. I love you. You may now call me "Dr. Brother" that goes for you too Sierra.

For the dedication of my parents Chris and Donna Shields, I say thank you. I am more grateful than I know how to express in words. I owe everything to you. The faithfulness of God displayed in your love for me has been my foundation. None of this is possible without you.

Dad, I wish you could have seen me graduate in person. I know that you are proud of your favorite son…me…because I am your only son. May your wonder and joy live on in me.

For the dedication of the people in God's church who loved my family, and gave me space to learn and grow, I say thank you. Thank you for the potlucks, the songs, the sermons, and teaching me how to love the downtrodden. Please stop at nothing short of partnering with God to continually become communities who do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

For the dedication of my Cohort in the Doctor of Ministry in Missional and Spiritual Formation, I say Thank you. Your laughter, humility, vulnerability, and friendship endure. Friends, always remember "When freedom is close, the chains begin to ache…"

Thank you to my professors who "made a way when there was no way." You know who you are. I admonish you with the same thing I ask my children to say when they leave their Sunday school classes: "Thank you for teaching me!"

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Context

My current church is a predominantly White church with a storied history of intentionally engaging racial healing and reconciliation. Part of my personally discerned calling to this congregation was to help continue and further this important work. Those hopes have been somewhat resisted but mostly affirmed within the congregation. Many share an active hope for racial reconciliation and healing to continue as a part of the life of this church and more broadly in God's world. I have been a worship minister at this church since 2019, but I have worked and worshiped in multiethnic and White churches for much of my life. While the scope of this project emerges from my current context, it belongs to this larger context. Throughout the arc of my formative ministry experiences, each context has been deeply influenced by one consistent factor: I am a Black Christian worshiping in predominantly White churches. Even when those spaces are multi-ethnic, White cultural norms have been centered.

Ministry Challenge

More spaces are needed for Black Christians who attend predominantly White churches to reflect on their experiences. What are the stories that truly represent what it means to be a

Black Christian in a predominantly White church today? The events of the last few years have shone a critical light on a divided and racialized America. The names Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor (and many others) have become social phenomena marking a new wave of American social consciousness. Viral video footage of racial violence shocked many Americans into recognizing the divergent experiences of different communities that are built along racial fault lines. Simultaneously, the country was experiencing the disorienting effects of a global COVID-19 pandemic that highlighted disproportionately poor outcomes among minority populations. Essential workers kept everything going, putting themselves on the line in their work. Many Americans were quarantined at home facing new challenges, and as a result, more collective attention was focused on news outlets and social media platforms for information and understanding of the moments unfolding. There was a sudden and persistent need for wisdom and guidance from Black voices across all spaces within American life. This was particularly true in many White evangelical churches seeking to engage communities, congregations, and congregants in relevant ways.

Historically, the ministry of reconciliation has been the language of faith communities engaged in race related efforts. However, in this most recent wave of social consciousness, Anti-racism has taken center stage. Moreover, racial justice, which has been historically central to Black churches and socially organized non-religious movements, has gained polarizing significance in many White churches. Are churches to pursue justice or reconciliation as the desired outcome of race-informed work? Should we embrace anti-racism as the true litmus for race-informed work? Should reconciliation and unity be the measure of a race-informed life? Are racial reconciliation and racial justice mutually exclusive realities?

The breadth of questions has been outpaced by the cacophony of voices providing answers. The volume of voices made it very difficult for many people to discern to whom to listen. Confirmation bias has been an unfortunate consequence of this environment. Simply stated, if someone listens long enough, he will likely find someone else who confirms what he already believes, rather than being challenged by the position of someone who believes differently. If one Black voice is unpalatable, one can simply try a more suitable flavor. White churches listened to Black voices who spoke nationally, regionally, and sometimes, locally.

Many of these Black Christians faced the familiar double burden of making meaning for themselves while centering the knowledge-building of White co-workers, colleagues, congregants, and friends. What has been the effect of this reality on Black Christians in these spaces? What recent moments have become a part of the stories they will tell about themselves? What moments will be codified, as a new Spiritual understanding of God unfolds? How have Black Christians made sense of these events? How are they being formed by these interactions? Have interactions been experienced as an act of healing or unhelpful othering? These are important questions to answer. The scope of this project seeks to explore these notions by asking one key question: What are the formative stories of Black Christians in predominantly White churches?

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to help Black Christians reflect on the experiences that have been most formative to them as they have participated in predominantly White churches. This space must be created in order to discover the answer to the key question above.

Contribution to Ministry

It is the desire of this researcher to create a space for Black Christians in predominantly White churches to share their experiences and then offer these reflections as a gift to churches and individuals. The current cultural and ideological divides in our country are extensive and are growing. In my opinion this group is overlooked and overburdened within the larger conversation of race relations. They are often “Othered" by both Black communities and White communities while straddling ever-increasing gaps between people groups and experiences. My secondary hope is that this research can benefit churches and institutions like the ones I have served throughout my time in ministry. Many of these entities have placed a value on seeking to embody diversity and recognize the reconciliatory impulse important to their faith. I hope for leaders and practitioners to benefit from this research, and that it will provide more than just information. My hope is that they will have another window into the lived experiences of Black Christians among them.

Racial Reconciliation

In the late 20th century, American Christianity was confronted with complicity in racism.[1] In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King famously declared that “Sunday morning was the most segregated hour of the week.” The American Civil Rights Movement was in full swing, and King, a Baptist minister, believed that churches were culpable for perpetuating racial division. The American Civil Rights movement challenged racial constructs in the public square. All are affected by the wide reach of racism. Today, many share the understanding that racism’s reach includes White people, Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color. Racial hierarchy

[1] Corrie Little Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

affects all these groups. Nevertheless, Black and White individuals have been centered in racial understandings for decades because Whiteness and Blackness represent opposite extremes in racialization. This same focus follows herein.

This racialized hierarchical reality is prevalent across structures in American life. As King challenged, it is also true in churches. How do groups of Christians live out the Gospel where they are? Many adopted "racial reconciliation as 'God's one item agenda', and [asserted] that the Christian message is essential for improving race relations and people's socioeconomic condition in the United States."[2] My dad was fourteen years old and my mother ten years old when Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1969. My grandparents were in their late thirties and early forties, the age I am now. This history is not far off. It is recent. A proliferation of movements[3] emerged from the eventfulness of the American Civil Rights Movement. In keeping with an undercurrent of American revivalism, Promise Keepers emerged years later.

D.C. With My Dad

In 1997, a group of men from my racially blended home congregation in the south suburbs of Chicago attended the Promise Keepers[4] rally entitled "Stand in the Gap." My dad was forty-three and I was sixteen years old at that time. We rode to Washington, D.C. on a chartered bus holding men from multiple congregations across the Chicago-land area. A major

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[2] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the problem of race in America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

[3] Edwards, The Elusive Dream vii. She continues, "The movement began with African American Christians like Thomas Skinner, and John Perkins who had intense personal experiences with racism and racial segregation. Those men believed that the Gospel is about reconciling people to God and one another."

[4] Ibid., viii. Edwards adds, "Also at that time, bridging the racial divide in churches was emerging in some Christian circles as a litmus test of sorts, a measure of whether one was authentically living out the faith. Promise Keepers, an evangelical organization for men, had grown to be an influential force in evangelical circles, holding conferences across the country. Several years after it started in 1990, the organization decided to make racial reconciliation one of its primary commitments."

focus of the rally was racial reconciliation, and a need emerged of the need to hear from Black voices to help this cause. In addition to racially diversifying its slate of speakers, Promise Keepers made racial unity one of its "seven promises." The seven promises included trust in Christ, forming close friendships with a few men, practicing moral and sexual purity, loving one's wife and children, supporting one's church, overcoming prejudice, and encouraging others to do the same.[5] I was moved by the experience. I committed my life to Christ on that 24-hour trip, and I got baptized when we returned home. This was a deeply formative experience for me. The call to racial unity was embedded in one of my most formational Christian experiences.

We Are Here Now?

What has happened since that call? What has happened to the Black Christians who left majority Black churches in favor of White churches for the sake of racial integration? What has happened to Black Christians who remain in White Churches in order to live out their faith in light of racial reconciliation? How have these Christians been formed by these endeavors? How have their children been formed? Is there wisdom to be found in their experiences of longevity? All of these questions surround the central concerns of this project which are twofold: What has become of the Ministry of Reconciliation widely adopted in evangelical circles? What are the experiences of Black Christians in predominantly White Churches, many of whom have mirrored racialization in America? The synthesis of these two horizons offers a critique, call and creative reflection for readers of this project.

[5] Stephen Frazier and Jonathan Karl, "All Politics: Promise Keepers Pour into the Nation's Capital Oct. 3, 1997," www.cnn.com, last modified October 3, 1997, accessed February 15, 2023. https://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1997/10/03/promise.keepers/#:~:text=There%20are%20seven%20promises%20they.

Chapter two will theologically reflect on the ministry of reconciliation by considering its relationship to justice and community. Chapter three will further this reflection by exploring the ubiquitous effect of racialization on the American cultural landscape and on Christian efforts of reconciliation. Chapter four offers an explanation of the study of the experiences of Black Christians in predominantly White churches while chapter five will present the interview findings. The sixth and final chapter will analyze the findings and fuse them with theological and formational reflection to elucidate the intersecting meanings of these phenomena.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL CHAPTER

"Reconciliation and justice must go hand in hand; Without one, you cannot have the other."
Miroslav Volf

Introduction

The ministry of reconciliation has been a key concept for evangelical Christians who engage in race relations.[6] How effective have these ministries of reconciliation been? Are Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words still true, that the most segregated time of the week is on Sunday morning when White folks and Black folks gather for worship? Why aren't these efforts making an impact? While not questioning the sincerity of those trying to do the work, perhaps one should question the theological assumptions that continually lead to unchanged ends. Perhaps one should reconsider Scripture, particularly the reading of the Apostle Paul and his message to first century churches so that everyone can come to a better, more Godly practice of reconciliation and acts of justice.

Faith forms and informs how Christians engage and understand the world. This is particularly true of evangelical Christians who expect faith to answer important life questions and provide the resources needed to live faithfully in God's world.[7] Scripture is key to this formation because Scripture helps shape moral imagination. Scripture also provides testimony of

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[6] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 75

[7] Ibid., 75, "For many religious Americans, their faith-based assumptions and beliefs are central to the formation of their other views. People not only employ their cultural tools in the context in which they were first learned, but transpose or extend them to new and diverse situations. Thus, evangelicals like others use their religio-cultural tools not only in directly religious contexts, but in helping them to make sense of other issues like race relations."

God's engagement with the world. Additionally, Scripture aids the process of interpreting, storying, and re-storying human experience. It can point towards God's future activity by remembering God's acts in history. Katongole and Rice say, "This is what makes Scripture indispensable to the Christian journey of reconciliation. Scripture forms Christian memory and shapes concrete possibilities for life in the world."[8] Scripture chronicles and invites embodied human response to divine activity. This is no small claim. Engaging Scripture can hold rich possibilities of learning about God and meeting with God. Scripture contains the power to invite education and encounter, reading and rendezvous that move people past theorizing into theologizing.[9] To theorize is to speculate about something, to hold a certain set of ideas about a topic, to create frameworks for critique[10] where theologizing invites embodied meaning making and gives significance to it in a lived way. Theorizing systematizes knowing and its gaze moves from the big picture to the granular. It is often first concerned with rational explanation and lends itself towards closed concepts. Theologizing, in contrast, tends to approach knowing through particularity which can become a broader proclamation. It is often first concerned with "happenings" in need of interpretation and is contextual. What does this mean for scripture and reconciliation?

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[8] Emmanuel Katangole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 49.

[9] Willie James Jennings, Acts, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), Kindle Ed. In the Series Introduction, William Placher writes, "Historical-critical approaches to Scripture rule out some readings and commend others, but such methods only begin to help theological reflection and the preaching of the Word. By themselves, they do not convey the powerful sense of God's merciful presence that calls Christians to repentance and praise; they do not bring the church fully forward in the life of discipleship. It is to such tasks that theologians are called." (loc.191).

[10] Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2: "Theory as 'the attempt to govern interpretations of particular texts by appealing to an account of interpretation in general' is impossible, insofar as it claims to be above, or separate from, or not implicated in, the practices it seeks to 'govern'."

As aforementioned, Scripture holds rich possibilities for learning about God and knowing God. Scripture's testimony about itself is that this pregnant possibility is empowered by the Holy Spirit.[11] Reading testimonies of encounters with God is different from postulating prerequisites for potential personal encounters. Reading Scripture can become an encounter with the divine. A charitable reading of Scripture keeps open the real possibility that God loves us and that the love of Christ is so compelling, that the reader experiences that love.

As for reconciliation, Alan Jacobs contends that "It is the kind of question that has to be answered through reflective living. The answer has to be discovered or established as the result of a process, personal and social, which essentially cannot formulate the answer in advance, except in an un-specific way."[12] In other words, reconciliation must spring forth from the particularity of lived experience before it can be a theory governing any portion of life. This is precisely what makes the account in Scripture *as* testimony important. These are testimonies of lived experiences that create the need to articulate those lived experiences. God is active in this process to bring about God's reconciling love. In light of the priorities of charitable reading and encounter through testimony, the reader is invited into a story of reconciliation from Scripture. The account concerns Saul of Tarsus. Saul experienced reconciliation with God. The Spirit revealed the resurrected Christ to Saul. This was Christ whom he had been persecuting.

> Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they

[11] Richard Foster, ed., *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible with the Deuterocanonical Books* (San Fransisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006), John 16:13.

[12] Jacobs, *Theology of Reading.* 2.

> heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
>
> Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.[13]

The experience of Saul is a storied response to divine activity. In his commentary on Acts, Willie James Jennings reminds us of important truths about who Saul is.

> Saul is a killer. We must never forget this fact. He kills in the name of righteousness, and now he wants legal permission to do so. This is the person who travels the road to Damascus, one who has the authority to take life either through imprisonment or execution. No one is more dangerous than one with the power to take life and who already has mind and sight set on those who are a threat to a safe future.[14]

In a stunning interpretation of Saul's Damascus Road experience, Jennings goes on to say,

> Such a person is a closed circle relying on the inner coherence of their logic. Their authority confirms their argument, and their argument justifies their actions, and their actions reinforce the appropriateness of their authority. Violence, in order to be smooth, elegant, and seemingly natural, needs people who are closed circles. The disciples of the Lord, the women and men of the Way, have no chance against Saul. They have no argument and certainly no authority to thwart his zeal. They are diaspora betrayers of the faith who are a clear and present danger to Israel. This is how Saul sees them. His rationality demands his vision of justice. But what Saul does not yet know is that the road to Damascus has changed. It is a space now inhabited by the wayfaring Spirit of the Lord.[15]

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[13] Acts 9:1-19 (NRSV).

[14] Jennings, *Acts*, 90.

[15] Ibid., 90-91.

When Saul encounters the resurrected and glorified Christ[16] on this road to Damascus, he is changed and given a new name. Saul becomes the Apostle Paul. The encounter with Christ began changing his identity. Paul narrates this Damascus Road encounter, which also provides space for continued interaction with this resurrected Christ. Paul gives testimony to this fact in Acts chapter 22. After describing his education, his zeal for God,[17] and his persecution of Christ followers through binding and imprisonment,[18] Paul reflects on his Damascus Road experience, revealing that his salvation is immediate and ongoing as this story unfolds, as his testimony reveals, "While I was on my way, and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me 'Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?' I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' Then he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.'"[19] He asked the voice what he should do, and the voice spoke back!

> The Lord said to me 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.' Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus. A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well-spoken of by all the Jews living there, came to me; and standing beside me he said, 'Saul, regain your sight!' In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. Then he said 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be His witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. And now, why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.'[20]

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[16] Jacobus Kok and Walter P. Maqoma, "The *Imago Dei Weltanschauung* as Narrative Motif within the Corinthian Correspondence," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37. 1 (March 31, 2016). On the Damascus Road, Paul, too, saw the glory of God. But there was a shape to it. Paul beheld 'the image (eikori) of God', the glorified Christ. In the heavenly Christ the invisible God, who cannot be seen, has perfectly and fully revealed himself (cf. Col 1:15). The glorified Christ is the ultimate and eschatological revelation of God.

[17] Foster, ed., *Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*, 2025.

[18] Acts 22:4.

[19] Acts 22:4-6.

[20] Acts 22:12-16.

This is a conversion story. It has all the major elements included in a celebrated conversion: confrontation, revelation, grace, repentance, trust, growing interdependence, restoration, and calling. As the story unfolds, Paul continues to encounter Christ. In one instance, through prayer, Paul recounts his past sinfulness through the public lynching of Stephen saying "...in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him"[21]. During prayer Paul is warned by Christ to flee Jerusalem because of the imminent danger Paul finds himself in, due to his testimony about Christ. It is by the grace of God that the one who lived by the sword would not die by the sword on that day. Paul continues,

> To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: That the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from among the dead, that he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.[22]

The effects of the Damascus Road experience linger and bear fruit in Paul's life. He asked on the road to Damascus "Who Are You Lord?" and by the grace of God, God revealed Godself as none other than the resurrected and glorified Christ who is the perfect image of God. Jennings says,

> The mustard seed that was planted now grows strong, and what was hidden to the wise will be revealed. The Lord has a name. This is the bridge that has been crossed in Israel. The Lord and Jesus are one. This is the revelation that now penetrates Saul's being and will transform his identity. He turns from the abstract Lord to the concrete Jesus. A future beckons in the pivot from holy faith to holy flesh…. Saul moves from an abstract obedience to a concrete one, from the Lord he aims to please to the One who will direct him according to divine pleasure.[23]

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[21] Acts 22:19

[22] Acts 26:22-23

[23] Jennings, *Acts*, 91-92.

This divine pleasure, or divine will, makes concrete claims on Paul's life and his transformed identity. Paul now interprets his life in light of Christ's reconciling work toward him. It has changed who he is, how he sees, and what he does. This reality is reflected throughout his writings to his churches. He is the apostle to the Gentiles, making Christ known among them in participation with God's desire and activity. In Galatians, Paul says that he is an apostle "sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead."[24] He sends grace and peace to the Church in Ephesus as " an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,"[25] and in the same letter he says, "for surely you have heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me, for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation…. I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles."[26] In Philippians, Paul recalls the religious and social accomplishments of his former identity but proclaims, "yet whatever I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."[27]

The blending of Jews and Gentiles into a new people in Christ is costly and worthwhile work. Paul participates in the Spirit's work of revealing Christ and creating communities of believers around this revelation. Paul does not withhold the personal nature of his encounters with Christ in his correspondence with these churches as they endeavor towards becoming a new

[24] Galatians 1:1.

[25] Ephesians 1:1.

[26] Ephesians 3:7-8.

[27] Philippians 3:7.

people in Christ. Rather, Paul rehearses God's grace towards him and proclaims the Gospel to the Corinthians Church saying,

> Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.[28]

Paul is clearly in relationship with these churches. There is honesty and vulnerability in these writings. There is a truth here as well that cannot be overlooked. As explained by Jennings:

> There is a stark truth here in this conversion so poignant that we sometimes ignore its abiding effect on us. Saul experienced the Lord Jesus. He encountered him, and this made Saul vulnerable. Experiencing the Lord Jesus makes us vulnerable. It is impossible to sufficiently explain an experience of the Lord, to make it a winning argument, or to present it as irrefutable justification for one's life choices. We must not run from this vulnerability supposing that we can overcome it by denying experience its place in witness or juxtaposing something called reason as over against it as a separate way of giving testimony. Soon Saul will present arguments, cogent ones that draw on all his knowledge and rhetorical skill and make a powerful case for faith in Jesus.[29]

At this moment the reader is invited to pause and reflect on this story of reconciliation. The narrative of Paul becomes the case study of a person to whom God reveals Christ and reconciles with. Through this conversion Paul is becoming a reconciler of others to God when he makes the move from theorizing to theologizing, from seeing Scripture as prerequisites to

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[28] 1st Corinthians 15:1-10.

[29] Jennings, *Acts*, 92.

understanding the Hebrew Scriptures as “testimonies of God encounter” in which Paul is a new vulnerable participant.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Paul lives as one who has been reconciled to God and to others. Paul has not merely gained right status before God: He is being transformed into something new. Paul’s salvation is initiated by God, happens in the presence of others, and is dependent upon the obedience of Ananias to heal him. Paul becomes emissary to the Gentiles by way of God’s desire for him and for the world God loves. Paul's way of seeing and understanding is *being* transformed through participation in this broader transforming work of God, in Christ, by the Spirit. All the while, Paul is making sense of what has happened, is happening, and will happen in Christ, through the Spirit, by the will of God. There is a thoroughgoing nature to his reflection that points towards a very present future. This working out of his encounters with Christ is more than theorizing. Paul is theologizing. Insofar as this theologizing is part of his transformation, it is theosis. Paul is becoming something new. Paul is becoming Christ. Paul knows that Christ is not only making claims on his life, but Christ is working interpersonally, politically, and on a cosmic level. It is this Apostle Paul who writes the words of reconciliation that are famously found in 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2.

> For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who

> knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says
>
> "At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
> and on the day of Salvation I have helped you."
>
> See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation.

Paul's experience of reconciliation is his justification before God. Interestingly, it elucidates a fuller notion of salvation offered by God. In Paul's conversion narrative he is in the presence of others. His life is interrupted, and he encounters Christ. He is in need of healing, and his healing is contingent upon another's obedience (who is also transformed by their encounter). Paul is restored to former enemies, repents, changes, is baptized, is offered hospitality, and is given a new name. He is justified by God into a just community.

Biblical justice is not retributive, but restorative. The just saving of God restores Paul. The telos of God's restoration is not to recover a lost version of oneself, but God restores humans past their previous capabilities into the life of Christ. Thus, God's saving act is literally an act of new creation. Paul is in Christ. Christ became like us so that we might become like him. Christ, being fully God embodies the saving justice of God, not retributive wrath. Christ is saving humanity from the separation and death created by sin, so that humankind might live for God.

Paul is not simply being saved from sins. He is saved from sins for God's purpose in Christ. Paul is reconciled to become a reconciler. He is liberated to become a liberator. Christ was revealed to Paul so that Paul, through God, could reveal Christ to others. Paul is being transformed so that Paul, through the Spirit, might help transform others. This happens in community, where reconciliation, liberation, and transformation can be manifested in God's just community.

Justification, Justice, and Identity

Bruce C Birch rightly explains, "Biblically speaking, justice is not an autonomous ethical principle. It is a comprehensive, covenantal, relational mandate."[30] Typically however, scholars do not speak of Paul in this manner. Missional scholar Michael J. Gorman jests, "The phrase 'Paul and justice' rolls off the tongue no more rapidly than does the phrase 'Paul and peace.' In fact, it probably rolls off more slowly if at all."[31] In his writings, Paul clearly cares about justification[32] and being justified.[33] Doesn't Paul care about the things God cares about? What is to be made of the apparent absence of the prophetic tradition in much of Paul's writing?

Jesus employs this prophetic tradition when he quotes Isaiah 61:1 as his first synagogue sermon recorded in Luke 4:18-19. Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."[34] In his full prophetic voice, Jesus declares, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." He also says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness[35] for they will be filled."[36]

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[30] Bruce C. Birch, "Reclaiming Prophetic Leadership," *Ex Auditu* 22 (2006) 11-13.

[31] Michael J Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission,* The Gospel and Our Culture Series (GOME) (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 212.

[32] Romans 4:25; 5:16; 5:18 (All passages that contain the word 'justification')

[33] Romans 2:13; 3:4; 3:20; 3:24, 3:28, 4:2; 5:1; 5:9; 8:30, 1Cor 4:4; 6:11, Gal 2:16; 2:17; 3:11; 3:24; 5:4, 1Tim 3:16, Titus 3:7; (All passages that contain the word 'justified').

[34] Luke 4:18-19.

[35] Thirst for 'justice/righteousness/*diakania*'... they will be filled.

[36] Matthew 5:3-6

Paul, like Jesus, alludes to the authority of speaking in the prophetic tradition when he quotes Isaiah 49:8 in 2 Corinthians 6:1: "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on the day of Salvation I have helped you," but there are few such instances in his writings. Paul cares deeply about being "in Christ" yet this prophetic tradition is not at the forefront of his writing. Paul cares deeply about the God of justice, yet notions of justification (right standing and status before God) seem to be more present than justice (care for the marginalized and the poor). This is a major question because God's justice, and righteousness are two of the most essential characteristics of God. Gorman says this about the biblical witness of justice in the Old Testament:

> The Scriptures of Israel, the Christian Old Testament, testify that one of the things God cares most about is justice (*mishpat*; LXX *krima* and related words) and its cousin, righteousness (*tsedheq, tsedhaqah*; LXX *dikaiosynē*). Discussing the biblical injunction to "listen to" YHWH, Walter Brueggemann rightly claims that even though this call to listen has many dimensions, "We may say in sum that Israel's obligation is to do justice."[37] The two terms *mishpat* and *tsedhaqah* often appear together, constituting an idiom of sorts that might be translated as "social justice."[38] 'The prophetic passion for justice is the social face of righteousness.' Yet, biblically speaking, justice is not an autonomous ethical principle. It is a comprehensive, covenantal, relational mandate. It is part of being in relationship with God, part of "walking" with God. [39]

The people of God will be known as a just community, in keeping with the identity of God. In fact, many of the Prophets' polemic against Israel concerns their inability to be a just community. Israel was to be a 'light to the nations' precisely because they would be a just

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[37] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 421.

[38]Gorman, Becoming the Gospel, 260; also see Christopher J H Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 257. For some, the term "social justice" connotes a humanly conceived project with certain fundamental dimensions arising from the Enlightenment project. It should be clear from this chapter, however, that the social justice of the prophets and (Gorman argues that) of Paul is decidedly theological and theocentric. Indeed, for Paul it is also decidedly Christological and Christocentric.

[39] Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 213.

community through whom the nations of the world would come to know the character and the ways of YHWH. The words of the prophet Micah ring loudly in this assertion. Micah 6:6-8 says,

> With what should I approach the LORD
> and bow down before God on high?
> Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,
> with year-old calves?
> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
> with many torrents of oil?
> Should I give my oldest child for my crime;
> the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?
> He has told you, human one, what is good and
> what the LORD requires from you:
> to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

Walk humbly before your God. Walking humbly is an embodied spirituality. Taken together these assertions characterize how one belongs to God. Gorman continues by saying,

> Thus justice, biblically speaking, is a dimension of spirituality. And if spirituality is ultimately about having such deep communion with God that one takes on God's character, then doing justice is one of the richest spiritual experiences and practices. Why? Because the God of the Bible is just and practices justice. This divine justice is rooted in God's character (YHWH is "a lover of justice;" Ps. 99:4) and God's *hesed,* or steadfast covenant love. Accordingly, the corollary covenantal command for God's people to love their neighbor finds expression in practices of justice. To be like God means to do justice. At the same time, justice is obviously about mission, about participating in the activity of this justice-loving, justice-doing God.[40]

Western Christianity's fixation on justification focuses on the vertical dimension of faith (towards God), often to the neglect of the horizontal dimension of faith (towards others). This chief concern of Martin Luther has shaped the western Christian imagination on this fact. To this formation one mustn't forget John Calvin, whose notions about God has created a fixation on soteriology and assurance of right standing before God in the wake of not being able to control one's status before God. These powerful forces keep much of the Western Christian imagination focused on divine activity over and against human responsibility.

[40] Ibid., 214.

In our bifurcated piety, sacrifice (worship) trumps mercy (hospitality), Spirituality (covenant relationship with God) trumps justice (covenant relationship with others), loving God trumps loving neighbor. However, when Jesus said that the whole law and prophetic tradition hinged upon these two commands: loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself. He wasn't elevating the first to the erasure of the second. Modernity's lens has kept these impulses in separate lanes, bifurcating justification and justice, and spirituality and mission in a way that was not true for Paul's Jewish upbringing. The new perspective[41] on Paul reunites these impulses in a faith- altering way. Gorman looks at the work of James D. G. Dunn for his new perspective on Paul.

> Dunn not only summarized his new perspective on justification with respect to Jews and Gentiles, but also argued for the importance of justice biblical, saving, restorative, relational justice in Paul's theology of justification. This "horizontal dimension of righteousness" …was inseparable in Jewish thought from the "vertical relationship": right relations with God cannot exist without right relations with others, especially the disadvantaged.[42]

Language limitations are part of the problem. English splits 'just' and 'right' into different word families, while Hebrew and Greek have one word family to express these concepts. However, Gorman says that "Justification is ultimately about justice, about God putting the world to rights,"[43] which is what Scholar N.T Wright also says. Gorman takes this

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[41] Robert J. Cara, "Justification and the New Perspective on Paul," *The Gospel Coalition*, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/justification-new-perspective-paul/. The New perspective on Paul has 5 components. 1) Paul was not arguing against a legalistic works righteousness view because it did not exist. Rather Saunders view of "Covenantal Nomism" is adopted. 2) Justification is not the traditional Protestant view. 3) 'Works of the law' primarily refers to Jewish boundary markers: Sabbath, circumcision, and food laws. 4) Paul's gentile mission is the contest for his teaching on justification 5) There is diversity of opinion among scholars of justification, but the standard view adopted by Dunn and NT. Wright, is that *initial justification* is by faith, and recognizes covenant status (ecclesiology), while *final justification* is partially by works (produced by the Spirit).

[42] Gorman, *Becoming The Gospel*. 218

[43] Ibid., 220, quoting N.T. Wright, New Perspectives on Paul, 10th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference, August 2003. See the full quote: "Justification is ultimately about justice, about God putting the world to rights, with his chosen and called people as the advance guard of that new creation, charged with being and bringing signs of

linguistic correction further by suggesting that Paul's concern for justice was even more central than the "new perspective on Paul" has maintained. He offers seven concrete explorations as to why this is the case, each section building upon the next to illuminate the link between justification and justice. They include the linguistic link, the human condition and injustice, justification as transformative participation, the justice of God in the cross of Christ, Paul's own transformation, and justice and justification in the Christian community. The final one is a multifaceted look through passages in First and Second Corinthians. The next sections will explore many of these notions and culminate in a look at Second Corinthians 5:21 and the surrounding passages.

The Linguistic Link Between Justification and Justice

As mentioned before, English divides and subdivides a word family that in Greek and Hebrew are all part of one word family.[44] These two word families are the "right-" family (right, righteous, righteousness, right wise, etc.) and the "just-" family (just, justification, justice, justify, etc.).[45] English translations can either hide or reveal the Greek linguistic connections between "right' and 'just', but generally unfortunately they hide them. Gorman says this.

> "Like most translations, the NRSV prefers the translation of the adjectives and nouns as 'righteous' and 'righteousness' even where various words in the dikaio-family appear together and the verbs are rendered as forms of 'justify.' The Roman Catholic NAB translation is only slightly better. Readers/hearers of most English translations are therefore left with little or no clue that justification and justice are interrelated in Paul's theology." [46]

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hope, of restorative justice, to the world. Let's put the justice back in justification; and, as we do so, remind ourselves whose justice it is, and why."

[44] Ibid. The *Dikaio* word family contains words (*dikaioō, dikaiosynē, dikaios*, etc.).

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

What does this mean? In English translations, righteousness and justice are separated from one another in spaces where they should not be and would not be given the Jewish context of Paul and the single Greek word family. This underscores the privatized individualistic notions of faith and creates a bias in translation by leaving out "justice" and overwriting it with righteousness as a preference in translation. This matters because righteousness is a legal or judicial category while justice is a social one. If the word justice is left in the text in places where righteousness has been supplanted as a change in status before God, then it changes the meaning of key texts by placing emphasis on the vertical relationship without an implied dual emphasis on the horizontal relationship as well. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul says, "He became sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." What if it read like this instead? "He became sin who knew no sin so that we might become the *justice* of God." In conclusion, Gorman says the following:

> [it would be preferable to] keep the verb 'justify' and follow Dunn's suggestion of using the noun phrase 'the justice of God' God's saving, liberating, and restorative justice to show the close connection between justification and justice. Moreover, 'the saving justice of God,' emphasizing the phrase 'of God,' reminds us also that Paul's gospel is about a special kind of divine character trait and activity God's justice that is radically different from other kinds of justice."[47]

The Human Condition and Injustice

Gorman is also concerned with the human condition and injustice. This notion is helpful to underscore Paul's description of the human condition that justification is supposed to affect, "that God's action in Christ is intended to rectify. This situation may be described as one of covenantal dysfunctionality people's disordered relations toward God (the "vertical" relation)

[47] Ibid., 223.

and toward one another (the "horizontal" relations),"[48] or ungodliness and wickedness respectively. Paul's descriptions of sin include both dimensions and are a warping of covenant faithfulness in each case.

Some translations illuminate the presence of injustice as sin better than others. Romans 1:18 in the Common English Bible says, "God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodly behavior and the injustice of human beings who silence the truth with injustice." In contrast, the New International Version reads, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness." Injustice is social while wickedness can be taken to be a reiteration of sinfulness against God. In other words, the former passage says that sin is against God (Ungodly behavior/injustice) and people (injustice), while the latter says that sin is against God (ungodly behavior/wickedness) and perhaps against God again (wickedness). It is possible to leave out a concept of sin against people because wickedness breaks a moral standard of God, while injustice can be understood as another moral standard against God. Given Protestantism's preference towards piety, most collapse sinfulness into a category that can only happen against God except in explicit cases. Consequently, those with a theological stance that makes some humans no greater than cattle while others bear the image of God, lack a theological or moral impetus for seeing social subjugation as sinful.

Moreover, if one interprets Romans 1 as God giving people over to their sinfulness and thus abandoning them, then, Gorman explains, "If justification does not renew and restore human

[48] Ibid.

relationships, it does not address the human condition as Paul perceives it."[49] Furthermore, Gorman investigates "injustice" more fully:

> The various lists and brief discussions of symptoms of the disease "injustice" in Romans 1:18–3:20 are rather comprehensive, and God's project of restoration and renewal includes, for Paul, the undoing of it all anything and everything evil the human race, or any individual, can concoct. One of the least noticed of these evil manifestations is violence. The presence of violence in our homes, on our streets, within nations, and between peoples separated by thousands of miles all are signs of the need for justification and reconciliation, both among people and between people and God, for all of this, Paul and his scriptural sources say, is rooted in humanity's rejection of God: "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (cf. Rom. 1:18-23). If justification is supposed to repair the human condition, then justification must address injustice, including violence. That is, justification must do something about injustice by making liberation from practices of injustice possible and practices of justice attainable. That is, given the human condition, the justification of the unjust will mean both liberation and transformation.[50]

Romans 3:25-18 references Old Testament texts[51] when it says, "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes."[52] The justification of God should change the conditions on earth between people, a truth that was not lost on Saul of Tarsus who was transformed from a killer into a brother of those he formerly persecuted.

Justification as Transformative Participation

"For many people, especially in the Protestant traditions" Gorman writes, "justification means simply acquittal, a divine pronouncement on the unrighteous that they are counted as righteous by God because of Christ's death for them and because of his righteousness."[53] The

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 224-225

[51] Quoting from Isa. 59:7-8; Prov. 1:16; and Ps. 36:1.

[52] Romans 3:15-18, CEB.

[53] Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 225.

linguistic complexity of translation jumps off the page yet again when considering Paul's writing about righteousness in the opening pages of Romans. Gorman offers an alternative and plausible translation of Romans 1:16-18. When leaving in the verbs for justice, it reads like thus:

> For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the saving justice of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is just, that is, part of the community of the just, will live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those who by their injustice suppress the truth.

The communal aspect of Christian living is evident, and Paul understands justification as a life-giving invitation into just community. Furthermore, baptism initiates a connection to this just community:

> Interpreting baptism and the life it inaugurates as participation in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, Paul refuses to separate this reality from justification. In fact, he uses a form of the verb *dikaioō (dedikaiōtai;* Rom. 6:7) to express his conviction that the inseparable realities of baptism and justification constitute a divine deliverance, a kind of release from slavery and new exodus. Specifically, it is deliverance from the reign of sin and injustice into justice and life. [54]

In this text, Paul employs liberation language in a more specific way. Those who are liberated from the effects of sin are liberated not simply for their own ends, but as tools of justice in God's world. Humanity is liberated from bondage and decay (much like creation is described as waiting to be liberated from bondage and decay, in Romans 8) that are the results of sin. The theme of new creation found in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is poignant here. New creation is emerging from within those God saves. Insofar as participation is concerned, Gorman says, "The human condition portrayed in Romans 1:18–3:20 is being addressed and undone. Justification means that the unjust are being liberated from injustice to live justly. It means resurrection from death to life, from participation in sin and death to participation in justice and life."[55] Gorman offers a

[54] Ibid., 227

[55] Ibid.

new definition for justification that includes all the dimensions that have been heretofore recognized:

> Justification, then, is about reconciliation, covenant participation and faithfulness, community, resurrection, and life. And this reality is brought about by death Christ's death for us in the past and our death with him in the present, all due to God's initiative and grace. Those who are justified who are in Christ will be conformed to his covenantal faithfulness and love.[56]

Gorman continues in summary by saying,

> This symbiosis of faith and love is not an addendum to justification but is constitutive of justification itself the restoration of right covenant relations. Put differently, Paul understands justification as participatory transformation in the justice of God in Christ that creates a just people. Justice is inherent in justification.[57]

The shape and nature of this transformative participation creates exciting possibilities for the church. For instance, evangelistic efforts will not be unidimensional. The saving message of the gospel will necessarily expand beyond achieving 'right' status before God (vertically) and include a message of liberation, oppression, bondage, sin, and any malformations that hinders human flourishing (horizontally). The good news of Christ can include healing, and peacemaking as active components of reconciliation to God for the sake of participation in the beloved community. The beloved community is the just community, which is a transformative community. The community is loved by God and therefore loving. It is justified by God and embodies God's justice. It is transformed by God and is transformative. As the community assumes the identity of this loving, just, transforming God the missional activity which flows from this identity is broad and lifegiving.

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

A body of believers who are anchored in their identity need not fear partnership in works of justice that do not originate through their efforts. If justice is reconciliation and reconciliation is something that bodies of believers pursue, how should this come about? Does this mean that anything goes? Will any work of justice suffice, no matter its aim? What would be good for the just community of God to engage? What might be harmful? How does a transformative community discern what to engage and what not to engage.

Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice describe three positions that tend to present themselves in the sphere of churches pursuing justice work, each a tale of caution and space for learning. The first is reconciliation as celebrating diversity. As they observe, "One of the most widespread and cherished notions of our time is that reconciliation is about promoting diversity in a pluralistic world."[58] However, diversity needs a purpose beyond itself. Without this greater purpose it can devolve into the most expedient benefit or come apart because it is too difficult to maintain. The middle road creates the opposite effect of diversity's greatest benefit. "Too often 'diversity' becomes a cheap form of coalition building by essentially silencing difference, as in interreligious efforts that presume that all religions are basically the same."[59] The second option is reconciliation that addresses injustice. According to Gorman, the chief purpose of justification within the church is to be an embodied community of justice. On this point, however, there is some disagreement.

Katongole and Rice, for example, recognize the position some occupy where "there can be no talk of reconciliation without justice." Katongole and Rice do not hold that the pursuit of

[58] Katongole and Rice, *Reconciling All Things.* 28.

[59] Ibid., 30.

justice is the singular vocation of the church. Nevertheless, when justice is pursued, they recognize the nuance needed to engage this work, especially as it relates to racial work:

> Often reconciliation has been evoked as a naive 'can't we all get along' sentimentality or as the agenda for the powerful to 'move on' without facing intricate demands for justice. Much is at stake in who is saying 'reconciliation', what they mean by it, and the experience or story out of which they speak. 'No reconciliation without justice' can be an attempt to resist a politically or historically naive vision of reconciliation that doesn't take into account the complex processes and long history to which people's sense of who they are has become connected to the past and its conflicts.[60]

Although the above quote can extend beyond the conversation on race, the authors end this section describing a personal experience at a racial reconciliation conference. Rice recalls that Black Christians in attendance at the event had much to say about what co-conversation must accompany or precede conversations about reconciliation. Liberation and justice were among these prerequisites:

> "Talk of reconciliation alone, especially when it sounds like a call to forget the past and move on threatens not only the future of particular communities, but individual identities as well. Martin Luther King Jr often talked about the need for African Americans to be integrated into power, not out of it. Minority groups feel this in particular. They know intimately the dangers of the false prophets who say 'Peace, peace' but there is no peace. (Jer 8)"[61]

There are also extreme responses to this complexity. One is a realism that can devolve into a cynical utilitarianism. The other extreme is to embrace complexity without a vision for the future. With regards to realism, people concede that war, political strife, self-interest, and sin will always be a part of the human experience, so the Church's highest aim should be to do the most good for the most people, believing that "This is what 'justice' promises."[62] Another realism is

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 31.

[62] Ibid., 32.

one which believes so powerfully in the transforming mysterious power that raised Jesus from the dead that many acts are "covered" by Jesus. However, those who ascribe to this view say, "Acts of injustice can be punished, repented of, publicly named and denounced, or even repaid, but they can never be undone. No act of justice can make up for the horrific loss of an abducted child or the trauma of a near death beating."[63]

Embracing complexity by creating intricate systems to undo structural evils and sins can be invigorating, but these efforts often lack the hope of a future of friendship between former enemies. There is little hope of a beloved community at the end of justice work that collapses others' humanity into "part of the system" and discards those persons along with the broken systems they symbolize. Again, it is important to understand who is asking for reconciliation and what story and experiences they are operating out of. The questions, "Whose justice?" and "Justice towards what end?" remain important and must be answered in this paradigm.

Rice and Katongole's third picture is of reconciliation as firefighting. This is a state where a church pursuing justice runs after each next crisis or urgent need to "put out the fire." They say, "The image that comes to mind is that of firefighting, trying to "put out" (or at least minimize) local and national fires of conflict, division, war, and brokenness. In firefighting we always need more water, more equipment, better trained firefighters. The focus is on better techniques."[64] In this paradigm it may be easy to miss God's particular missional invitation to become the loving, just, transformational community in a specific time, place, or social location. Reconciliation as firefighting, also reduces the wide invitation to participation because professionals are needed to carry out specialized initiatives. "Reconciliation as firefighting

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., 33.

transforms the church into a social agency. It is often unclear whether what Christians believe in practice makes any difference for what reconciliation looks like. The church fails to offer a unique answer to that crucial question, reconciliation toward what?"[65]

As mentioned before, Gorman contends that, "Biblically speaking, justice is not an autonomous ethical principle. It is a comprehensive, covenantal, relational mandate."[66] Gorman also says,

> It is important to be crystal clear about this, as with peacemaking (remembering that, biblically speaking, justice and peace are actually both part of one reality, shalom). Christian commitment to justice must never be separated from Christian commitment to Jesus. When the two are severed, even partially, the Christian understanding of justice inevitably morphs into a sub-Christian one. This does not mean that Christians can only work for justice with fellow Christians, or that Christians can only work for justice when they are allowed to speak the name of Jesus. But the shape of justice for which they work must conform to Christ.[67]

Katongole and Rice say that "At the center of pain, God breaks in to reveal a new creation within a landscape of deep brokenness."[68] Not just any justice will do. The importance of a cruciform justice emerges here.

Justice of God in the Cross of Christ

> The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved. It is written in scripture: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent. Where are the wise? Where are the legal experts? Where are today's debaters? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish? In God's wisdom, he determined that the world wouldn't come to know him through its wisdom. Instead, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those who are called—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's power and

[65] Ibid., 34.

[66] Birch, "Reclaiming Prophetic Leadership," 11-13.

[67] Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel,* 229.

[68] Katongole & Rice, *Reconciling All Things,* 34.

> God's wisdom. This is because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.[69]

Christ crucified is both the power and the wisdom of God. Gorman says that "The correlation between justification and justice for Paul has its ultimate origin in Christ crucified as the supreme manifestation of divine justice. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul proclaims that 'Christ Jesus… became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.'"[70] God's preference for the weak, the marginalized, and the poor is displayed in the nature of Christ's character, life, death, and redeeming work. Therefore, Gorman says, "We should therefore speak about divine justice and cruciform justice."[71] It is possible for us to share in the faith of Christ because of Christ's reconciliatory movement towards humanity.

Allan Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss DeYoung speak into this reality when they define reconciliation in Greek. They say, "The Greek word for reconciliation (*katallage*) literally means 'to change, or exchange; to effect change.' When we are reconciled we exchange places 'with the other' and are in solidarity with, rather than against the other."[72] This exchange has an inherent mutuality because, as they explain, "Reconciliation is a process that causes us to overcome alienation through identification and in solidarity with 'the other' thus making peace and restoring relationships."[73] While Boesak and DeYoung are describing the interpersonal or

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[69] 1st Corinthians 1:18-25 (CEB)

[70] Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 229.

[71] Ibid., 230.

[72] Allan Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 12.

[73] John W De Grunchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 21, quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM Press, 1971), 300.

"horizontal" dimension of faith, all must recognize that this is made possible because Christ has gone first in this .

"The Word became flesh and made his home among us."[74] This is particularly powerful because as Christ emptied himself, came in human likeness, took on the form of a slave, and became obedient to death on the cross, it could only mean one thing. God was enduring the same. In his book *Cruciformity*, Gorman says, "The importance of the confession Jesus is Lord is not only that Jesus is divine, but also that God is Christlike."[75] This exchange is less a 'substitutionary atonement', and more a 'hospitable opening of the life of God' to suffering and to the fullness of the human experience. That which God experiences, God can redeem within God's life.

Paul writes, "It is because of God that you are in Christ Jesus. He became wisdom from God for us. This means that he made us righteous and holy, and he delivered us."[76] Another powerful aspect of this divine deliverance is its radical nature to forgive all. Paul was penning these words, as a Jewish man, prior to Christianity becoming the ideological center of the Roman world. While he shared some benefit from his status as a Roman citizen in a Roman occupied world, he was still an ethnic minority. Christianity was still a subversive movement within a colonized world. This world held clear delineation between oppressors with power and oppressed without power. Allan Boesak and Curtiss DeYoung authors of *Radical Reconciliation* wrote from within a similar cultural phenomenon. Boeseck and DeYoung write from the context of Apartheid in South Africa. DeYoung contends that "The Pauline emphasis on reconciliation

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[74] John 1:14a (CEB).

[75] Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 18.

[76] 1st Corinthians 1:30.

emerged from his understanding of the life, message, death and resurrection of a Roman colonial subject named Jesus, from the town of Nazareth in the occupied territory of Galilee."[77]

The Roman Empire used crucifixion as "an instrument for terrorizing subject peoples by publicly torturing to death individuals who Rome considered politically troublesome."[78] There was meant to be a clear delineation between powerful and powerless, between oppressed and oppressor. Jesus' resurrection turned those notions of power upside down. Moreover, the cross was changed from an instrument of power and death to the symbol of the liberation from captivity to power. Christ crucified became the means of salvation for both the oppressed and the oppressor, for victim and perpetrator, for the just and the unjust. Reconciliation is real and creates radical possibilities for healing in the possibility of new shared life. "Paul was not ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16) for a very basic reason: "simply because in it, real justice was seen, 'the justice of God, the justification of the unjust as the justice of God means God's reconciliation of enemies and God's compassion for the weak. It is restorative rather than retributive or retaliatory or Romanesque justice; it is the justice of the prophets."[79] Gorman quotes Pheme Perkins when he writes:

> Prophetic hopes for the manifestation of God's salvation in a new order of justice have been fulfilled.' The Roman believers, like the Corinthians, will be expected to practice the same kind of justice in their communities and toward their enemies as an essential component of that new order. The missional justice of God creates a missional people of justice.[80]

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[77] DeYoung & Boeseck, *Radical Reconciliation,* 15.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Gorman, *Becoming The Gospel,* 232.

[80] Ibid., 232-33.

Justice and Justification in the Christian Community

The Corinthian Letters Paul was reconciled into the Christian community. He represents the turn to justice that occurs when one is justified. As Gorman says, "Paul's own life-story confirms that justification has a public, observable, social face: it includes the just practices of non-retaliation/nonviolence (1 Cor. 4:11-13) and reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20) as well as commitment to the poor. (e.g., Gal. 2:10 and the Jerusalem collection)."[81] These reconciliatory affects are thoroughgoing in his life, and one of Paul's most important links between justification and justice is that Paul believed that God's intention in justification was to create communities that are being transformed into the justice of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

Much of Paul's writing to the Corinthian church rests upon this belief. What happens when the beloved, just, transformative community fails to function as such? Paul addresses them and challenges them to live fully into their identity in Christ. Paul addresses the fact that they (the just) are taking one another to court to be tried by the non-believers (the unjust) over trivial matters.[82] Paul admonishes them not to withhold cruciform love by asserting their rights over and against the consciousness of the weaker brothers and sisters.[83] Paul also admonishes them not to dishonor the Lord's table by the way they commune together.[84] Paul reminds them of God's priorities to give greater honor to the inferior members.[85]

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[81] Ibid., Gorman, 234

[82] Ibid. (1 Corinthians 6:1-11/The tragic irony of injustice in the community of the just).

[83] Ibid (1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1/Injustice in the Assertion of Rights and the Withholding of Cruciform Love)

[84] Ibid. (1 Corinthians 11:17-34/Injustice in the Subversion of the Lord's Supper)

[85] Ibid. (1 Corinthians 12/The Body of Christ as the Locus of Justice for the Weak)

It is important to note here, as Gorman states, that "Paul's cruciform justice and cruciform ecclesiology, the church as the locus of justice for the weak, are rooted ultimately, therefore, in his cruciform theology proper his doctrine of God. Once again, Paul echoes Scripture's identification of God as the God of the weak, the God whose thoughts are not ours. Paul knows these divine thoughts as the mind of Christ."[86] It is this same Christ who prays that the believers be one as he and the father are one in John chapter 17.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the justice [*dikaiosynē;* NRSV "righteousness"] of God.[87]

In 2nd Corinthians 5:21, Christ is identified with the human condition so that we might be identified with his. This "interchange is not about substitution, but about Christ's representation, and our participation."[88] All that Christ became holds the possibility for those in Christ to become. As Gorman explains "The interchange named in 2 Corinthians 5:21 should be understood as a reference to Christ's death, which is part of the larger narrative of reconciliation that includes the incarnation and the entire Christ event: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world.'"[89] The we that Paul refers to in verse 21 includes everyone.

The ubiquitous nature of Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection on behalf of not only humanity but of the cosmos is what is revealed here. Gorman says, "Despite centuries of argument about its implicit doctrines of the atonement and of justification (2nd Cor 5 ff.) is

[86] Ibid., 245-46.

[87] Ibid., 246-47.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

fundamentally a text about participation and transformation. The key words that underscore these two inseparable dimensions of the text are '*in him*' and '*become*.'"[90]

This theme of transformation is reinforced by the words "*no longer*" (v.16) and "*new creation*" (v.17). The NRSVUE reads, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we no longer know him in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!" The emphasis on 'come into being' displays the transformative dimension of the text. Salvation is becoming something new, literally a new creation by the will of God. Richard Hays describes it as follows:

> [Paul] does not say "that we might know about the righteousness of God," nor "that we might believe in the righteousness of God," nor even "that we might receive the righteousness of God." Instead, the church is to become the righteousness of God: where the church embodies in its life together the world-reconciling love of Jesus Christ, the new creation is manifest. The church incarnates the righteousness of God. [91]

Christians become the righteousness, or the 'saving justice' of God embodied in the world. This is the call to the church and justification's transformation of the unjust into the just community.

> God's not counting trespasses (v.19) and God's transformative project (vv. 17, 21) are not two separate acts but one unified salvation. Here, as elsewhere in Paul, forensic and participatory language kiss; justification and justice embrace. And, most importantly for our purposes, participation, and mission embrace…or to reintroduce a word from the opening pages of this book, theosis and mission embrace."[92]

This is the reason why reconciliation can be a category that encapsulates so many aspects of human experience and be named as a way to "live out the gospel". In this notion of

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[90] Ibid., 248.

[91] Richard B Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; a Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996), 24.

[92] Ibid.

reconciliation AS justice there is revelation, conviction, forgiveness, healing, justification, as justice, peace, mutuality, commitment, and the potential for flourishing. The presence of all these things is good news, it is gospel.

> "The 'new creation/new creature' that God has accomplished in Christ belongs to a spiritually empowered reality that was previously as inconceivable as it was impossible: God's own covenant righteousness enacted in community in Corinth." In other words, the Corinthians can become the gospel they have embraced or, better, that has embraced them. The greatest human privilege, Paul suggests, is to be part of this new creation, to participate in the very purpose of God for humanity: becoming the embodiment of God's saving, reconciling, restorative justice in the world.[93]

Gorman concludes and summarizes his excursus on Paul's concern for justice with this.

> Justice for Paul is continuous with the concerns of the prophets but is also reshaped by his gospel of Christ crucified; justice is covenantal and cruciform. In Christ God was and is making peace with the world, and God was and is making a reconciled and justified people into the justice of God… this is not an argument for justice instead of spirituality, but rather a fully biblical spirituality that includes spiritual practices of justice. In Christ, as already in the Scriptures of Israel, love of God and love of neighbor coalesce. Also in Christ, and now in and through the church by the power of the Spirit, the eschatological day of justice and peace has arrived, if only partially and proleptically. Indeed, as we have seen briefly at several points, justice is inseparable from peace. Theologically, this makes sense for all sorts of reasons, chief among them being, that "justice and justification simply name the right alignment of the world with God through the redemption of the creation," and "reconciliation is God's act of aligning all things in their proper relationship to God through Christ's cross."[94]

According to this reading of scripture, the centrality of justice in Paul's writing is clear, which begs the question of application. What are the contours of justice needed in the evangelical church in America? What does just reconciliation truly look like in the American Evangelical context? As Christians seek to participate in the deep and abiding spirituality of just communities, what practices should they embrace for the sake of their becoming the "saving

[93] Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 249.

[94] Ibid., 257-58.

justice of God?" Much of the literature offered concerning reconciliation seems to be a corrective to the ministry of reconciliation as currently imagined in many spheres. Now we turn towards taking an account of the cultural and religious landscape in American Christianity and imagine together: How might the Christian Church in America become the embodied saving justice of God to the world?

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

"History and Scripture teaches us that there can be no reconciliation without repentance. There can be no repentance without confession. And there can be no confession without truth."[95]
Jemar Tisby

We are here now. Together, these simple words can communicate a great deal. However, changing the emphasis changes the meaning of these symbols. Context becomes deeply important if something clear and meaningful is communicated with these words. Perhaps the focus is upon the ***people gathered*** to consider its meaning; ***we*** are here now. Perhaps this is a ***declaration***; we ***are*** here now. Perhaps saying something about ***status*** or ***location*** is the chief consideration; we are ***here*** now. Perhaps a message about ***time*** is most important. We are here ***now***. What happens when this phrase is a question rather than a declarative statement? We are here now***?*** Suddenly, these four words hold a new layer of complexity. Emphasis becomes essential to any notion of shared understanding. Often more than one meaning must be held simultaneously to capture the complexity and nuance of what needs to be communicated. Such is the nature of race in America.

Clarity in the face of complexity and nuance is essential, especially if the conversation involves diverse groups of people. The racialized history of America is pervasive. It aggregates the stuff of many peoples, qualities, places, and histories. Some authors create entire anthologies of the history of race and racialized formation in America without exhausting the innumerable events that construct this storied past. Sufficiently naming the current moment with regards to

[95] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 15. Kindle edition.

race in America is a daunting task but is an essential first task of anyone seeking to create understanding across diverse groups. Understanding how people are formed through this endeavor necessitates an understanding of cultures.

Institutions, disciplines, organizations, communities, social arrangements, language, philosophies, Spiritualities, spaces, and land are all culture creating entities wherein human formation occurs. Importantly, these are not variables to be navigated on an otherwise empty tapestry, but constitutive of the shape and nature of life together. They are the threads upon which people look to define culture and themselves. There is no life or notion of life outside of these entities, and no understanding of human formation can be conceptualized apart from the influence of institutions, disciplines, organizations, communities, social arrangements, language, philosophies, Spiritualities, spaces, and land. Meaning and formation can be derived from the stories created in light of these cultural milieu. The key question of this project is "What are the formational stories of Black Christians within predominantly White Churches?" The conviction and, perhaps more importantly, the deep hope of this researcher, is that the divine imprint within creation and the divine image within humankind cultivates curiosity. The divine compels communities towards conceiving the inhabited world and carrying the complexity of this world with compassion and grit for the sake of co-creating a better world and telling a better story. ***We are here now.***

The first section of this chapter explores key terms. These include *racialized society and racial justice, culture, formation, whiteness, and hegemony.* The terms build upon one another to set the landscape for the next section. The second section of this chapter explores faith leaders, churches, and key authors who have engaged the conversation of race, reconciliation, and justice in the current evangelical religious environment.

Race in America: Terms and Conditions

Race is intimately tied to the American experience. It is 'an American dilemma'[96] often indivisible from American life. Sociologists Michael O. Emmerson and Christian Smith describe the contours and a history of racialization in America. They contend that "Few subjects are as persistent and emotionally explosive, or as troublesome as race in America. It takes more benign forms as well. The race problem is not confined to prejudice or unfair treatment by some individuals. To focus solely on these when considering American race relations is to miss the broader picture."[97] To be clear, personal experiences are deeply important regarding race. Positive interpersonal racial experiences often result in consolation, relief, and peacefulness between races. Negative experiences increase personal discomfort and stimulate a variety of responses such as denial, avoidance, or anger. However, race has meaning beyond individual experiences. These authors use the term racialized society to help capture the meaning of race in America. Smith and Emmerson contend that "racialized society" is not only "more useful than prejudice or racism, but it provides a framework by which to guide our inquiry."[98]

Racialized Society & Racial Justice

Racialized society is a society in which race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.[99]

> A racialized society can also be said to be 'a society that allocates differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines; lines that

[96] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith,* 6. This quote is attributed to 'Swedish researcher Gunnar Myrdal 1964.'

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., 6.

[99] Ibid., 7.

> are socially constructed. 'After all, usually Americans can clearly identify people according to their race but do so based on physical rather than social characteristics. But to say that race is socially constructed does not mean physical differences are not readily apparent. Rather, we say that race is socially constructed for at least two reasons. The first is that only certain characteristics are used to identify people. Foot size and ear shape are not used by Americans to classify people by race, even though people vary on these physical characteristics. Second, race is socially constructed only insofar as selected physical characteristics have social meaning.[100]

Skin color was chosen as the definitive marker of race, and people give race its meaning. For instance, people often make assumptions about class based upon skin color. Whites tend to be thought of as upper or middle class while Black or Indigenous Americans are often assumed to belong to a lower class. Are these categories static? Can attitudes and perceptions change? Absolutely so, but this further proves the social construction of race. According to Emerson and Smith, "In the United States, Irish and Italian Americans were once viewed as distinct, and inferior, racial groups. Today they are classified as white."[101]

Racialization is adaptive. In societies where race matters, the form of racial hierarchy and division varies. Pierre Van stated, "The form varies both between societies and over time within societies as their economic systems and other institutions change."[102] This is desperately important to understand if one seeks to follow a progression of racialization in the United States. In a lengthy excursus, Emmerson and Smith describe these changes that have moved from Antebellum slavery to Jim Crow segregation[103], to the post-Civil Rights-era division:

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Pierre L Van, *Race and Racism* (New York, NY: Wiley, 1967).

[103] "Jim Crow" refers to the pattern of racial discrimination resulting from state and local laws requiring segregation and everything from housing, work sites, bus seating, churches, cemeteries, theaters, hospitals, schools, restaurants, and much more. The term derives from a song referring to Jim Crow, a "happy slave", performed in the 1830's by Thomas D. Rice, a white performer in blackface. Jim Crow came to be a code word for segregation." S Dale Mclemore and Harriett Romo, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998).

> A major problem in understanding race relations in the United States is that we tend to understand race, racism, and the form of racialization as constants rather than variables. This view has grave implications. Racism for instance is often captured best in people's minds by the ideology and actions of the Ku Klux Klan: an overt doctrine of racial superiority usually labeled prejudice that leads to discrimination. Based on this unchanging standard, racism is viewed as an irrational psychological phenomenon that is the product of individuals, and is evident in overt, usually hostile behavior. It (racism) is the driving force behind anything negative about race relations. Using this perspective, social scientists devise survey questions meant to measure the level of racism in a society, such as "Whites have a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhood," or "How strongly would you object if a member of your family brought a black friend home for dinner?" Based on this approach, they conclude that racism is declining, since a smaller percentage of people over time respond in a prejudiced fashion. The interpretation? Because racism is seen as driving racial problems, race matters less for shaping social life and life opportunities.[104]

In other words, if racism is prejudice leading to discrimination or racist thoughts leading to racist actions, when these thoughts and actions decline, racism declines. This constant, invariable definition seems logical. Less equals less, and more equals more. Additionally, if racism is the product of maladjusted individuals, it remains with them as they become social outliers. White supremacists are the ones who are overtly racist individuals with overtly racist action.

However, racism does not have a static definition. It is not simply the product of 'a few bad apples.' Racism is adaptive. Racism is contextual in that it shifts and changes over time. Racism begets racialization. Emmerson and Smith go on to describe these shifts in the conditions of racialization. The problem persists as the standards change. As they describe, these changes become clear when compared over time:

> Suppose we are still using a standard that was set in relation to slavery….If we were designing ways to measure racism in the Antebellum era, we might measure racism as the level of agreement with statements like "darkies are happier being slaves," "colored people are more like children than adults," "Africans are not fully human", and "it is God's will that Anglos be Masters and Africans be slaves." If we used this unchanging standard, we would find that the farther removed from 1865, the smaller the percentage of people agreeing with such statements. Again, using the present-day logic, we would conclude that racism and the race problem were declining, and indeed (using the same

[104] Emmerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 8.

> questions) say by 1955, we would conclude it had nearly disappeared. But our hindsight is clear. By 1955, the problems of race and the racial hierarchy had not disappeared at all. The forms had changed to be sure, but so ever-present were the problems that major social movements and upheavals resulted.[105]

The racial socialization in the Jim Crow era was marked by segregation laws and violence. Segregation was the rule, and rules are to be followed, right? Wrong. Unjust rules are meant to be disrupted and challenged. Civil Rights advocates fight to undo those unjust laws and create safety for Blacks in society. By the end of the Civil Rights era, schools were integrated by law, individuals were free to eat at any public lunch counter, and public transit no longer had limitations based upon skin color. Each of these changes harken back to significant movements during the civil rights era. However, America is past those moments, these former achievements were remarkable in their day but are long past being considered the leading edge of confronting racial inequity, as explained by Emerson and Smith:

> Rather than incorrectly examining race in the United States using an old standard, we must adapt our understanding and analysis to the new, post-Civil Rights era. The framework we use here Racialization reflects that adaptation. It understands that racial practices that reproduce racial division in the contemporary United States (1) Are increasingly covert, (2) are embedded in normal operations of institutions, (3) avoid direct racial terminology and (4) are invisible to most Whites." [Racialization] understands that racism is not merely individual, overt prejudice or the free-floating irrational driver of race problems.[106]

Racism, according to Emmerson and Smith, is the collective misuse of power that results in diminished life opportunities for some racial groups. Racism relates to power dynamics as much as it relates to individual agency. "Racism is a changing ideology with the constant and rational purpose of perpetuating and justifying a social system that is racialized."[107]

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[105] Ibid., 9.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

Racialization, however, is a sobering reality embedded within the everyday operations of institutions, and despite individual efforts to the contrary, racialization occurs every day. Emerson and Smith added, "Throughout American history, the racialized character of the United States has relied as much on its institutionalization as on people being individually prejudiced. Many slave owners were quite fond of their slaves, and formed deep bonds, while the institution of slavery did the racializing."[108]

Racial Justice is the systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.[109] The previously discussed notion of the church becoming 'the saving justice of God' or 'the righteousness of God' becomes deeply important here. The Christian Church as an institution within culture holds, within itself, the opportunity to affect change on more than one plane of concern. The Christian Church as a movement can do the same. The confession of the Christian Church is that she is called, created, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, but it also exists and operates within the cultural landscape.

Culture & Formation

Culture is a sociological and anthropological term that refers to the beliefs, norms, rituals, arts, and worldviews of particular people groups in a particular place at a particular time.[110] Flemming posits, "Culture embraces both our beliefs and our social practices, that is, the ways

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[108] Ibid., 10.

[109]NEA Center for Social Justice, "Racial Justice in Education: Key Terms and Definitions | NEA," *Www.nea.org*, last modified January 2021, Accessed July 25th, 2022.

[110]Lisa Sharon Harper, *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2018),140.

people live out their everyday lives."[111] Culture is particular but not monolithic. Culture has plurality.[112] For a moment, consider the "Black Church." Black Christians do not belong to a singular cultural expression of faith. In fact, thinking only within the construct of organized Christian religion as it is represented in the 20th century American landscape there are seven major, historic, independent, Black controlled, Black Christian denominations. These include, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.).[113] This doesn't even account for the local predominantly Black expressions within majority White denominations such as the United Methodist Church, Episcopal Church, Roman Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Churches of Christ, etc. Together, the cultures found within these particular spaces contribute to the notion of "Christian Cultures" in America. The descriptive possibilities are exponential when applying factors such as Northern, Southern, urban, rural, suburban, wealthy, and poor to the notion of 'Christian Cultures' in America. When describing individuals within these expansive environments, factors such as gender, ableness, and age can be culture creating priori within different social eco-systems since cultures are expansive and overlapping. As people gather around specific embodiments of cultures, these are always intersecting realities. Individuals

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[111] Dean E Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 118.

[112] Lesslie Newbigin *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989)

[113] Eric C Lincoln and Lawrence H Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 1.

create groups. Groups create environments. Particular ways of being are the products of these group environments.

Missiologist Leslie Newbigin says that, "Culture, in its broadest sense, is the sum total of ways of living that shape the continuing life of a group of human beings from generation to generation."[114] He continues by saying that when "we are speaking about the language that enables [people] to grasp, conceptualize and communicate the reality of their world" that is to say, rule of law, values and forms of social organization, including family structure and agriculture,[115] that we speak of cultures. Cultures are pervasive. Humans are socialized into cultures, and cultures constitute the act of socialization. Human formation happens within these social ecologies because these intersecting subjectivities are near the center of the human formational endeavor. Additionally, humans are story making creatures. Individuals learn to make meaning of these intersecting subjectivities by creating stories that narrate identity, morality, worth, relationships, and social arrangements. This act of 'making meaning' within one's inhabited world, this attentiveness to things and people and self, is an act of human formation.

Formation is the action of forming and the process of becoming. It is the structure or arrangement of something, a formal arrangement of things in relation to one another.[116] Human formation within a society leans upon stories to sustain it. Formation within a racialized society is no different. It relies upon certain stories, or myths to carry meaning from generation to

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[114] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, Publishing Company, 1995).

[115] Ibid.

[116] "Definition of Formation | Dictionary.com," *Www.dictionary.com*, last modified 2019, accessed November 20, 2019, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/formation.

generation. However, Richard Hughes explains that "Contrary to colloquial usage, a myth is not a story that is patently untrue. It is not like the show 'MythBusters' that sought to prove or disprove a 'false belief.' Rather, a myth is a story that, whether true or false, helps us discern the meaning and purpose of our lives and, for that reason, speaks truth to those who embrace it."[117]

In his seminal work, Richard Hughes describes five myths that have deeply shaped the American consciousness. These myths are the myths of a chosen nation, nature's nation, the millennial nation, the Christian nation, and the myth of the innocent nation. In a revised edition, Hughes later argues that there is one final myth, a seminal and final myth that undergirds and is obscured by the others. It is the myth of White supremacy, the story that White people are at the top of a natural hierarchy. This myth is present in all the other myths in concrete ways that have had lasting impact, not only on Americans' imagination but also on America's institutions.

White supremacist notions are present within the *myth of a chosen nation* because blacks were locked out of the very democracy that was to be 'an illuminating light to the world.' In this story, only white men were chosen by the Judeo-Christian God to co-create this light. With regard to the *myth of nature's nation*, the early founders contended that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" were self-evident truths, grounded in nature and nature's God, while , Hughes says, conceiving of the "inferiority of Black people as a self-evident truth, also grounded in nature."[118] The *myth of America as a Christian Nation* is undermined by Christianity's strange compatibility with an unchecked White supremacist ideology which not only allows, but invites sustained racial violence and subjugation of fellow believers based on skin color. This White supremacist ideology engendered the creation of a slave bible meant to limit Blacks' exposure to

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[117] Richard T Hughes, *MYTHS AMERICA LIVES BY: White Supremacy and the Stories That Give Us Meaning.*, 2nd ed. (Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

[118] Ibid.

powerful liberating narratives of scripture in order to protect and preserve profitable slave labor. The *myth of the millennial nation* declared that America, through its shining example of freedom and democracy, would lead the world into a golden age of much the same.

However, Hughes rightly contends, "slavery and Jim Crow segregation told the world in fact that America lied when it presented itself as a nation defined by freedom and democracy."[119] White supremacy lies at the heart of the *myth of innocence*, which claims that due to America's noble cause and moral presence in the world, violence done by America on the world stage is justifiable for serving a greater good. Tied up in this myth is the notion that America is perhaps God's arbiter or instrument of justice in the world, simply doing what is necessary to achieve God's aims. Internally, however, there is no way to morally justify the ill treatment of equal partners in these efforts. Some implicit hierarchy must provide that one entity is lesser than the other or that they are in a different class or category, not suited to moral sameness and just treatment.

White supremacy at its core is simply the belief that White people are superior to others and deserve to dominate society. Walker-Barnes posits, "White Supremacy is a systematic way of ordering societal systems, ideologies, and relationships so that political, economic, cultural, and social dominance accrues to Whites."[120] This is typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial groups, centering, and elevating Whiteness without consideration of others or at the expense of others. Whiteness is socially constructed and held as normative. It is conceived as the center around which society orbits. Michael Eric Dyson has argued that he real unifying force in

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[119] Ibid., 22.

[120] Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People A Womanist Vision of Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2019), 43.

our national cultural and political life, beyond skirmishes over ideology, is White identity masked as universal, neutral and, therefore, quintessentially American. In the construction of Whiteness in America, many ethnic identities that were once distinct were enfolded within White racial identity based upon skin color. It was advantageous for one to "pass as white" in the eyes of society and be on the right end of the color spectrum. Dark complexion embodied the opposite end of that spectrum, and thus the lowest end of racial hierarchy. This racialization of society with white people at the center is the power that Whiteness yields as a culture creating force.

Whiteness Hegemony & Homophily

Whiteness is a domain of malformation that assumes and enacts the superiority of Whites in a racialized society. It is a social construct. It is not based on biological, genetic, or other "natural" facts, but rather an identity that processes a set of meanings. Edwards described, "Whiteness is assigned to people who *do not* possess those arbitrarily chosen physical attributes that disqualify them from claiming a White racialized identity."[121] What it means to be White is to be one thing while being 'Non-White' is to be something else. For instance, Boesak and DeYoung described, "Blacks in South Africa were classified as 'non-white', as non-persons. 'Non-white' is a negation. 'Non-white' points to a non-entity.'"[122] Anyone over 25 years of age in America who has had to indicate their race on standardized tests knows this same reality. While there are multiple race options, White is always the first category at the top of the list, and non-White is often a clarifying secondary option within several other racial categories.

[121] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream,* 9.

[122] Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation,* 14.

Whiteness seeks to create and maintain boundaries.[123] Whiteness positions itself as a standard against which all other groups ought to be measured. Whiteness is more than an insidious idea. It is a formative force created to proffer power to some, based upon racial hierarchy. Taken together, Whiteness is a formative cultural force that seeks to dominate the cultural landscape. It is a form of ruling.

Hegemony is a form of rule where the dominant group's status is based primarily upon the consent of subordinate groups. Subordinate groups perceive the dominant group's rule as legitimate and acknowledge its beliefs, values, and practices as "common sense."[124] In the face of belonging, this is a path many tread in order to survive or to advantage themselves equally in relation to those whose experiences are more centered in society, institutions, and social practices. Unfortunately, hegemony often sets the conditions of belonging within White friend groups, institutions, and even churches.

Homophily is a social principle which says that people prefer to interact regularly with others who are like them.[125] This likeness could be based on skin color, values, religion, or any other number of important factors. Homophily can lead towards the creation of homogeneous people groups where few important differences exist between members of the group. This lends towards a formation that can be myopic in its scope, especially with regards to salient issues among other groups. Interestingly, this can have the unforeseen effect of furthering hegemony

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[123] "In the United States, the boundaries of whiteness are flexible and contingent upon the definitions of other racial groups, most often African Americans. Some State's laws claim that a person with one African American grandparent was African American. Other states claimed that any person with one drop of African ancestry was African American. Still other states used more ambiguous language for defining who was African American, like appreciable mixture or ascertainable amounts of African ancestry. These classifications persisted up until the late 1980s as legal social distinctions." Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 9.

[124] Ibid., 121.

[125] Ibid., 118.

when Black racialized identity has low saliency among Black members in a White institution. To the degree that identity is narrated, this can re-story members of the group towards choosing other forms of "likeness" around which to gather. Homophily can be important to group cohesion, perhaps disproportionately so in capitalist environments where meeting consumers' needs and desires is essential for gathering enough economic power for self-sustainability, but homophily can have the simultaneous effect of erasing other identities that are still salient in a racialized society. In other words, being Black may not be the most important identity for belonging in a predominantly White space, but being Black still has significant meaning in a racialized society. To express this in one more way, for Black individuals in White spaces, the option of adopting certain identities as more important than their Black identity can be favorable, but this option does not negate the effects of their Black racial experiences in a racialized society.

The truth of our racialized society can paint a bleak picture, even among those who endeavor to improve or change the beliefs, practices, and structures that have cultivated and maintained a malformed conception of the world. A recent Barna study reports in Beyond Diversity, "In 2006, about four in 10 Blacks said they were aware of what race they were every day. In 2012, nearly half of Blacks, including 52 percent of Black Protestants, said they thought about their race daily. Just 10 percent of Whites reported the same degree of racial awareness in both waves of the study."[126] Can religion offer a word of hope against such forces? More specifically, can Christianity offer substantive solutions to racialization as it contributes to injustice in God's world?

[126] Barna Group, Beyond Diversity: What the Future of Racial Justice Will Require of U.S. Churches (Ventura CA: Barna Group, 2021), 34.

Ignoring or dismissing the thoroughgoing impact of race in American society and the imbalances proliferated by racial hierarchy is short sighted at best and intentionally manipulative at worst. It is disingenuous to deny the culture shaping force of racialization in America, but the stakes are higher in faith communities. Many Evangelical churches recognize the sin of racism and name it as such. Racism is counter to Christ, grieves the Spirit, and stands in defiance of the saving justice of God. Racism perpetuates division in Christ's Body and is a barrier to the ministry of reconciliation between Black and White Christians seeking to be the just community of God in a racialized American landscape.

Consequently, overcoming racism, racialization, White supremacy, Whiteness, and the thoroughgoing effect of self-interested power is a highly significant way for Christians to embody the saving justice of God. Some bring all their personhood into partnership with God to eradicate the sin of racism. Others think it important but not central to the Gospel. Still others think talking about the sin of racism is divisive and therefore counterproductive to Gospel efforts. Astoundingly, the ubiquitous nature of racism is contested by some. Proximity and experience are indicators of one's attentiveness to racialization. These indicating factors often shape people's assessments of the race problem and what solutions they offer for this complex malformation. These different assessments emerge from different needs within the racialized society. In other words, different needs create different solutions. This is true in the secular sphere as well as in Churches who profess to follow the saving, liberating, compassionate, loving Christ Crucified, who is the righteousness (or the saving justice) of God.

Black Leaders Invitation: Reconciliation & Justice

Black faith leaders have been founders in pursuing the ministry of reconciliation in American Evangelical Churches. These endeavors require that they bring all of themselves to

this process of becoming. It is important to recall that culture refers to the beliefs, norms, rituals, arts, and worldviews of particular people groups in a particular place at a particular time, and in its broadest sense, cultures are the sum total of ways of living that shape the continuing life of a group of human beings from generation to generation. The intersection of Blackness and Christianity in America has produced a qualitatively different expression of Christian faithfulness that culminated in a much-needed expression in the mid-twentieth century. It called on Christians to deal directly with racism and injustice in America. For them, Christian commitment towards justice included the spiritual and material, the individual and corporate, and the invitation to participate in justice for all was extended to people across all classes and races. These leaders often embodied prophetic voices. Some of these voices include, but are certainly not limited to, Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, Freddie Gray, James Cone, and Thurgood Marshall. They informed or worked towards racial justice through civil and economic equity across the American landscape. Though not exclusively, others, like John Perkins, Thomas Skinner, and Samuel Hines engaged directly with White faith leaders and Evangelical churches to find a way to embody the Gospel together. For the narrow scope of this project, the focus will remain upon a few Black faith leaders who directly engaged White churches and White faith leaders at the intersection of evangelicalism, racial unity, and the ministry of reconciliation.

John Perkins is the founder of Christian Community Development Association and a racial justice advocate for scores of years. He grew up a Black Mississippian, raised by his grandmother following his mother's death and his father's subsequent departure. Perkins lived in deep poverty. He was no stranger to early childhood trauma and quickly learned the racial hierarchy of a racialized America after his brother's murder at the hands of police. Emerson and Smith explained, "The social system exploited him and fellow Blacks. Further, the Whites

controlled the power. For him, the constant threat and actuality of violence were clear indicators of this power. African Americans were most certainly at the bottom of this system and the lowest of these, to Perkins, were Black Christians."[127] He thought that their religion simply made them compliant with and submissive to oppressive structures. Terms such as "coward" and "Uncle Tom" were levied against Blacks in that position.

He eventually fled the South and met Thomas Skinner, a New York gang member who also lived in abject poverty, albeit within a different socialized environment. Skinner is said to have "cursed the day he was born Black"[128] due to harrowing conditions and the ominous presence of death that accompanied his environment. While in New York, these two gentlemen met a Jamaican minister named Samuel Hines[129] and both had life changing encounters with Christ, turned towards Christ, and became ministers of the Gospel. Each had a deep faith and a deep need to see this new faith lived out practically in the world, not just for themselves, but for others as well. Here's what Emerson and Smith recounted:

> Specifically, they turned their attention to the divisions among Blacks and Whites, the poor and rich, the powerless and the powerful. For Perkins, this meant returning, after nearly fifteen years, to the people he had left in Mississippi, to live out reconciliation in the 'war torn' South of the 1960's. For Skinner, it meant traversing the country as an evangelist and a 'minister of reconciliation,' focusing especially on the nation's youth. For Hines, it meant returning to the pastorate, coming to America, locating in the inner city of Washington D.C., and preaching and practicing reconciliation.[130]

Each considered the ministry of reconciliation as the *means by which* living out the Christian faith made sense. All were influenced by Martin Luther King and were committed to

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[127] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 52.

[128] Ibid. 53

[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid.

mentoring future Black leaders. They created a theology of reconciliation based on Ephesians 2:14-15[131] and created a four-step ministry of reconciliation to be embodied by the just community of God, the church.

The first of the four steps required that "individuals of different races must develop primary relationships with each other."[132] They argued that if God desires unity, it should be evident in shared worship and intimate associations and friendships. This also solves the exposure and proximity issue that plagues so many Whites' inability to recognize racialization. Emerson and Smith noted how this, "demands recognizing social structures of inequality, and that all Christians must resist them together."[133] This would have moved powerfully against processes like redlining and imbalanced educational access in impoverished areas. Denouncing the sin of indifference was inherent in this call and central to the men's desire for the ministry of reconciliation to liberate both groups. The third step that Emerson and Smith described was, "Whites, as the main creators and benefactors of the racialized society, must repent of their personal, historical, and social sins."[134] This is mainly an act in truth telling so that as historical and social sins are named, they will not have the power to be passed down to future generations unknowingly. The fourth step Emerson and Smith shared is for African Americans: "They must be willing, when Whites ask, to forgive them individually and corporately." Somewhat like the

[131] **"**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." Ephesians 2:14-16 (NIV).

[132] Ibid., 54.

[133] Ibid., 55.

[134] Ibid.

lived impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's pardon for truth telling[135] following the vicious Apartheid regime in South Africa, White confession was not to happen without some guaranteed benefit. The following is described by Emerson and Smith:

> The essence of the message of reconciliation and the critique of evangelicalism that these African American messengers began bringing in the mid-1960s, is concisely communicated by John Perkins: Something is wrong at the root of American evangelicalism. I believe we have lost the gospel – God's reconciling power, which is unique to Christianity– and have substituted church growth. We have learned how to reproduce the church without the message[136]

These Evangelical leaders of faith taught through conferences, personal visits, mentoring, and writing. They claimed Evangelicalism as their expression of faith and invited their White Evangelical brothers and sisters to engage with them in this message of reconciliation. Billy Graham, considered by many to be the father of American Evangelicalism, was a contemporary of these men before the Civil Rights Era. He initially was reluctant to engage with issues of race during his Crusades, preferring to follow the rules and customs of whichever region he was visiting. Emmerson and Smith say that he typically preferred to separate racial issues from the church and,

> recall that in 1952 he told a Jackson, Mississippi, newspaper: 'We follow the existing social customs in whatever part of the country in which we minister. As far as I have

[135] In Desmond Tutu's, *No Future without Forgiveness* (Norwalk, Connecticut: Easton Press, 2009), 24. Tutu writes: "The Judicial system in South Africa had the distinct reputation for abusing power. There were decades of missing bodies of prisoners and outright violence and murder of Black South Africans at the hands of the police in the Apartheid regime. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee was empowered to bring a torn nation together. Rather than perpetuating the grief and resentment of Black citizens who would testify in court about the missing status of loved ones, they offered immunity from criminal prosecution if offenders of these vicious crimes would publicly confess the truth about their heinous acts. The reasoning of the TRC for this radical act of forgiveness was this 'Most distressingly, we discovered in the course of the TRC investigations and work that the supporters of apartheid were ready to lie at the drop of a hat. This applied to cabinet ministers, commissioners of police, and of course those in the lower echelons as well. They lied as if it were going out of fashion, brazenly and with very considerable apparent conviction. In the courts was the word of one bewildered victim against that of several perpetrators, other officers in the police or armed forces who perjured themselves as they have now admitted in their applications for amnesty.'"

[136] Emmerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 55.

> been able to find in study of the Bible, it has nothing to say about segregation or non-segregation. I came only to preach the Bible and not to enter into local issues.[137]

This position was inconceivable to these Black faith leaders at the time. Graham eventually came to agree with them, and by the mid 1960's elevated racial reconciliation as an important part of his crusades during the heart of the Civil Rights Movement.

White Leaders' Response: Racial Reconciliation & Cultural tools

The latter half of the 20th century held much conversation with regards to Evangelical's lack of response to racism in America. Some would call this America's original sin. For many, the ministry of reconciliation has been a hallmark of how to live out the Gospel most faithfully, calling it "God's single item agenda." White and Black leaders began creating solutions to the problem of segregation and unity, but they failed to reach the same solutions independently. A correspondence between such leaders, featured in a 1971 issue of *Christianity Today*, highlights some of these differences. An open letter entitled "Dear White People"[138] was written by a Black man, and "this plea contains all of the components of reconciliation from the need for cross-race relationships, to forgiveness and accepting forgiveness, to overcoming together the structures of

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[137] Ibid. 55-56

[138] Ibid., 57 The Letter says: "Although we have known each other for centuries we have not truly known each other. I, the black person, feel I know more about you because I had to. My will to survive forced me to learn about you. I was forced to learn your ways of doing things, forced to accept your Concepts and values, and yet denied the right to share them... If I tell you that I have hostility and anger within me, how do you interpret those emotions? Do they make me a Savage who will riot and burn your property? It seems to me that our society is presently paying for the many years of wrongs done to the black person. In my rational moments, I can understand that you are a product of your forefathers' teachings, and they're not entirely to blame for your feelings toward me. But if you are, I should pass feelings of racial hatred to our children. We Stand condemned before God…. along with my feelings of anger and hostility, there's a strong sense of disappointment. This disappointment is felt most keenly toward those who had taught me of God's love for all mankind…. I am still forbidden to attend some of your Evangelical colleges and churches, and to be your neighbor.... I have been referring to myself as a black person. but I still feel I have not been allowed to reach complete adulthood. you have made me doubt my ability to compete with you intellectually and you keep stunning this area of my life with inferior School systems.... I, the black person, suggest that you really get to know yourself. evaluate your life experiences and see how they may have given you your views of the black person...If this happens, it will enable us to love and live together and enjoy the blessings God intended us to share."

inequality."[139] The counter response came from an anonymous White author who expressed thanks for his letter. The magazine published the response entitled 'Dear Black Person"[140] as it had the original letter. While the response contained important aspects of reconciliation, such as forgiveness and commitment to being transformed through a posture of openness and learning, the terms of these activities shifted.

The first letter speaks generationally of centuries old oppression while the second reduces the scope of oppression to recent activity such as racial profiling on sidewalks and unlawful search of private property. The first letter was written as one community addressing another while the second shifted the conversation to the acts of individuals. Most importantly, the second letter asked for color to fall from the equation so that individual merit would rise as the chief measure. The first letter talks about access to Christian colleges and churches and names the power dynamic that allows one group to deny equal access to education as it sets the rules of intellectual competitiveness. The second letter completely ignores any of these social justice concerns as if these structural issues were non-existent. Something was clearly lost in translation.

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[139] Ibid. 57.

[140] Ibid. 57-58 The response letter: Dear Black Person, Thank you for your wonderful letter. I cannot claim to speak for the whole white race as I write this letter. Although I am sure that many others feel as I do, I can only speak for myself. For many years I was guilty of ignorance... I did not know that black men were routinely but rudely questioned just for walking along the street, or that black homes were frequently invaded without benefit of warrant. things like that never got into the news that reached me... I am guilty. I admit my guilt. but more importantly, I have repented. I have sought the Forgiveness of the Christ savior of white and black and every person, and I am seeking to educate myself and others so that the gap of racial misunderstanding and abuse may yet be closed... I was especially touched by this statement in your letter: " I am telling you these things because I want you to know." I feel the same way about you. I am telling you these things because I want you to know me... I want you to know that in order to raise my level of awareness I have been sitting at the feet of black authors like William Pennell and Tom Skinner. I realize that white evangelicals are not the only offenders… but we are offenders, God help us. God forgive us, and please, black person, give us your forgiveness too. The important goal to strive for in all my relationships is caring for individuals as individuals. Please judge me not by my color but by my individual spirit. and please when I reach out my hand and friendship to you, take it~ your fellow human being."

This gap in comprehension of the situation was a loss in translation that persisted even as Black and white evangelicals pursued avenues of shared work.

Walker-Barns described a movement, "In 1997, Promise Keepers, a predominantly White Evangelical men's organization, launched a division on racial reconciliation and declared the lofty goal of eradicating Racism in the church by 2000."[141] When the movement held 22 stadium rallies in 1996, Evangelical men heard that racial reconciliation was not only valued but was a mandate of the Gospel. Most of the men were white, but the leader of the movement, University Football Coach Bill McCartney, made explicit efforts to include a number of diverse clergymen in the lineup of presenters and speakers in order to reach the goal of diversifying the rally audiences. Walker-Barnes described, "A clergy summit in Atlanta drew 39,000 clergy under the theme 'Breaking Down Walls.' The audience, as with other Promise Keeper events, was predominantly White but included significantly more African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, and Native Americans than previous rallies."[142] This and previous rallies fed energy into subsequent efforts which culminated in the largest event of its kind, the "Stand in the Gap" rally that happened on October 4th of 1997 in Washington D.C. on the National Mall. Attendance reports vary, but the loudspeakers proclaimed that there were at least nine hundred thousand males in attendance for the six-hour event. During one of the events, Crusader Billy Graham famously preached about racial reconciliation after denying seats to black brothers and sisters in previous crusades. Emerson and Smith describe the scene as Graham spoke:

> Gentleman, the promise keeper speaker bellowed from the podium to a crowd of 60,000 largely Evangelical men, "We have grieved our brothers and sisters of color. We have ignored their pain and isolation. We have allowed false divisions to separate us. We must reconcile our differences and come together in the name of the Almighty God! Turn now

[141] Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, 2.

[142] Ibid., 5

> to a brother of a different race, confess your sins and the sins of your fathers, and pledge to unite!" All across the expansive domed stadium, small groups formed around men of color. A great murmur of confession rose and reverberated off the stadium top, further amplifying the sounds. Soon weeping could be heard, first in pockets, then spreading like an uncontrollable wave, until the entire crowd was shedding tears of lament. "What we have witnessed here, men," the podium speaker said once the sounds began quieting down, "is the power of God's unity. You have tasted it, now pursue it with a brother of a different race. Be Yokefellows, carry each other's burdens, and demonstrate true reconciliation![143]

The message is clear. Overcoming division by reconciling differences, confessing sins, and developing relationships is the road map to unity between Churches. It is important to note, however, that while this movement was generative and aimed towards good, no women were present. Women were represented as spouses and sisters to those in attendance and ultimately regarded as important daughters of God in messaging by the organizers, but their voices were absent from a call to reconciliation that focused on the proliferation of relationships between Black and White Christian men. Promise Keepers was founded upon seven tenants which called men to: 1) honor Christ; 2) develop friendships based on trust and mutual accountability with a few men; 3) practice spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity; 4) build strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values; 5) support the mission of the local church through prayer, involvement, and financial support; 6) reach beyond racial and denominational barriers; 7) influence the world, being obedient to the Great Commandment (Mk 12:30-31) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20).

Promise Keepers had the goal of discipling one million men into the ministry of reconciliation and sending them back to local churches. Founder Bill McCartney pressed this

[143] Emmerson and Smith, Divided by Faith, 51.

agenda and made it central to the Promise Keepers movement following the events of 1997. Walker-Barnes posited:

> Consistent with the Evangelical emphasis on Christian identity being centrally expressed through the individual believer's personal relationship with God, the evangelical understanding of reconciliation focuses on: (1) Transforming interpersonal relationships between Christians of different ethnic backgrounds; and (2) establishing racially diverse congregations. This was especially true for Promise Keepers. As Lisa Sharon Harper notes, 'PK focused on individual responses to racism through personal relationships alone.' Thus it was that the sixth promise was limited to 'reaching beyond …racial and denominational barriers' rather than dismantling structural barriers and working to ensure equity and equality.[144]

Promise Keepers' largest audience was white men. Unfortunately, when the movement turned toward a more singular focus on the necessity of racial reconciliation, it faltered. Attendance at rallies in subsequent years fell by as much as fifty percent.[145] Something went awry. In his book *Sold Out,* McCartney provides an inside view. He toured the country promoting this message of racial reconciliation, sharing his own experiences and personal conviction about how Scripture points towards this ministry as a necessity. Emerson and Smith explain:

> But always, he writes, "when I finished there was no response nothing… and city after city, and church after church, it was the same story wild enthusiasm while I was being introduced, followed by a morgue-like chill as I stepped away from the microphone….To this day the racial message remains a highly charged element of the Promise Keepers' Ministry and of the 1996 conference participants who had a complaint, nearly 40% reacted negatively to the reconciliation theme. I personally believe it was a major factor in the significant fall off in 1997 attendance– it is simply a hard teaching for many."[146]

Something was lost in translation. There was no small amount of critique and skepticism from then-current Black faith leaders who typically wondered after the missing components of

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[144] Walker -Barnes, *I bring the Voices of My People*, 8.

[145] Ibid., 6.

[146] Emmerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 68.

the message of reconciliation. Where was the addressing of structural inequities? Emmerson and Smith described:

> As the message of reconciliation spread to a white audience, it was popularized. The racial reconciliation message given to the mass audience is individual reconciliation. That is, individuals of different races should develop strong, committed relationships. There is also a need to repent of individual prejudice. These are the means to reduce racial strife and division. Missing from this formula are the system change in components of the original formulations. The more radical component of reconciliation espoused by the early black leaders and many of the current leaders– challenge social systems of injustice and inequity, to confess social sin– is almost wholly absent in the popularized versions.[147]

Despite religious efforts to the contrary, racial segregation still characterizes the American landscape. Once maintained by law, segregation is now maintained by social structures. Blacks and Whites largely still do not live in the same neighborhoods. Blacks and Whites largely do not attend the same schools. All under the auspice of free will and colorblindness, America largely remains a segregated nation. Although race is endemic to the American social system, structuring all institutions, it is first manifested in the everyday, routine activities and interactions of life where we live, work, and for many Americans, where we worship.[148]

Interestingly, the American Christian landscape still reflects rather than challenges this segregated reality. Emmerson and Smith give legitimacy to this reality in their study of White evangelicals regarding racial problems in America. They said, "We were struck by how racially homogeneous the social worlds of most Evangelicals are, particularly those of white respondents. Other than an occasional acquaintance, they had few interracial contacts. With a few notable exceptions, none lived in worlds that were not at least 90% white in their daily experience."[149] People's experiences within an environment shape the locus of their attention and create the

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[147] Ibid., 67.

[148] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream,* 20.

[149] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith,* 80.

cultural tools necessary for narrating a cohesive understanding of the world. Sociologist Williams Sewell contends that "People not only employ their cultural tools in the context in which they were first learned, but transpose or extend them to new and diverse situations. Thus, Evangelicals, like others, use their religio-cultural tools not only in directly religious contexts, but in helping them make sense of issues like race relations." In popular Evangelicalism, the gospel moment could be narrated through an altar call of freewill commitment to Christ. One could narrate the good news of the Gospel as something like this example from Billy Graham:

> How many people claim to be Christians but don't have any peace in their life? There's no joy, there's no love in their life. There's no walk with Christ. There's no thrill. They get angry quickly, they're sensitive, they're jealous, they're filled with pride. I tell you, the Christian life was never meant to be that way. Give your life to Christ, and make sure that he lives in your heart. Some of you give your life to Christ tonight for the first time. Others of you can re-dedicate your life and see you tonight. I'm going to surrender my life to Christ anew and afresh. I'm going to give myself to him…. All of you that will come tonight and receive Christ and say I'm going to begin. I give myself to him. I come to the foot of his cross renouncing my sins and failures. I'm coming to give myself to him and receive him as Savior and Lord."[150]

What tools might emerge from a moment of commitment and salvation like the one offered above? What cultural tools might shape the message of the gospel in such a way, where this moment becomes the fullness of salvation? If this is the entrance into the life in Christ, what might the shape and nature of that life look like after salvation? Emmerson and Smith say that three main cultural tools deployed by Evangelicals are particularly racially important: "The racially important tools in the Evangelical tool kit are 'accountable free will individualism,' 'relationalism'(attaching central importance to interpersonal relationships), and anti-structuralism (inability to perceive or unwillingness to accept social structural influences)."[151]

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[150] "Surrender to Christ (Must Watch) Dr. Billy Graham," *Www.youtube.com*, last modified March 6, 2018, accessed April 16, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYL2ZuLwVXQ&t=110s.

[151] Emmerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith,* 76.

Emmerson and Smith define these concepts further by saying:

> White conservative Protestants are accountable freewill individualists. Unlike progressives, for them, individuals exist independent of structures and institutions, have free will, and are individually accountable for their own actions… This view is directly rooted in theological understandings as described by Stark and Glock. "Underlying traditional Christian thought is an image of a man as a free actor, as essentially unfettered by social circumstances, free to choose and thus free to affect his own salvation. This Free Will conception of man has been central to the doctrines of sin and salvation. For only if man is totally free does it seem just to hold him responsible for his acts. In short, Christian thought and thus Western Civilization are permeated with the idea that men are individually in control of, and responsible for, their own destinies." Contemporary white American Evangelicalism is perhaps the strongest carrier of this Freewill individualist tradition.[152]

In this notion, there are clear right and wrong choices to be made. Consequently, if God is not only the objective standard bearer but also the God of nature who reveals the divine order of creation through what is empirically observable, this can create a deeply difficult standpoint from which to fully assess racialization in America is created. Responsibility for actions and natural consequences become moral categories that are quite entrenched, and if someone's life displays difficulties, the explanation is that they got there on their own because they deserved it. Great compassion can be displayed for those who are seen as innocent, and therefore not deserving of difficulties thrust upon them, like the unborn, those born with cognitive disabilities, and people who suffer extraordinary accidents (which they didn't cause) and lose the able-ness they once enjoyed. All others are expected to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and get on with it. Those who work hard to change their circumstance will often be granted respect, acceptance, help, and even belonging. These social rewards are basic currency in the economy of accountable freewill individualism because everyone is accountable for his or her own actions.

Relationalism is the next cultural tool. As Emmerson and Smith explain, "For Evangelicals, relationalism derives from the view that human nature is Fallen, and that salvation

[152] Ibid. 76-77.

and Christian maturity can only come through personal relationship with Christ. It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of this relationship for Evangelicals. It is a bedrock, non-negotiable belief."[153] In their research one Baptist respondent stated, "God has created individuals to be in relationship with him. But because of our sinful nature we are set apart from that, and the way to have fellowship with God is through personal relationship with Jesus Christ."[154] Since relationship with Christ is the nature of Christian salvation, relationships with others is the nature of Christian life. This is also indicative of the primary preferred solution to most problems in life. With regards to race, this might play out like so: "Sin is limited to individuals; thus, if race problems – poor relationships– result from sin, then race problems must largely be individually based."[155]

Anti-structuralism is the third cultural tool of Evangelicals that is relevant to race:

> Absent from their [White Evangelicals] account is the idea that poor relationships might be shaped by social structures, such as laws, the ways institutions operate, or forms of segregation. Again, understanding Evangelical cultural tools illuminates why this element is missing. White Evangelicals not only interpret race issues by using accountable Free Will individualism and relationalism, but they often find structural explanations irrelevant or even wrong-headed.[156]

A dose of suspicion driven by lack of experience is all that is needed to denounce structuralism as a legitimate cause of issues. Only those who are oppressed by those systems, who experience the microaggressions against their personhood, or daily run into barriers related to their flourishing tend to see these structural issues clearly. Additionally, those who are in networked proximity to those who regularly experience structural barriers tend to develop this "sight."

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[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., 78.

[156] Ibid.

Therefore, any aspect of reconciliation related to structuralism, namely economics and justice, is outside the scope of imagination for most White evangelicals.

White Church and Racialized Structures

The scope of this study seeks to understand the formational stories of Black Christians in predominantly White Churches. What is it that makes a White church? A White church is defined as one where at least 90% of the congregants are White, with up to 10% of the congregants coming from multi-ethnic backgrounds.[157] It is a church that has a majority of White leaders, primarily engages in problems and issues most relevant to White members (often to the exclusion of other racial groups), and caters to the preferences of White members in church activities, worship music, preaching, church life, and church identity. A predominantly White church operates within White normativity through a combination of hegemony, homophily, and can be highly susceptible to notions of White Supremacist notion enacted through practices that simply do not center the experiences, preferences, and cultural tools of other groups. This is more descriptive than pejorative, but the effects are real for those who stand outside of a White racial identity.

Defining the scope and nature of the issue at hand is important to offering solutions to the problem. Racism is a problem. White Supremacy is a problem. Segregation is a problem. Many complex problems need solutions. However, the problem with isolated homogenous experiences as the vantage point for defining the world is that they create a closed circle of logic. Reality of human experience is a collection of intersecting subjectivities. When those experiences are a closed loop, it is extremely difficult for individuals to see beyond the closed loop of their inner

[157] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream,* 19.

logic. There are only perspectives within our environments that shape the nature of sight and solution. Emmerson and Smith say this:

> Much research points to the race problem as rooted in intergroup conflict over resources and ways of life, the institutionalization of race-based practices, inequality and stratification, and the defense of group position. These are not the views of white evangelicals, however. For them the race problem is one or more of three main types: Prejudiced individuals, resulting in bad relationships and sin, other groups usually African Americans trying to make race problems a group issue when there is nothing more than individual problems, and a fabrication of the self-interested again often African Americans, but also the media, the government, or liberals.[158]

Churches are sites where, through voluntary participation, individuals can come together to offer something generative from the just community of God. What is required for a church to become the just community of God? Relationship with Christ should be enough to do so. To be sure, commitment to Christ is enough for some to radically alter their lives but ais often considered the result of some special calling. When a suburban Christian gives up wealth building in order to serve on a foreign mission field, it is considered extraordinary. When someone gives up the comfort and familiarity of suburbia to live among the poor in the inner city, it is seen as exceptional Christian service. The cross of Christ provides the invitation to radical self-donation, but like many other White Americans, according to Emmerson and Smith:

> …at least some White Evangelicals do not want and are not willing to substantially rearrange their own lives to reduce the race problem. Although their faith directs them in many powerful ways, White American Evangelicals, unless burdened by an individual "calling," assume that faith does not ask them to change the material aspects of their lives for this cause. Given their aversion to discomfort (a universal human trait) and cultural tools, they offer "Christian" solutions such as asking for forgiveness, converting people to Christ, and forming cross-race friendships. The problem with these solutions is that, by themselves, they do not work.[159]

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[158] Emmerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith,* 74.

[159] Ibid. Emmerson & Smith, 130.

Distance offers perspective. For instance, applying the logic that one should "just love your slave well" belongs to a different era. Time has offered enough distance for these perspectives to have fundamentally changed. Critique of a "slave lover" perspective rings true, but what of current issues? How can perspective be achieved? People need different others to illuminate that which is apparent to the outsider but may not be obvious to in-group members.[160] In the opinion of this researcher, hearing from out-group voices is a necessary practice that can help eliminate blind spots and lead to better outcomes.

Nevertheless, Emmerson and Smith rightly state that "Some of America's non race-based values reproduce racialization without any need for people to be prejudiced as defined by the Jim Crow era."[161] In their study Emmerson and Smith found that "often, the leaders in reproducing racialization in the post-Civil Rights era are those who are least prejudiced."[162] Neighborhoods, schools, and even churches inadvertently help to entrench this reality. The dominant American values of choice and freedom undergird this reality, and, according to Emerson and Smith, perpetuate racialization and division along socially constructed lines. Racial justice finds much of its meaning within this understanding of the shifting paradigms of racialization.

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[160] Ibid., 10. "During the late 1930's and early 1940's. Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal traveled to America in preparation for this monumental work on American race relations. In interviewing, he found many honest, good-natured people who told him that though the United States once had a race problem back during slavery times, it no longer did. Relations between the races were good and improving all the time, people were content, and Society was functioning smoothly. Yes, a few racists were out there and some of the things they did were dreadful, but those racists in no way represented the majority of people. Myrdal then pushed them a bit, asking about the gross inequalities in the segregation between races, and suggested that perhaps they themselves contributed to the problem simply by living according to socially defined ways, such as segregation. People were rather taken aback by this, and though they had not really thought about this before, they were sure this was not the problem. They then proceeded to offer justification for the system."

[161] Ibid.

[162] "Highly educated whites, compared to less well educated whites are much less likely to say they are uncomfortable with Black neighbors, less likely to say that they would move if African Americans moved into their neighborhood, and more likely to say that they would consider moving to neighborhoods where African Americans lived.…Based on what the well-educated say, they should be less segregated from Blacks than are other White Americans." The inverse reality is true.

Black Women's Voices

More spaces are needed for Black Christians to reflect on their experiences in predominantly White churches. James Cone says that "What people think about God cannot be divorced from their place and time in a definitive history and culture."[163] Stories have a way of holding complexity that systematics cannot always hold, and autobiographical storytelling is a cultural tool that helps people to remember, to lament, to learn, to heal, to reunite with our origins, to discover, to be surprised, to be transformed, and to be open to new possibilities. Such transformation can be found in the stories of four Black women who are engaged in the work of reconciliation and justice in Predominantly White spaces.

Latasha Morrison tells a story of having a racial awakening in college. She recalls hearing the rich, un-whitewashed history of Africa prior to the Transatlantic slave trade. She learned of a deep and abiding personhood that was present long before colonizing self-interest forcefully separated African people from their homes, "I listened to my professor at East Carolina University share the unfiltered truth about African culture and my African heritage, and something shook loose. Why was I so uncomfortable with hearing this? Underneath my shame and embarrassment, I felt ignorant. Ignorant of the historical context of my people."[164] She talks about moving to Austin, Texas to attend an all-white church as the only black person on staff, and though she became friends with church and staff members the historical and cultural disconnects mounted. She says, "Because I was the only Black person in so many of their lives, I became the go-to source for answers to all their questions about hair and music and all things

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[163] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Revised edition. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1997), 37.

[164] Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation* (Colorado Springs CO: Waterbrook, 2019), 4.

Black. It felt as if people had saved all their 'Ask a Black person' questions for me, and they unloaded until it almost drove me insane."[165]

Her deep disillusionment grew due to the racial disconnect and ignorance of her White friends. Deeply embedded cultural divisions were furthered by the lack of lament within worship; the church did not process the pain in the lives of Black and Brown people. She said,

> The longer I worked in the church, the more I came to see that it wasn't a credible witness for racial reconciliation…. I found that many were oblivious to the full scope of American history and its multiracial realities. With that realization, I made a conscious decision: I'd do my best to be a bridge builder between the majority and non-White church cultures. That bridge might open space for my White friends to better understand my history, culture, and experience and would provide room for my non-White friends to share their pain.[166]

Morrisons' bridge-building group began to flourish, and then the events of Ferguson, Missouri, happened. The city of Ferguson exploded with rage after the murder of unarmed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown at the hands of police. Her "Be the Bridge" group became a reconciliatory Gospel movement in the lives of everyone involved as they processed those tragic events together in community. They reflected on the ministry of reconciliation, and as her white friends "became aware of racial injustice and the history of discrimination, it became impossible for them to turn a blind eye."

All of this set the stage for her Be The Bridge ministry which resources multicultural groups to join the ministry of reconciliation as they commit to truth telling in community, with a posture of humility in their interpersonal engagement. She invites people through a process of Truth Telling, empathizing and lamenting, removing shame and guilt, confessing, seeking forgiveness from complicity in all its forms, repentance, making amends, reconciliation, and

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[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

restoration and ultimately reproducing the transformational process. Morrison posits, "Truth, unvarnished and unfiltered, is essential to the work of sanctification, freedom, and reconciliation."[167]

Another Black woman with a voice to be heard is Christena Cleveland, a social psychologist who loves the Church. She is a natural storyteller who weaves anecdotes about her experiences into her research and writing. She describes "Wrong Christian" and "Right Christian" in her book *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart,* and with a touch of whimsy, she confesses that Right Christian tends to look like her. Wrong Christian tends to look like Ben, a white male young adult whom she often found herself paired with in large group church activities because they were among the few singles in the group. She describes Ben like this:

> Ben happened to be quite possibly the most offensive person I knew. I wish I could say this wasn't the case but everything about Ben bugged me from his inflexible and preachy conservatism to his career as an engineer who designs nuclear (I mean, *seriously?*) warheads, to his dorky Hawaiian print button downs (alas, perhaps his greatest offense). Anyway, there I was riding through Colorado lamenting the fact that Ben was a part of my life and plotting ways to avoid interacting with him ever again, and suddenly I was confronted with the idea that Ben was going to be in heaven. With me. For all eternity. And I would never be rid of him. Suddenly the idea of frolicking on the streets of gold seemed less enticing. "That's okay," I quickly assured myself. "Heaven is going to be a big, big place."[168]

Cleveland goes on to describe more interactions and musings about Ben. He voted based upon one or two issues rather than considering many. He lacked cultural sensitivity, "naturally" only dating women in his own race though he had infatuations with "those exotic types" now and

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[167] Ibid., 22

[168] Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, Il: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 13.

again. She avoided him and confessed that she thought less of him in her label as Wrong Christian. She said:

> For the most part I was happy to keep "Wrong Christian" at bay. There was one cosmic problem. As I got to know Jesus, I began to realize that this was not exactly what he had in mind when he invited us to participate in the kingdom on Earth. I discovered that Jesus apparently did not get the memo concerning the colossal importance of my distinction between Right Christian and Wrong Christian. In fact He doesn't seem to care for my distinction at all. I think this is what God meant when he said, "So my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" in Isaiah 55.[169]

She uses this disarming storytelling to introduce her work in group social psychology, and to reveal the psychological underbelly of group dynamics that keep communities divided from one another. Labeling and dismissing is the position that she challenges, and she invites healthy cross-cultural interactions among equals to be the sight of learning and transformation. She says:

> We do need to have candid conversations about racial injustice in the church and beyond, how we're interacting with the natural environment, how we're caring for the homeless, how we're protecting the unborn, how we're defining atonement, who we are voting for and so forth. These are all necessary and valuable conversations. The trick is to wisely use our Christian friend's ideology to humble us, strengthen us and enhance our understanding of God and the role we're called to play in his kingdom.[170]

In her social psychological research Cleveland reveals that "group process shows that group separation and prejudice tend to result in division between groups, and division between groups tends to result in prejudice"[171] In other words, homogeneity breeds further in-group, out-group labeling and divisiveness. Without healthy diversity and exposure to other ethnic groups, a group becomes less likely to receive outgroup members. This has a severe adverse effect on

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[169] Ibid., 15.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Ibid. 33

churches who embrace the homophily principle without any intentional or thoughtful engagement with different others. Dr. Cleveland holds the theological conviction that the incarnation is the heart of the gospel and of Christian living. Cleveland says:

> People can meet God in their cultural context but in order to follow God, they must cross into other cultures because that's what Jesus did. In the incarnation and on the cross. Discipleship is cross cultural. When we meet Jesus around people who are like us and then continue to follow Jesus around people who are just like us, we stifle our growth in Christ and open ourselves up to a world of division. However, when we are rubbing elbows in Christian fellowship with people who are different from us, we can learn from each other and grow more like Christ. Like iron sharpens iron.[172]

Cleveland wrote *Disunity in Christ* in the years leading up to publication in 2013. Her previous areas of focus and her previous websites, prior to 2013, were largely academic and promoted her book and offered booking and guest lecture opportunities. Her previous work focus and website has since changed. In 2015, Cleveland became an associate professor of the Practice of Reconciliation and director of the Center for Reconciliation (CFR)[173] at Duke University. In 2022, Cleveland authored *God is a Black Woman* following a pilgrimage to a region of France known for its devotion to Black Madonna. As she is referring to Black Madonna, Cleveland states, "deep down inside she needed to believe that her Black and Female Body is sacred too…that transformed her understanding about who is sacred and what is profane."[174] Cleveland's new webpage now has this description of her public work: "Integration. My passion

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[172] Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, Il: Intervarsity Press, 2013). The author comes to the conviction that cultural diversity should be a universal goal of Christian organizations and churches. She pays attention to cultures as they are broadly defined and shaped by age, gender, economic status, education level, political orientation, etc. contending that "every church should fully utilize the multifaceted cultural diversity within itself and express the cultural diversity of its local community. This pressure is intensified for churches within multiethnic communities.

[173] "Center for Reconciliation | Duke Divinity School," *Divinity.duke.edu*, accessed April 17, 2023, https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/cfr.

[174] "Christena Cleveland," *Sacred Folk Productions* (Monforte Studio, 2021), last modified 2021, accessed April 15, 2023, https://www.christenacleveland.com/.

is integration. I integrate justice and renewal, body and mind, hope and lament, social psychology and theology, research and practice, pro-Blackness and pro-humanity, truth and love, and contemplation and action in pursuit of a new reality in which all people are truly free."[175] In her most recent work, Cleveland centers the importance of the human body because we have nothing to encounter God with outside of our human bodies. Our enfleshed selves are the location of the work of God.

Oshetta Moore is another vulnerable and prophetic Black female who lives out her call to antiracism as Christian Faithfulness. She experiences the heaviness and the deep intentionality of being a Black Christian in a predominantly White Church, and she weaves this experience into her stories throughout her work. One story was particularly formative. It happened when she was 17 years old:

> James was a forty-nine-year-old man in Jasper, Texas, a town just two-and-a-half hours away from my hometown in Texas. One Sunday morning in June, James was walking home from his parents' house when three White men pulled up next to him. One of them, Shawn Berry, was an acquaintance of his, so when they offered him a ride home, James accepted. You guessed it--he did not make it home.
> The three men, Lawrence Brewer, Shawn Berry, and John King did the unspeakable, instead of taking him home. They took James to a field, where they beat him and treated his body like a common rest stop bathroom. They spray painted his face, urinated and defecated on his body. This alone would have been enough to traumatize a severely wounded James for the rest of his life, but that wasn't enough for the men. King was a member of a racist organization and needed to prove himself with the murder of a Black person, so they chained James to the back of their pickup truck and went on a horrific torture ride. Swerving the truck from right to left, they drug James three-and-a-half miles along a logging road. His skin and blood left a trail in over eighty-one places for officials to find, and even though he fought for his life until the very end, trying to hold his head up as it slammed against the road, when he hit the edge of a culvert his arm and head were severed from his body. The men then continued to drag the remains of his torso all the way to the cemetery reserved for Black people in Jasper, where James was found the next day.[176]

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[175] Ibid.

[176] Osheta Moore, *Dear White Peacemakers* (Harrisburg, VA: Herald Press 2021), 72-73

This gruesome murder happened in the year 1998. In response, President Obama passed a hate crime prevention act bearing the name of James and another such victim. Oshetta Moore was 17 years old when this present-day lynching occurred. This became a core memory for her regarding her family and her church. When Black bodies enter the conversation about race, racism, and White supremacy, the conversation gains urgency. Moore goes on to notice the body of her father, herself, her uncle, and of Klansmen:

> I found out about James Byrd's death on the news. Seventeen years old and stunned at this modern-day lynching, I looked over to my father sitting next to me watching the news coverage and studying the picture of James, and all I could think was, "He looks like Uncle Morris ... he looks like Daddy's younger brother." My father, a man known for his stoicism, rested his hands on his head as tears formed in the corners of his eyes. Then I wondered, "Does he see his brother ...or does he see himself?" I honestly thought these kinds of things didn't happen anymore. Not in 1998, not in the age of colorblindness and melting-pot cartoons played for me on PBS about this great nation of tolerance. Not in a church that is admittedly mostly White, but we have a few Blacks and "Mexicans" (the embarrassing shorthand I learned as a Texan for all people of Latino descent). And these guys didn't look like Klansmen or White supremacists, they looked like regular Joes who grill on the weekends and drink beers on their porches and dance with their honeys under a starlit southern sky. White people don't do these things anymore, right? And if they do, they do them under the covering of a hateful hood. This was one of the first times I realized that being Black was not only a liability, it could get me killed. The color of my skin makes me an easy target to someone who never talks about the systemic reality of white supremacy and the dangerous implications of unexamined biases. I often wonder what would make a White person cauterize their empathy so completely that they would dismiss the emotional, spiritual, and physical pain of a person of color.[177]

Moore recalls the racial reconciliation movements that swept across the Evangelical world in the 1980s and 1990s. She describes it as bringing a wholesale emphasis on unity without sacrificial Christlike love.[178] She says,

> [Christ-like love] never asked the White people in my church to experience discomfort for more than a couple of hours a year of preaching about race relations. It substituted mission trips to Africa for authentically caring about the Black members in their church. If there were stories of victory in overcoming racism, it was always in some other church

[177] Ibid., 73-74.

[178] Ibid., 74.

> or community and we'd wear their testimony like a secondhand frock so as to never be asked to take up our unique mantle of addressing the racism in our very pews. I once heard a Korean theologian describe this interpersonal-focused, systematic-downplaying form of racial reconciliation as "hug a Black friend."
>
> But looking back, I didn't want hugs, I wanted justice. I wanted justice for names. I wanted justice for every time a White teacher refused to say my name on the first day of school because it's "too difficult." I wanted justice for the school secretary who put me in remedial English even though I tested into AP. I wanted justice for the anxiety I carried every time my brother got in his car– in addition to our mistrust of the local police, I knew my brother's unaddressed mental health issues caused him to blow up at a moment's notice and I worried that if he got pulled over at just the wrong time, he might offend the wrong officer and never come home again. I wanted the White people who loved me to show they truly did by being willing to enter into my pain.[179]

This sounds very much like "bearing one another's burdens in love," but it was not her experience that day in Church. As the rest of that day in church unfolded, she recalls the rehearsal of "God is good…. All the time" and flatly participated in it. Over the course of the service there was no mention of the lynching, no call to lament or to pray for the lynching death or the family of James Byrd. Moore's questions following this Sunday morning service are breathtakingly difficult. She says this.

> God is good for you because you're White. Was God good for James? Where was the sacrificial love of White people having an honest moment in our polished service to show love to Black members in pain? Where was the Mastery of their anxiety of saying the wrong thing? Where was their rejection of the idols they erected to the god of comfort and where was their allegiance to Jesus, the one acquainted with rejection, the wounded healer, the Prince of Peace?[180]

The incongruence of the victorious (by default) triumphalist service stung deeply that day. It was tantamount to hearing, in the words of the prophet woe to those who cry "Peace, Peace, where there is no peace." At the age of seventeen, Moore was terrorized by the murder of a Black man and then forced to face that terror alone while in the presence of her church community. That

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[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid., 76.

neglect was a transformative moment. She says, “I was tired of being a Christian in a context crafted for White people because we didn't have honest conversations about race…. I built a wall to protect me from White people. Because well-meaning White Christians who refused to talk about race and acknowledge this influence of White supremacy, I decided that it was not safe for me to grieve any type of racially charged death.”[181]

Pain of this magnitude changes a person. It requires healing. Any hope of reconciliation needs truth telling as its beginning and healing as its telos. Moore describes White Supremacy as an illness, a pathology that affects everyone and everything. She strives to bring healing through active peacemaking and embodied love while telling the truth in vulnerability.

Oshetta Moore is a peacemaker. She calls other peacemakers to begin with her in embodying three paradigm-shifting teachings from Jesus. These three ‘calls’ are first to love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your mind (Matt 22:37), secondly, to love your neighbor as yourself (v.39), and third, to love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:27-28).[182] She is a Black woman who, in the face of her anguish and hope, calls White people beloved. Antiracism[183] is centered in her understanding. It is an active stance against actions which further racial inequity between groups and against expressing ideas which suggest racial inferiority or

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[181] Ibid., 77.

[182] Ibid., 30–32.

[183] Ibram X Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (NewYork: One World 2019), 17–20. Kendi defines a policy as a written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people. There is no such thing as a non-racist or race neutral policy, but every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing racial inequity or racial equity. A racist idea is any idea that suggests one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way. ***A racist is one who supports a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expresses a racist idea. An ANTIRACIST is one who supports an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an anti-racist idea.***

superiority between groups. Anti-Racism intersects with her first call through peacemaking with her full, whole self. She says, "Shalom is God's dream for me to be transformed by his love so that all aspects of myself, even myself in this Brown body, can flourish. My thoughts, my heart, my experiences, my perspective as a Black woman can be used to proclaim the love of God, but first peace, and the making of it begins within, "by dismantling internalized racism."[184]

Peacemaking, shalom, wholeness, healing, transformation, and anti-racism: these are words that are all in the orbit of an embodied reconciliation for Moore. However, if reconciliation does not have a large enough definition to be subsumed by these notions, it is not a reconciliation that should be embraced, for it has no power to address the complexity of the human situation. It has no chance of transforming people and enemies into the beloved community, the community created and sustained by the love of Jesus.

To review, these Black female voices suggest a plethora of contributions to the work of reconciling people to each other. Latasha Morrison posits that bridge building as part of the efforts toward racial justice and offers a posture of humility and the practice of truth telling are the starting points. Christena Cleveland challenges the church to take seriously the ways that groups are formed and warns of self-protective sameness and labeling, acts that disallow following an incarnated Christ across cultures to learn from those we might "Other." Oshetta Moore strives for the healing of everyone, internally and externally, as they embody faithful Anti-racism. She invites all to dismantle racism with grit and grace. These are the stories of Black Christians operating in predominantly White churches. Soon, attention will be turned to the reflections of research participants. Before that shift, however, it is important to engage one

[184] Moore, *Dear White Peacemakers, 31*

final person. She will help frame a more current understanding of the persistent transmutability of racism through White Supremacist power as Emmerson and Smith introduced.

Chanequa Walker-Barnes has a lifetime of presence in the Civil Rights Movement and is a daughter of the South. She describes herself as having the fire for racial justice lit within her from a young age. Having encountered racism along the way, her lens for justice informed her understanding of the racism she encountered. It was structural and interpersonal. It needed justice and reconciliation. Her environment and her family of origin prepared her for this work. She says, "Fortunately, in addition to my family's strong sense of racial identity, I inherited a penchant for peacemaking from my grandmothers. Like my paternal grandmother in particular, I had and still have a sort of pollyannaish tendency to see the best in people, to believe that people can and will choose their best selves."[185]

One important critique she offers regards the scope of the ministry of reconciliation as constructed by Black and White men:

> "The exclusion of women's racial experiences from dialogue on racial reconciliation is not simply a problem for women. It precludes any real understanding of the dynamics of race and racism. Historically, Women's bodies have been the sights upon which racial boundaries have been policed and racial wars have been fought. In the United States, for example, two of the primary ways by which white supremacist patriarchy has exercised its power have been by controlling what white women could do with their bodies and by demonstrating that black women's bodies were violable."[186]

For example, the myth of the rapacious Black man who is sexually virulent and, therefore, dangerous was constructed to protect the innocence of White women. Hyper sexualization provides a lens for "justifying" racist ideas and is a part of the intersection of race and gender. This gender racism against Black men incited White men towards protective (and therefore,

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[185] Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, xviii.

[186] Ibid., 10.

innocent, and noble) violence against Black men to police sexual or romantic interest in White women. This fearful policy undergirded miscegenetic laws blocking interracial marriage, the last of which was upheld in the state of Alabama until the year 2000. Meanwhile, rapacious White men need not look any further than the bodies of enslaved Black women to satisfy sexual urges not "fulfilled" by White women. Sexual violence was common through enslavement. Why else explains so much diversity of pigmentation among African Americans? Why else would the pseudo-scientific "One Drop"[187] rule be necessary in defining racial categories? This undergirds colorism, which is a form of racist ideology that positions lighter skinned African Americans as more "preferable" or "more desirable" than darker skinned African Americans in terms of beauty, safety toward white persons, and other domains of measuring value. A specific race-gender atrocity committed against Black women is the "Mississippi appendectomy." Eugenics were a form of "scientific" racism that resulted in the practice of sterilization of Black women in the South. Walker-Barnes explains:

> During the 1970s sterilization became the most rapidly growing form of birth control in the United States, rising from 200,000 cases in 1970 to over 700,000 in 1980. It was a common belief among blacks in the South that black women were sterilized without their informed consent and for no valid medical reason. Kitchen hospitals performed unnecessary hysterectomies on poor black women as practice for their medical residents. This sort of abuse was so widespread in the south, but these operations came to be known as Mississippi appendectomies.[188]

To have notions of God's reconciliation that do not consider sexual violence and bodies is incomplete. These realities have been pervasive yet remain unacknowledged in most *patriarchal* White evangelical conversations about racial reconciliation. These terrorizing realities are as old as antebellum enslavement and have lasting effects to this day. Thus, as

[187] The 'one drop' rule was a White supremacist Notion founded upon scientific racism which said that if a human had 'one drop' of African blood in them, that person was categorized as 'negro' or 'black'.

[188] Walker-Barnes, I Bring the Voices of My People, 26-27.

Walker-Barnes explains, "marginalizing the voices of women of color results in anemic understandings of racism and hinders our efforts toward reconciliation. If we truly hope to work toward racial reconciliation, the perspectives of women of color must be moved from margin to Center."[189]

In her book *I Bring the Voice of my People,* Chanequa Walker Barnes offers a womanist perspective of racism. She also offers a definition of racial reconciliation that necessarily incorporates a more holistic integration of God, salvation, mission, justice, dignity, cultures, antiracism, and human flourishing. Consequently, she sharpens and helpfully clarifies White supremacist racialization in American cultures:

> Racial reconciliation is a part of God's ongoing and eschatological Mission to restore wholeness and peace to a world broken by systemic injustice. Racial reconciliation focuses its efforts upon dismantling white supremacy, the systemic evil that denies and distorts the image of God inherent in all humans based upon the heretical belief that white aesthetics, values, and cultural norms are the fullest representation of the Imago Dei. White supremacy thus maintains that white people are superior to all other peoples, and it orders creation, identities, relationships, and social structures in ways that support this distortion and denial.

Womanist Theology begins its exploration in the lived experiences of African American women and notices multiple intersecting forms of oppression and their hope-filled resistance to these oppressions. Womanist Theology's scope extends beyond Black women and into the lived experiences of other women of color, displaying the extremely generative idea that the liberation of Black women is ultimately not just for their own sake, but for the sake of everyone.

Another important concept highlighted by Womanist Theology is the current modus operandi of racism in America. As stated before, racist expression has shifted from epoch to epoch. The language and actions normalized in one time-period seem outdated or absurd in the next, creating a blindness that serves the aims of obscuring the myth of White supremacy.

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[189] Ibid., 10.

Classical racialism says that race is a biological reality, a lie was undergirded by the myth of nature's God. Definitions of racism change to suit the needs of racist power, but unfortunately, theological beliefs are harder to change and harder to disentangle from due to their position as "objective realities" in much of the American religious imagination.

Nevertheless, this biological racism gave way to scientific racism. The practice of eugenics "purported that race was biologically linked to not only to intelligence, but also traits such as criminality, poverty, alcoholism, laziness, and morality."[190] Therefore, "breeding" within racial categories was deemed to be preferable. Classical racism has largely been debunked and dismissed as pseudo-science that does not stand up under the scrutiny of real scientific examination; however, the social realities it fostered still persist. Some ethnic groups were co-opted into Whiteness while others tend to have race-class embedded in their meaning.

These determinations continue to expand and shift. Nevertheless today, these racial designations[191] include the following: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Hispanic or Latino is viewed as a separate ethnic rather than racial category because persons of Hispanic or Latino descent may be of any race.[192] These distinctions underlie what we have come to call the social construction of race.

Though race is socially constructed, the impacts of it on lived experiences are real. Constructed does NOT mean false or made up. This language is a tool of White Supremacist

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[190] Ibid., 25.

[191] Ibid., 32. "Today racial designations, that is the racial category to which a person ascribes and/or is assigned, are based upon a combination of factors such as phenotype, continental ancestry, shared history, and self-identification."

[192] Ibid., 33.

power to obfuscate the testimonies of Black and other people of color. The current cultural landscape of racialization aims towards color-blindness as a moral and practical ideal. It is a notion of racism "without racists." Colorblindness became the dominant racial ideology following the civil rights era. ***We are here now.***

> Compared to Jim Crow racism, the ideology of color-blindness seems like 'racism lite'. instead of relying on name calling (niggers, spics, chinks), color-blind racism otherizes softly ('these people are human, too); instead of proclaiming that God placed minorities in the world in a servile position, it suggests they are behind because they do not work hard enough; instead of viewing interracial marriage as wrong on a straight racial basis, it regards it as " problematic" because of concerns of the children, location, or the next burden that places on couples. Yet this new ideology has become a formidable political tool for maintenance of the racial order. Much as Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression and the pre-civil rights era, color blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who would subjects and those who would Rewards… thus whites enunciate positions that Safeguard their racial interests without sounding "racist." Shielded by color blindness, whites can express resentment towards minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic; and even claim to be the victims of 'Reverse Racism.'[193]

Color-blind racism can be identified in four frames which include abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism does not refer to political leftness or rightness, but rather the fundamental philosophical notion of western modernity. It emphasizes, "individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, and meliorism, "the idea that people and institutions can be improved."[194] Naturalization justifies and dismisses racial disparities by claiming that they occur naturally rather than as the result of intentional practices and policies of exclusion.[195] Thus, schools, areas of town, churches, and any other segregated

[193] Ibid., 34-35.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid.

place has become that way naturally. Cultural racism explains racial disparities as resulting from cultural differences between racial/ethnic groups. It unfortunately becomes a form of victim blaming which notices disparities as real, but places responsibilities for the disparity solely on the person. For instance, if applied to a gender racist lens, individuals might blame unwelcome advances on a woman because her state of dress or demeanor convey that 'she is asking for it'. This is wrong. The final frame of racism is minimization. It simply desires for people to believe that racial discrimination is a phenomenon of the past that no longer impacts the lives and opportunities of ethnic minorities.[196] In fact, to the contrary, Black exceptionalism is used to declare a 'Post Racial America.' Obama was president that one time, right? Black basketball players are some of the richest Americans, even more so than their White counterparts, because when was the last time anyone saw a supermax contract go to a White player? Black people are college professors, doctors, and lawyers, so racial discrimination is over, right? No.

If ***we are here now***, what does it mean? The far-reaching effects of racialization encompass everyone. This racialization is not some debatable reality or academic exercise; it is the shape and nature of American cultures. This racialization happens in real places and real times upon real bodies, yet it simultaneously dislocates our sense of self and our sense of God from concrete location (creation). This racialization is happening and recreating itself through White supremacist power that cuts across intersecting experiences and oppressions in our current shared realities right now.

A first order of importance is to slow down and take account of the ways that people are being formed, to pay attention to the stories of formation that emerge when reflecting on, spirituality, identity, experience, and desire. The intention of this project is to discover the

[196] Ibid., 36.

formational stories of Black Christians in predominantly White Churches. Their stories will be attended to now.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

The purpose of this project is to help Black Christians reflect on the experiences that have been most formative to them as they participate in predominantly white churches. This study relied upon self-reported identity of the participants. The categories of 'Black' and 'Christian' were essential for participating meaningfully in the study. The study was not focused on the experiences of indigenous populations or People of Color more broadly or specific ethnic identities within racial categories. These were omitted from participant registration because the study focused on "Blackness" as a gathering notion related more to racialized experience rather than colorism, or specific nationality. The language in recruitment was kept simple to be inclusive of all ethnic minorities that self-identify as Black. The intent of this simplicity was to welcome the diversity within Blackness while allowing for people to self-select in or out of the study based upon their self-definition. The scope of the study was described to each participant, and each individual was asked if she or he would like to participate.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited primarily by email contact. I began by creating a list of individuals whom I knew in predominantly white churches where I have been a member or been on staff. Once this initial list was created, all participants were contacted by me and offered to join the study. Those who agreed to participate were sent digital consent forms, and initial interview times were set. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and did not exceed 90 minutes. This interview method was most accessible, and it created space for listening and reflection, the goal of the data

collection method. Secondary recruitment came from primary recruits at the conclusion of the interview times, when participants were offered the opportunity to voluntarily provide referrals for other individuals, they perceived might benefit from participating in the study. Secondary participants were contacted via email with the addendum that "A participant in this study offered your name as a potential participant to this study." All who received this email reported being happy to have been referred and were eager to participate. Consent forms were sent, and interview times scheduled.

Demographics

The study yielded 15 participants of varying ages and genders. Ages ranged from 73 years old to 35 years old, with a median age of 49 years old. Participants self-identified gender. There were five female participants and ten males. Thirteen participants currently attend Churches of Christ while two others attend Christian Churches. Participants reside in Orange County, California; Fulton County, Georgia; Dekalb County, Illinois; Oakland County and Shelby Township, Michigan; and Davidson, Rutherford, and Williamson Counties, Tennessee. All participants self-identified as Black, Christian, and attending predominantly white churches. All reported a current active status in a church which fit the parameters of the study.

Table 1: Summary of Participants

Participant #	**Age**	**Gender**	**Denomination**	**County/State**
1	69	Female	Church of Christ	Orange County, CA
2	44	Male	Church of Christ	Robertson County, TN
3	66	Male	Church of Christ	Oakland County, MI

4	54	Male	Church of Christ	Oakland County, MI
5	66	Female	Christian Church	Davidson County, TN
6	46	Male	Church of Christ	Dekalb County, IL
7	40	Male	Church of Christ	Davidson County, TN
8	47	Female	Church of Christ	Dekalb County, IL
9	57	Male	Church of Christ	Williamson County, TN
10	60	Female	Church of Christ	Williamson County, TN
11	38	Female	Church of Christ	Davidson County, TN
12	50	Male	Church of Christ	Fulton County, GA
13	35	Male	Church of Christ	Rutherford County, TN
14	73	Male	Church of Christ	Shelby Township, MI
15	42	Male	Christian Church	Davidson County, TN

Interview Approach and Questions

This qualitative study[197] utilized a semi-structured[198] interview[199] approach to have consistency with each participant while leaving room for necessary follow-up questions[200] based on responses. I sought to create a rich storytelling environment through focused listening. Participants were instructed to take their time answering each question and were encouraged to consider stories that emerged with each question rather than giving singular responses. All fifteen participants were asked the same set of eight questions in the same order. The questions were as follows:

1. What does it mean to you to be Black?
2. What does it mean to you to be Christian?
3. Tell me about your experience(s) in a predominantly White church. What led you there and what makes you stay?
4. What have you gained from being part of a predominantly White church and what have you had to give up?
5. When have you felt misunderstood within this context and what was it like?
6. When have you felt understood within this context and what was it like?
7. How has being a Black Christian in a predominantly White church shaped who you are?

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[197] John W Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 4. "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."

[198] Gregory J Privitera and Lynn Ahlgrim-Delzell, *Research Methods for Education* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2019), 146. "A semi structured interview is an interview with a set of questions that are presented to all individuals being interviewed but the responses are open ended."

[199] Katarzyna Peoples and Sage Publications, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-By-Step Guide* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2020), 55. "The data collection method of using semi structured interviews and follow-up interviews allows the lived sense of participants' situations to function spontaneously in the initial interview.")

[200] Privetera and Ahlgrim-Delzell. *Research Methods for Education*, 147. "This type of interview also allows for follow-up questions to clarify and expand upon a response."

8. Which stories from scripture are most important to you? Why?

The questions were structured to build upon one another and to offer natural opportunities for reflexive reflection. In fact, many participants said, “I’d like to go back and say something more about one of the previous questions.” Questions one and two, What does it mean to you to be Black? What does it mean to you to be Christian? are narrative identity questions where participants had the opportunity to begin to express meaning through these identities to situate responses in reference to these narrative identities. These questions also provided the opportunity to tap into the rich diversity of response elicited while making them particular to the individual. Question three is a tandem question to access experiences and agency within each individual's setting. Reflection about personal agency was meant to engender a full range of responses regarding human flourishing or the lack thereof. This was the focus of the next three questions. Questions four, five, and six invited further reflection on moments and events in a descriptive way so that participants talked about longings, losses, and benefits of their participation in white churches, followed by descriptive thoughts and feelings related to experiences. Question seven turned towards attending to formation and is the key question for participants to synthesize meaningful or noteworthy changes in them that resulted from participating as Black Christians in predominantly white churches. The final question sought to offer a different lens to consider formation through scripture in these environments. I was particularly curious about which stories from scripture might emerge as formative and how that related to the formational stories told from the other questions. This question also functioned as a surprising ending to the arc of the questions and was met with surprise in nearly each interview.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen for the researcher to gain a deep and full description of participants' experiences related to rich storytelling. Interviews were audio recorded through Zoom and transcribed through a transcription technology. Participants were numbered 1-15 and are referred to as such in the data findings. I analyzed the audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews and made notations about responses containing vocal inflections[201], feeling words, adjectives, and metaphors. The data was coded for themes.[202] A thematic analysis was completed, and the themes[203] and subthemes were reported in the findings.

[201]Peoples, *How To Write*, 54. "Certain inflections, tones, accentuation, tempo, acceleration, modulation and things that go 'unsaid' are all part of the data."

[202] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research : A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 199. "Formulating themes and patterns is just one way of capturing, make sense of, and communicating the phenomenon being analyzed."

[203] Ibid., 198. "The most common and easiest part of the process is generating themes, categories, and patterns."

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings

The purpose of this project is to help Black Christians reflect on their experiences in predominantly White Churches. The data reflect the results of the semi-structured interview approach. Interviews were coded and then grouped into seven major themes that emerged from the findings: The Impact of Events in History, Racialization in Predominantly White Churches, The Pursuit of Belonging, Materiality and Location, Racialized Trauma, The Twin Realities of Hope and Despair, and Power. Once established, these seven major themes yielded sub-themes that further characterize and group descriptive codes into meaningful representations of the participants' experiences.

Impact of Events in History describes the relevance of current and historical events that have racial impact. The inherent sub-themes are *recent events* and *past events*. Racialization in Predominantly White Churches recognizes the ubiquitous impact of racialization on the church and church adherents. These sub-themes include *racialized policies* and *racialized formation.*

The Pursuit of Belonging captures the intrinsic strivings of Black and White churchgoers who endeavor to share in the church community. The sub-themes include *Black identity and belonging*, *benefits of community*, *shared experiences*, *emotional care in community*, *lifegiving interpersonal interactions,* and *stressful interpersonal interactions*. The theme of Materiality and Location accounts for the material dynamics between people in spaces. Its sub-themes include *resources, places,* and *people.*

Racialized Trauma explores the effects of ongoing exposure to emotionally disturbing and/or life-threatening events that have lasting adverse effects on participants functioning in regard

to mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.[204] Its sub-themes are *physical*, *psychological*, and *counter formation*. The two categories of Twin Realities of Hope and Despair describe the data which contribute to the unique duality present in most participants' inner lives. The sub-themes are *hope* and *despair*. Power was a surprising theme that emerged specifically in relation to intersecting realities found in the data. Its sub-themes included *dominance* and *gender*.

The final section is a short representation of Scriptures that participants named as important in conjunction with question eight of the research questions. Responses are charted on Table 3 at the conclusion of the findings, which includes a brief overview of participants, named stories and specifically named scriptural references, and a summarizing sentence for why these stories are reported as important.

The 15 participants are of varying ages, genders, and church experiences with the overwhelming majority coming from Churches of Christ. Interviews yielded stories and pertinent moments. Table 2 below describes the themes, sub-themes, definitions, and a pertinent quote.

Table 2: Snapshot of Themes

Themes and Sub Themes	Definitions	Example
Impact of Events in History 1. Historical Events 2. Recent Events	Describes the relevance of current and historical events that have racial impact.	"I don't think people understand how white evangelicals champion the cause around a president who…" ~ Participant 9 Male, Age 57
Racialization in Predominantly White Churches 1. Racialized Policies	Recognizes the ubiquitous impact of racialization on Church and Church participants.	"At different points in time people have been marginalized and oppressed because they were not

[204] "What Is Trauma?," *Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center*, last modified March 20, 2018, https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma/#:~:text=SCIENCE%20OF%20TRAUMA-. (There are many definitions for Trauma. This definition represented the most codes from the research findings.)

2. Racialized Formation		the people in power…And so I'm keenly aware of our country. ~ Participant 12 Male, Age 50
The Pursuit of Belonging 1. Black Identity 2. Black Belonging Shared Identity & Belief 3. Benefits of Community 4. Shared Experiences 5. Emotional Care in Community 6. Lifegiving Interpersonal Interactions 7. Stressful Interpersonal Interactions	The intrinsic striving of Black and White participants who endeavor toward Church community.	"I learned that not all white people are evil…I ran into families that just liked all people and lived wholeheartedly. They didn't want to be harmful to anyone. That's the benefit of going to an all White Congregation." ~ Participant 6 Male, Age 46
Materiality and Location 1. Resources 2. Places 3. People	The material dynamics between people in spaces.	"One of the things being in a predominantly White space has shown me that hurts, but is also reality. The gap in wage and just wealth is tremendous." ~Participant 13 Male, Age 35
Racialized Trauma 1. Psychological 2. Physical 3. Counter-formation	Explores the effects of ongoing exposure to emotionally disturbing and/or life-threatening events that have lasting adverse effects on participants' functioning with regards to mental, physical and spiritual well-being.	"I wrote a piece that talks about all the places I thought I would be safe that I wasn't. I wasn't safe at home. I wasn't safe at work. I'm still not safe from racism.' ~ Participant 5 Female, Age 66
The Twin Realities of Hope and Despair 1. Hope 2. Despair	The data which contributed to the unique duality present in most participants' inner lives.	"As long as I've been here, and we've been working towards this…it's still an issue. I don't feel like I've done…I don't know….enough?" ~ Participant 14 Male, Age 73
Power 1. Dominance 2. Gender	Power recognizes the effects of dominance which is an intersecting reality with gender in White evangelical churches.	"'He was used to seeing things in one way, so he felt like he could question 'why are all the black people together?' Ladies' groups are different when men are

		present." ~ Participant 8 Female, Age 47

Theme 1: Impact of Events in History

Some participants shared the impact of events in history that affected them. As participants shared some events, there were observably tense body postures, facial expressions, and disappointed sighs. The historical events related to the murder of George Floyd and the election of former President Trump. When participants remembered Black accomplishments, their body language changed to a confident reverence. Analysis of the qualitative data revealed many common themes related to events in history.

Recent Events

Several participants in this study described troublesome recent events. Participant four said, "So I'm going to bring up something that changed my view in the last couple years. Let's go back to the prior President that we had. Those four years brought out a side of my brothers and sisters in Christ, Black and White, that was somewhat disturbing." Participant four continued, "If the perspective that I heard come out of the mouth of some of the people that I sit next to in church…if that is the perspective…I don't know if we're going to be in the same heaven." Participant four then said, "I stopped going to church for a few years because the environment was just too toxic."

Participant nine recalled, "I don't think people understand how white evangelicals champion the cause around a president, who you and I know has broken several, I won't even say laws, I'll just say norms." Participant one had a son who was on the medical front lines dealing with COVID early on, and the church congregants were refusing to wear masks. One

person told her, “Trump’s telling the truth,” Which sent her out the door in frustration. Her church family would not take seriously the thing that was endangering her son’s life every day as a medical professional. Participant five felt that the election of President Trump was a racist act, and some members of the church, out of care, approached her after Trump was elected and said, “How are you? You know, how are you with this?” That was a gesture of checking in on her.

Another recent event was the murder of George Floyd. Participant four recalled, “What happened to George Floyd and the pandemic as our economy began struggling, people started saying and doing things differently than they normally do.” When speaking about people he knew, Participant four stated, “Once you reveal who you are, I have to respect that if you tell me the truth about who you are, and shame on me if I don’t pay attention. I had some people who told me who they were. And I, I paid attention. So, let’s, let’s agree that we are not going to agree.” Participant four had to stop talking about certain things with people with whom he used to hold frequent conversations.

Participant seven said, “Of course living in 2020 was crazy, being a black person, man or woman in a predominantly white space. Yo’ behind was worn out. You became the sounding board for all of it, all of it. You got all the, ‘I’m sorry’s’ and the ‘Help me understand.’ Participant fifteen recounted this event in a different way: “The injustice that was happening with George Floyd, I think, was the very first time in my experience at church, of going there, for, you know, eight or nine years, where my voice was having a greater volume than others.” Participant five recalled, “After George Floyd was murdered, my minister asked me to do this work in the church. I felt it was a really prime opportunity to educate White people. Now, everybody doesn’t want to be educated. And I know that. But it is an opportunity to reach people.” One-third of the participants reported that recent events impacted them.

Historical Events

The participants in this study also described historical events that continue to have deep negative impact on them even if they did not experience them personally. The effects of past moments in history continue to linger. Participant five stated, “Fresh out of college I was working for a state agency. I walked in early for a staff meeting and someone looked at me and said, ‘well, _____, we were just having a KKK meeting.’ She recalls being frightened, but not knowing what to do, so she sat in her seat and let the meeting begin. Similarly, Participant two recalled where he grew up: “If you don’t know anything about Pulaski, it’s the birthplace of the KKK.”

Participant three had an exchange with a dear friend that went like this: “You know, I really can relate when people say, we want to get back to the good old days. And I said, ‘Oh, really? Like what?’ He says, ‘Yeah, back when families were stronger, and life was simpler, and things were just better.’ I said, ‘So, what year are you talking about would be the good old days? He said, ‘The 1940s and 1950s?’ I said, ‘OH! So back when I would have to sit at the back of the bus. And back when it would have been against the law for me to date a white woman or marry a white woman?’ And he got a little quiet. And I said, ‘You know, in the 40s and 50s, the Jim Crow laws were very, very strong in parts of the United States.’ And he said, ‘Who was Jim Crow? When did he write laws?’ And I said, ‘No, no, no, you don’t understand.’ Past events have lingering effects in the world and shape interpersonal moments of the participants.

However, history does not only serve the purpose of recalling negative experiences; it can also serve to discover identity and belonging to a people who overcome. Participant 1 said, “When I look at what my ancestors, my forefathers, have accomplished with literally nothing, it gives me hope.” Participant one also stated, “I grew up in an all-Black church. We had several

prominent Black leaders, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, and Angela Davis, come through to speak." Those leaders were active in organizing sit-ins and, "Their interpretation of the scriptures meant being responsible and accountable." Participant 2 shared a family story of his hometown: "My family member is someone who was trying to reconcile Black and White churches in Pulaski, Tennessee." This is work my [family member] continues to do today. Participant two also describes another moment of heritage and pride saying, "I see traits of myself in these people that have been passed down. If there was one who stood up for what he believed in, Campbell did, and it got him in trouble. I mean, that's my family. It's always been my family's attitude. To stand up for what you believe in. I looked over at the other side and found out that I have Igbo Nigerian as my main African identity. I had a feeling we came from Nigeria, but I didn't know the name of the tribe until a few weeks ago. And I just found a lot of proud people. And I look at things… I had a great-great-grandfather born in 1835. This man lived through slavery, the Civil War. and even up to the Great Depression when he passed away at night in 1930 at the house my grandmother and great-grandmother used to live in, but I can still go out to this house to this very day. He started the church in my hometown." Some participants viewed historical events as having a positive influence in their lives.

Theme 2: Racialization in Predominantly White Churches

Participants understand the world in relation to racialization. A solemn wisdom and seriousness befell the faces of participants in some of these questions. Many participants took on the tone of teacher when explaining the logic of a racialized church and society. Participants described microaggressions, difficulty identifying as an Evangelical Christian, and Sundays. Further, the notions of complexity and racial awareness were prevalent. Analysis revealed themes that were interrelated.

Racialized Policies

Participants described microaggressions as a detriment to themselves and others. Participant five shared, “I lived in a large home, and I was having someone come pick up my husband's laundry and he thought I was the maid. I had someone come in and clean my carpet and they asked me how I obtained my house. Now, if I was a white woman, he wouldn't have asked me how I obtained my house.”

Participant fourteen recalled a moment in worship when the youth minister preached the sermon and used a self-made video as an illustration. He said, “There was a time we had a youth minister who I know, and we had a good relationship. And he was preaching that Sunday. And he wanted to show a video in the local downtown, about what people thought about Jesus. So, he went one Saturday and talked to about ten people and got various opinions and views on what they thought about Jesus. And when he showed it, eight of the people were white, and two were African American. Yeah. One African American was a woman who was intelligent and articulate which, you know, we expect that most African Americans are intelligent and educated. And then the one African American man he interviewed was somebody that was basically homeless, toothless, not very well educated. So, it offended the black people that were in the audience.” Participant fourteen gently shared the impact of the video, and the minister was remorseful.

With regard to the Church, the participants had difficulty identifying as Christian Evangelical because the term has become synonymous with something they are not. Participant four stated, “I don't know that I use the word Christian very much anymore to describe myself, because it just seems to be one of those terms that just gets associated with a lot of different things that I don't know that I want to be associated with. Yeah. Do I follow Christ? Or do I want to use the term Christian? Not particularly.” Participant twelve said, “In today's time the idea of

Christian doesn't mean much." Participant seven remarked, "You know… Christian culture that is predominantly White and ….it's like you are, you realize that you are other." Participant two remarked, "And these days in time, I'm hesitant on utilizing the phraseology Christian…. everybody wants to claim that everybody…has quote unquote, done an instantaneous shift, getting baptized… but we have come to know that not everything that wears that name is truly that."

Sunday mornings are another space that reflect the racialization of the world. Participant six recalls a story his mother told him: "Even like with my mom, she said, 'Yeah, growing up, we would go to churches, for a church visit, and black people would sit on one side, and white people would sit on the other side. We're worshiping together, but you are still separated.' And so when you grow up in that mind frame it's like, 'okay, these people are evil towards me, and I need to have my guard up all the time because they're looking to do not nice things to me.'"

Participant six remembered moving to a White congregation at a young age, "We were the only black family there. Now, this is when I was, you know, in elementary school and everything like that. So, at that time, you just want to play and have a good time. You want to make sure you remember all your verses and books of the Bible so you can get your little Bible sticker. But…you know, thinking back, you know, there is something to be said, when you walk in, and nobody around you looks like you."

Participant twelve mentioned this about Sunday mornings: "So what I've had to give up are some of the things that I relish about how I grew up. The music is just gonna be different. There's no sister Kilpatrick or sister Stella Bennett, Lord rest their souls, singing out those nice alto ad libs in the church. I've had to give up a more loose interpretation of the music. In this specific dominant culture context, I'm in charge of the music. Just in order to engage everyone,

you just needed to be more structured, you know what I mean? We sing the notes written by the original arranger of the hymns, right? Inside of me are these songs that are not in the book. They're inside of me. And I could in the middle of church start singing one of those, the way that I sang it, the way that I learned it when I grew up, and I would lose 90% of my church."

Racialized Formation

Multiple participants described the complexity needed to navigate racialization and the ways they have been formed by it. Participant two said, "When I hear the word 'Black,' it means I've been categorized to be in a certain position in space and place in the social hierarchy of this country. When I hear African American, I hear there are certain genetic and genealogical circumstances that have occurred, that have brought me to the current state of being."

Participant four reflected on the complexity of being a Black man: "I have to accept all the positives that come with that. And all the negatives that come with that. So there are days that are a little bit harder than other days. I had to tell some of my friends who are not Black that they could go a whole day, they could go a whole week, and not interact with a Black person. In my environment, I could go a whole day, a whole week, and not interact with a Black person. But it'd be very rare if I go a whole week and not interact with a white person. So that means for most African Americans, they really do have to be prepared for all interactions, where my counterparts to some degree, don't have to be prepared for an interaction with me."

Participant two recalled a moment teaching White church members about racial power. He says, "I was explaining that racism is not about dislike, but that racism is an issue of power and distribution of power. As it is, I have no power over the power to distribute power. As it is now, I can be prejudiced all day long and dislike you for this or that, but to truly be racist means I wield power over you. Outside of here I can go run to the police and say something, say that

y'all did anything to me, and you will get the benefit of the doubt. I could do that. But at the end of the day you probably won't get in trouble. I will get in trouble. Now, on the other hand, if you say I did something, the police officer automatically, in most cases, will take your word for it and do something to me. Without question! Without question. That's usually a problem that we encounter."

Participant two also remarked, "As an African American man, you have to learn how to use your energy. I talk with my hands. At certain times, I can't do that too much. It might scare somebody. Because I'm a big guy. You know, it might not be the intention, but I also had to understand how to utilize my voice. Because I have a commanding voice. I've learned that even being around my in-laws. I've been in the house and my kids are doing something they shouldn't and they're across the room. And I'll say real sternly 'sit down.' And I looked up, and even my in-laws were sitting down. I'm like, 'Oh, y'all can stand back up.' So I had to learn that. My dad tried to explain this to me back in the day, too, and I didn't catch it, but I have to understand perceptions that others might have. I don't think our White brothers and sisters understand that or even have those thoughts when they leave the house, that they have to make sure that their perception is safe. I've got to protect my perceptions. So when I speak, I can't be too overpowering or might scare somebody or be perceived as the Big Angry Black guy. Which is we have seen in our history, that the big angry Black guy, becomes the Black beast who is then gunned down, lynched, or killed. It's justified by the killers because of these perceptions."

Participant seven said, "You have to be mindful of the passion that exists within you. You don't want to be known as the angry Black person. Yeah. Sometimes our passion gets construed as anger. The fact that we, a lot of Black people, speak with confidence."

Participant eleven stated, “This might go back to responsibility, but you know, there’s sometimes where I have to kind of keep my emotions in check a little bit more. Because I do have this recurring thought like, are they seeing a mad Black woman? Someone who’s passionate or someone who is upset?”

Participant four also stated, “To be Black means that inherently I have to function in two or three different worlds.” Participant thirteen said, “So that means that I am pretty much everything and at the same time, I can be whatever I want. I mean, in the color spectrum, black is, you know, the coming together of all colors, and so that I have a little bit of everything that I could bring to the table. I know how to engage in any environment and know how to be present everywhere and to be comfortable in my skin.” Participant seven said, “You can put me in the middle of the boogie coffee shop where I’m the only Black person, it’s only me in this place and I can also go to the catfish restaurant and not feel out of place. You know, and I think when you start existing in different spaces, and a different context you become so comfortable, that you’re now comfortable in all spaces, you know, instead of only certain spaces.”

These examples show that navigating racial policies creates racialized formation. Identity, awareness, and behavior matter. Participant’s self-assessment of these things shows a secondary formational effect that produced frustration or fatigue in some while producing Joy and pride in others. Still, the wide range of response communicates that formation is happening.

Theme 3: The Pursuit of Belonging

The Pursuit of Belonging presented in the data. Participants were particularly energetic with more intense and focused interactions through these portions of the interviews. Many leaned to the edge of their seats when describing data that dealt with longings and losses while endeavoring towards belonging. The pursuit of belonging encompassed many interpersonal

aspects of community, including discipleship, relationships, solidarity, and desiring shared experiences. It also contained interpersonal interactions related to understanding, misunderstanding and confrontation. Belonging is centered, first established in Black communities then White.

Black Identity & Belonging

Belonging to the Black community presented as a desired loss, and a natural transition away from certain aspects of the original Black community. Participant thirteen describes it this way: “So I went to ACU and it was kind of I don't wanna say it's frowned upon, but there was some hesitancy from some people in my home church. I remember even one of my elders warning, ‘Don't go down there and let those white people change you.’” Participant thirteen also said, “But by and large, my connection to fidelity with Black churches, especially in church of Christ was, I don't want to say it was severed, but it's a real weak link because of my, yeah, some of the choices I've made and some of the opportunities I've had.” Additionally, participant thirteen said, “I would say, ACU didn't prepare me to return to the congregation I grew up in, it just didn’t. And that's not a that's not me taking a shot at ACU. It’s just, ACU wasn't and I would say it still isn't, geared to do that. It is not geared to take young Black ministers who come out of churches of Christ and prepare them to go back to Black congregations.” Participant nine describes leaving the Black church of his youth and moving towards a White church after college when he says, “I think the gospel that got me there, what kept me there, was I felt certain that there was such a message of love and that somehow, we could also then be about reconciliation.” Participant nine also said, “You know, I grew up in that and I just knew I couldn't go back. And I guess another thing is that the message that I grew up with was too small and almost hateful.”

Participant fourteen had a similar journey. He remarked, “Well, I think, based on where I was, what led me there was the promise of getting away from the hard line, a hardcore traditional church of Christ, Rochester. Yeah, it was something different. However, what I found out was that those differences weren't as obvious as I had hoped.” Participant fourteen also said, “I got asked quite a bit why, why are you there? Why are you up there with those White people? First of all, I have to remind them that those White people are my brothers and sisters, just like they're yours. And somebody needs to be there, so why not? We need to get this interrelationship going.”

Benefits of Community

The following data pertains to the benefits of community in predominantly White churches as experienced by participants. While this could be representative of other communities, these answers pertained to Black experiences in White Churches. Participant 7 said “I think I gained perspective. And I think that I've gained wisdom that I wouldn't have, if I, if I only existed with Black people.” Participant nine shared, “I immediately noticed a very different presentation of the gospel. Noticed that we talked about this strange thing called grace that I honestly had never heard of, until I heard it from Landon Saunders. And I remember feeling like almost this weight lifted from my shoulder as over the course of the next few weeks, you know, I learned more and heard more.”

Participant nine said, “So I've gained what I was looking for initially as far as the opportunity for deeper teaching, and some freedom.” Participant nine stated, “I remember feeling empowered. I remember feeling like I was doing something that was going to help.”

Shared Experiences

Shared work and shared experiences were important to participants. Memories of shared experiences often brought joyful recollection from the participants. Talking about these moments created a cathartic and hopeful expression on the faces of many participants. Participant ten described a moment that provided joy and acceptance in light of her strivings in a predominantly White church. She describes feeling valued when she said, “And that was when my husband was able to sit at the table and bring in a different perspective. Because of what we experienced and what we have needed culturally.” Participant nine made a previous church connection with a female Christian leader from a different church because of a service opportunity he led. This service work helped the woman launch a similar project at her church back home. He remembered, “We just immediately, you know, this bond just developed, and I mean, we felt like we were being called to do the same thing.” They both developed projects that got school supplies in the hands of children who needed them throughout their separate communities.

Participant fourteen described his transformation through shared experiences. He said, “I got to know folk, good relationships and started working in various ministries. A ministry located downtown being one of them, where we would go to the city and serve the underserved, particularly the homeless but also others. I did that for about seven years, and just developed some really good relationships. And then, of course, I got involved with the praise team and music and that was really what I loved. I began to get a seat at the table, not the top table, but just the table of the congregation.”

Emotional Care in Community

Emotional care was a consistent experience in the White church community and was mostly expressed as solidarity. As mentioned before, participant one has a son who works as a

medical professional. Members of her church refused to mask during COVID, and she exclaimed, “I've had enough of you. I've had enough. I'm out of here. And I'll come back when you show that you care. And after I left, accidentally, I didn't close the door. And Jason [the minister] says, ‘do you understand how you're hurting her? She's frightened for her son.’ And when I heard that, I turned around and went to the door. And I said, ‘Thank you, Minister, love you.’ And everybody in there was crying. They said, ‘We're sorry.’ They said ‘Give us another chance. You come back this evening and you'll see a difference.’ I went back that evening. Everybody had an N-95 on…. They cared; they saw me. They saw my pain. They saw my fear. Does that make sense? …. And that's beyond color!” The congregation’s loving response had an incredible impact on her.

Participant three said, “The nice thing is that [after our conversation about race] my friend went on a mission to understand. He didn't ask me to educate him. He read and sought out information. And I so deeply, deeply respect and appreciate him for doing that. So I would say that he and his wife have been such encouragement and major support, especially during this time!”

Participant six described a time when he felt validated and understood by his White church members. He said, “One time I spoke with a friend who has a Black son-in-law. We talked about the situation with my young daughter feeling unsafe on a youth group trip as the only Black person, and he said he actually understood me. The reason why he understood me is because he said ‘One day when we went on a big family trip, and I had my son-in-law, there. Yeah, I know, we stopped at McDonald's. I noticed how when he walked in, everybody just started staring at him.’ And he was like, at that moment, ‘I got it.’ And so when I talked to my

friend, I know he understands because he saw firsthand what happens, but through his own family. Now he has a baseline to say, 'This is what his life is like.'"

Participant two recalled a time he was cleaning up following a church function. After he hooked a grill to the back of his truck and left the parking lot, the police pulled out behind him. He called a friend saying, "Hey, check this out, man. I'm taking the grill back to the University. I just left the parking lot. P.D.s were in the parking lot and now they're behind me. My friend said, 'Are you kidding me?' I said, 'Have I kidded with you since I've been here? This is what's going on…so if you know anybody at the police department, you might want to get on the phone before they have me pulled over. I've worked in this county before. And I know that he might be thinking I'm not supposed to be over here. So let's avoid this. And just make that call.' He said, 'I got you.' He understood it. He called right away. He didn't question. He wasn't like, 'Is this really happening?' He just said. 'Let me help you,' and he didn't question. He's like, 'Let's get this taken care of.' So he made the call….and the next thing I know, the police officers are going off in a different direction."

Lifegiving Interpersonal Interactions

Apart from the experience of solidarity other interpersonal interactions emerged as the site of community formation for Black people in White churches. Participant eight was excited that she was approached by a fellow graphic designer, a white man in the congregation, to develop the church logo. She shared, "My background is in graphic design. The Church of Christ symbols, like I created it, I designed it with another member. What we have today is what we have right now on the website and letterhead. I literally have it in my portfolio. I contribute my creativity."

Participant eight said, "I feel like when the ladies, when we get together, I'm understood,

like being in or being a participant of the activities for women at the church. Talking to women, there tends to be a similarity in what happens regardless of your color."

Participant eleven described her relationship with her youth minister who helped shape her as a leader and gave her confidence in speaking. She recalled, "You're a woman and have opinions and these thoughts and beliefs and I don't necessarily have to be silenced." Participant 11 also described her current involvement at church as being active with opportunities for leadership. She said, "They reached out and they're like, hey, we want you to be on MCC, which is their ministry coordinating committee. It's like deacons and deaconess in other churches. I'm also on our praise team."

Participant four caringly described a Bible study that he was a part of that brought him to Christ in college. Through that transformation he became connected to an elder of the church who he said, "Would call me about 8 a.m. the first couple of weeks I was in college, to what I was doing and make sure I was doing okay." Participant four fondly recalled interactions in church: "I would say I've had a chance to baptize some friends over the years. My best man at my wedding was a guy I played football with, and I baptized him, and I had a chance to share my faith with a couple friends in college and I was able to see them come to Christ. So yeah, it's been good. Good."

Stressful Interpersonal Interactions

There were also stressful interpersonal interactions in the church community. These included but were not limited to various microaggressions. Participant six described an interaction asking for more musical diversity before and after church events. In this instance he made suggestions for the pre-event playlist for VBS, saying, "They pick the music that they mostly like. The Christian folk music. And it's like, not everybody wants to listen to that. Now,

does it sound nice? Yes. But that's not what everybody wants to listen to, so let's pick some other types of music to play. You know? It's not fully understood that we need to be intentional about that. If we're playing music for an event, then we need to really think about all the cultures that are here and select some music for everybody on the playlist. Yes, it's gonna take you longer to make your playlist. And maybe you have to ask five other people that are different from you. What would you like to hear? But when you do that, people have a better sense of, oh, I enjoyed it…. We bring it up to our children because we want our children to have a sense of where we grew up, as well."

Participant five recalled an interaction where she talked about crime with a White church member. She remembered, "Someone was asking something about Black-on-Black crime. And I had the opportunity to explain why we are talking about Black-on-Black crime when we don't talk about White-on-White crime. The fact of the matter is that people kill people who are in proximity to them."

Participant six mentioned, "I think something that is not understood fully is the fact that when something offensive comes out of another member's mouth, it's kind of how they feel internally. Leadership should address it, but they don't always do that. At some point it is not brought up anymore by Black members of that congregation because we don't feel that anything will be done. So we're like, what is the use of even mentioning it? We know that all you're gonna do is sweep it under the rug, and then we're gonna get more upset. So we just, you know, don't mention it, and we put that person on our list. Don't connect with that person because there's an ingrained issue."

Participant three recalled, "Back when we had Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in the church building, I'd come running in from my principal job with my

suit and tie on my way to an elders' meeting. Someone would direct me to the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, or the Narcotics Anonymous meeting, and I was like 'Thank you very much but I'm going to another meeting.' You know, it just got to a point where it's like, they weren't being rude, but the assumption was made that I certainly wasn't a member here going to a leadership meeting."

Theme 4: Materiality and Location

Materiality emerged as a concrete theme in the data. Some reflections centered resources and wealth or even perceptions of both. Location also came forth as a contributing factor to decision making and experience. Surprised and sobering glances accompanied many participants' responses in this section as they responded to factors that contributed to materiality and location.

Resources

Participant thirteen said, "One of the things that being in a predominantly White space has shown me hurts, but it's also reality: The gap in wage and wealth is tremendous. And working in and growing up in a predominately Black church, interning in predominantly White churches, and now working in one. I mean, I've been a part of Black churches, but only Black churches with five hundred members, and seen what they're able to do. I've watched similar predominantly White churches, but with one hundred members being able to do twice as much as them just because of the amount of resources that they had. And it was, it was just eye opening."

Participant fifteen said that the opportunities for children drew him and his wife to a White church because "it has a very thriving children's ministry, where they have a ton of great kids programs, and we have two young kids. We want to make sure that we're raising them in an

environment with an ability for them to grow in their own faith and make connections to other Christian children at a very young age, which is very rare for us. You know, I grew up in a church where we did not have a children's ministry. You know, it was basically I'm sitting in a pew, with Mom and Dad, who sometimes let me bring a GI Joe just to entertain myself. When we go to church, now, we send our kids up front, and they're able to experience, you know, have their own kind of early faith journey and learn a lot of things, which I think is great." Similarly, participant four talked about resources for children and location driving his family's choices for discipleship when he said, "We needed something that was a little closer to home and a little bit more relational for our high school kids."

Participant three addressed perceptions and discrimination surrounding resources when he said, "I don't have that story of rags to riches and I wasn't a thug on the street. But, that doesn't make me impervious or insensitive to the stories of so many other Black and Brown and poor folk who are struggling. So, if a comment or statement comes up, I do feel that I want to speak out on their behalf. Even though it's not my story, it could be my story and I don't have to go too far in my family tree where it is *their* story. So, I care deeply."

Places

Participant six describes an experience talking with the youth minister about safe places with the youth group: "You know Gatlinburg, Tennessee. I've been through those areas, and you just get the feeling that you're being watched. And so my daughter went. That was her first [youth conference] going with everybody. When She comes back, she tells me, 'Yeah, you know, I was afraid walking through there.' Now mind you, they didn't really go out in the neighborhood too far from the lodge, only across the street to the Walgreens to get some snacks. But she told me, 'Dad, I was afraid.' And you know that hurt me. As a Dad, you don't want your

child to say ‘I was afraid,’ especially when they're not with you. Especially when it is a Christian event. So, I talked to the youth minister and some of the folks at our congregation. I said hey, we need to really think about the places that we're taking our teens to. And we need to start to go places where there are more black people, you know, where everybody feels safe.” The reaction from the church leader was, “NO! When my daughter walked from wherever she was, she felt afraid. And you're not understanding how impactful that is.”

Additionally, participant six said, “Now that I’m in the adult stage, many times where I live also dictates where I’m going to go. I could go to an all-Black church closer to the city, but HERE fits the culture of the neighborhood that I live in.” This is pertinent because of the participants' intentionality in choosing a living place that is diverse. Conversely, participant fifteen recalled, “When I was a kid, I went to a school with all White people. There were four hundred and fifty kids in our entire high school and there were five who were Black. So I grew up in and around White people. I didn’t have my first Black friends until I got to college.”

People

The findings indicate that people emerge at the intersection of resources and places. In other words, where resources are distributed across different areas, people were at the center of the felt effects. Themes of capacity, scarcity, poverty, and generosity also emerged. Participant twelve recalled the effects of attrition during the pandemic. He stated, “Our congregation went from a congregation of consistently 850 to 900 people to about a 500-member congregation. So that’s where we sit right now.”

Participant nine said, “I don't know that they [the White church members] feel the depth of the pain that you feel around your own [Black] people, being homeless, not being able to afford a place to live, being arrested at rates that are much higher, very disproportionate to what's

going on in the world. I mean, I just don't know that people see that, and I would wish that in a church situation there would be somebody who would rise up and say ‘What can we do? What should we do?”

Participant one brought the plight of real people to the forefront as well. She said, “What I think our church has failed to do: We don't hold each other accountable. We say, ‘Oh, we're not a part of the work.’ But yes, you are. And that's what this guy [the White preacher] preached on, you're complicit when you do nothing, when you don't vote for justice. It's more than helping the homeless on the street. When you push for these charter schools that don't let certain kids in, you're complicit, you're sinning.”

Participant one also shared a story about the church helping a single mom. She said, “We had a woman in the church, who they call the self-helping. She's living in a trailer, her husband had cancer and died, leaving behind her and their three kids. Some of the elders' wives said, ‘We've helped them enough.’ I said, ‘No, we have not restored her. And if we care for her, we're going to put her in a house, it's going to take five years…. and they did it. I made the suggestion, and they put her in the house. Once they put her in a townhouse and paid the down payment, she hasn't taken a penny from the church since…. And then they wanted the money back. I told one of the elders, I would check on her each month. They said, because she fixed the house up, we want our $10,000 dollar down payment back. I called him [the shepherd] and I said, ‘Brothers, we have to meet’.... And I met with the elders and the deacons and deaconesses. I said. ‘You old white men! We’ve got to pray!’…. And you know, they didn't get it back from her. And that's the kind of difference. They don't see the pain right in front of their eyes; they see the pain from a distance.”

Participant three recalled living in the city where they attended church and people would, “ask repeatedly how long did it take us to drive from Pontiac, to the church we attended. And when I first started getting asked that question, I was so naive, I would answer like, ‘I don’t know, I don’t do much interacting in Pontiac. I don’t know how long it takes to drive to church from there, because we live 2.7 miles away.’ The question wasn’t an issue, but then my wife calmly explained to me, ‘Dear, they think because we’re Black, that that’s where we live. And that’s why we’re driving into Rochester.’ And I thought, ‘Oh those are assumptions. And then the comments about, ‘You know, you’re not really Black, you’re not like the rest of them because we just love you and your family.’ And I just, at that point, I didn’t even respond because I didn’t even know how to respond. So in my mind, I’m thinking, you’re saying that like, it is a compliment. And that really is quite insulting. So that was a bit of a downer, but that didn’t happen often.”

Theme 5: Racialized Trauma

Racialized trauma emerged as a major theme due to the conglomeration of safety, fatigue, burnout, emotional pain, and struggle. A theme of counter formation emerged as a signifier of survival strength in the midst of sustained exposure to painful events. Participants' voices vacillated between downtrodden, indignant, defiant, and strong during this section. It was clear that participants were affected psychologically and physically through these events.

Psychological

Participant six remembered his father’s wisdom about having a car with a large engine. “I look back at my dad, and where he grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, way back when. I mean, he's in his upper eighties now. I asked, ‘What is the reason you will always have a car that has a

really large engine?' He told me the reason one day. He said, 'I did that because you needed to be able to outrun the cops.' He lived in the era of sundown cities."

Participant eleven recalled a particularly intense time of racial discrimination at her place of employment. She said, "I'm one of two black people who work at my school. And so at the time this incident happened, or incidents I would say, three or four years ago, there was this ongoing thing about race. There was a lot that our students were living in. So you have people on both sides saying whatever the heck they wanted. And I was like, 'Okay, everybody, remember we're all humans and we all have souls, you know.' And I had a talk with our administrative team. I was like, 'I don't want to always be called in and having to explain to you all what being black is.' Because I finally just asked, 'Does this bother you?' Are you bothered by what is being said and reported in all this? And they say, 'Yeah' and I said, 'Well, then there you go. We've got the same desire. It might actually even mean more if it comes from you. You have to address the student body that it's bothering you because they already kind of assume it's bothering me. And so I don't know that my voice is going to carry as far as yours could, so that was more of the conversation that we had to have. What these people are saying is wrong. So if you know that it's wrong, and I believe it's wrong, you can address it because what they wanted me to do is talk and be this voice for the administrative team. I was like, 'No!' You've got to be the voice and I'll stand behind you.

Physical

Participant nine describes burnout which affects individuals across many levels of their personhood, often manifesting physically. He said, "I mean, I was listening to NPR on the way home and they talked about burnout. Teachers are burning out and policemen and counselors and they mentioned all the people who were burned out. At the very end, they made a transition to

people of color. You know, why are people of color burning out? The answer was basically because a person of color is in a situation where we have to lead, to be involved in everything, and we have to represent, but people may not want to hear what you represent. We have to lead and we may challenge you. We [black people] are expected to be a certain way. And then, after a while, we're exhausted."

Participant five described deep feelings of unsafety, as she was, "making a left-hand turn, and I guess they thought it was taking too long, or whatever, so I'm called a 'nigger,' because I'm making a left-hand turn. So I'm not safe in my car. I don't feel safe as a Black woman anywhere I go. And I have a Black son, and he's definitely not safe. Any place he goes, I can tell you stories about that, that are hair raising, with the pride of being Black. Actually, when I think about it, I think about how I have had all these experiences as a Black woman, and continue to have experiences as a Black woman, that are hurtful, harmful."

Counter formation

Resilience was a characteristic that emerged as participants engaged their realties but were not defeated by those realities. Participant one remembers sharing a sermon entitled "Im tired" with fellow congregants during the pandemic. Given by a Black man, it enlightened her fellow Christians, yet she didn't claim this reality for herself. Congregants thought the sermon was helpful, saying, "We never thought of it that way." In response, participant one said, "As for me?! I'm not tired because I'm not gonna make you feel comfortable by giving up who I am. That's the difference for a lot of Black people… I am who I am. If I want to stand up [in worship] I do, Hallelujah. They're accustomed to it. Now there is room for both."

Participant three initially pushed back on the question of shaping in relation to White spaces, but then discussed formative experiences as a Black member of a White church saying,

“I pushed back on some things… because when I first got there, it was real, real Republican leaning. I thought it didn't influence me at all. If anything, I wanted to be middle, I wanted to be independent, I wanted to be moderate. But the more different individuals pushed that way, it pushed me the other way. I guess that in some ways, I guess that is shaping because I was molded in resistance.”

Participant two said, “Truth has to be told, to tell it like it is. And let it in. Let God do the rest. I'm gonna say what I need to say. And I'm walking away from it. So when I remove myself from the equation, they're left to wrestle with what was said, and they have to go find that out for themselves… I say what I need to say, and I let the razor do its own cutting. I ain't gotta cut. I don't have what a razor has, and you don’t gotta do much. It does the cutting itself. That's the word of God. You let it cut.”

Theme 6: The Twin Realities of Hope and Despair

This category emerged from the most sobering moments for interviewees. Hope was characterized by transformation, and despair was characterized by regret or resignation.

Hope

Participant ten told a story of learning the meaning of community through the just and kind efforts of Christians. She said, “My story is a little different from most. When my father was living, he took all our family to church every Sunday… my mom, and all of the kids, all 10 of us. He would drop us off, and he'd come back and pick us up. This was at the CME church. Carter’s Institutional CME church is where our roots lie. Once my father passed, we didn't go to church, but my mother was a very spiritual woman who grew up in a family with spiritual roots. We still trusted God, believed in God. And then about a year and a half after my dad passed, our

house burned down. My mother was almost killed in that fire, and she was in the hospital for six months. And at that time, it was so important because no one could just take in 11 children. So we were put in different homes in our community, some with White families, some with Black families, because even on our street, it was racially mixed. We lived on a court with about 10 houses, and we stayed with different people in our school district so that we could continue to go to school, at our school of origin. It was just…. that's where I learned community."

Participant eleven also recounted a story from her childhood that taught her about vulnerability in community and what it felt like to be loved deeply and protected by her church family: "When I was in high school, I came to the big city for a shopping trip. It was what you did, I guess, come to the big city to shop. I went to Claire's department store and didn't buy anything. I had purchased a CD and some jeans elsewhere and had those things with me. I looked up at the ceiling, and was like, oh, there are mirrors up here. I just thought it was so funny that mirrors were on the ceiling. I'm laughing and I'm elbowing my best friend who's standing there with me. So, she goes and buys her item, and then we leave. Well, as we walk out, we're stopped by a police officer. And he asked to search our bags. And I mean, little old me, I was probably eighth grade or seventh grade. I did not understand what was going on. I was just like, Why? Why would they do that? I know [my friend] just bought something there. So, she shows the receipt. I just say, 'Oh, I have a CD. Officer, that's just a CD and jeans in here.' So, they find nothing, and we walk away. Then she tells me. She was like, 'Well, they did that because we're Black' and so I was like,' No. Why would they do that? So, she goes and tells my youth minister, who is White. I have never seen him become [angry] so fast. He was pretty fired up about a lot of things, but he was REALLY fired up. Oh, he was so mad. He said, 'You turn around. We're going back to Claire's, and so we go down there, and he lets this woman have it, but in a

Christian way. And just… just said all that uh…wooo…you know. And so now, I would only hope I would do that for one of my students, you know. Just have that umph. I mean, he was like a different person. It was anger, but he and he said that something that just still rings, still rings in my ear. He pointed at her and he said, 'You only did that because she's black,' and he said 'This is an outrage.' Then he walked out. The thing that was really neat, especially in hindsight, is that all my friends who were White, the Black girl I was with, all my other white friends, and their white parents took their merchandise back. My mother wasn't on the trip. We were in like sixth, seventh, or eighth grade, somewhere in there. Anyway, everybody shopped at Claire's! All of them took their merchandise back and asked for a refund. I'll bet it was 20 girls, and so the manager said, 'What's wrong, what happened?' and they said, 'You were rude to our friend. And we're not shopping here.' It just makes me proud again like those relationships and the church. I was young, but he went to all that length to stand up for me because he understood that I didn't understand what's going on."

Participant two said the following in regard to faith, calling, and mission: "I see Christ working through the murkiness of humanity. I see him working through the rapes, in the abuse, through the depressive areas of life, through a whole lot of all that mess. Me and my cousins came forth, we're doctors, we're lawyers, we're theologians, we're preachers, we're a little bit of everything…As a Christian, I just don't look at where I'm standing now, I look at the feet that brought me to where I'm at. I look back. Some would say, man, a lot of bad stuff happened. But, God was there, even in the midst of that pain. I had a great great great grandmother that had all these kids… This woman had to work for those people. Even after she was abused by every person she worked for, she still mothered kids by those people. But here I am. They trusted in a God who is able to hear. In a God who is able to see. They trusted the day would come that I

would be here. They trusted that God is going to make it right like he said he would. Even though they knew they might not see it in their lifetime. There are some things in my lifetime that I want to see. I know that may not be right, but my children, my grandchildren may see where we've come from to see where we're going. I see a bright future, despite this bleak present."

Despair

Participant six remarked, "You cannot assume people will have as much grace as you have… The message is 'I don't want to change. I want to stay where I'm at, but I want you to change to fit with me. And for me, if you're the person of Color in the middle of predominantly White space, that's all you've been doing is changing. So how about you try to change to the level which I'm changing, just to exist?"

Participant nine confessed, "I think if I had seen a different kind of change around those different spaces, I wouldn't feel like culturally that I've given up so much. I was like, if there was more of a coming together. But I feel like that's been the biggest sacrifice and I don't know... I don't know you. I don't know if that would be a common answer. It's just me I just feel like to some degree, it's almost like you lose your voice. And you lose a piece of who you are. You sacrifice a piece of who you are." Participant nine also reflected by saying, "That's what you… you give up. And I think about it sometimes and I think… you know… was it worth it?"

Theme 7: Power

This final theme was an intersecting theme, often involving dominance and gender. While there were forms of dominance outside of gender, there were no instances of gender in the data that were not also tied to power. Themes of White male dominance accompanied male

dominance, which intersected with gender considerations.

Dominance

Participant seven had this to say: “I exist in a predominantly white space. That means that shepherds are predominantly older white men. Guess what older white men don't like? When a confident black man says, ‘You don't know what you're talking about you and you are being unwise.’ They don't like being told ‘you're wrong.’ All these churches want to be more diverse. You want blacks and Asians and have diversity in leadership. And we want to have good conversations around the LGBTQIA community. That's great. Love it. For me, one of the things I even said to a room of leaders is that ‘If we cannot steward the diversity that already exists in your community, like the voices of women…how do you think it's going to work when actual other types of diversity make it into your space? If you can't even, you can't even have your own white women talk? How will have black people, Hispanic people and Asian people and gay people come into your space, when you don’t really want to hear the women in your own community? You think it is gonna go well, if you let a bunch of diverse others have a voice?’”

Participant two explained, “That's what racism evolves from, when voices of people other than white males are blotted out and not heard. Not even white females are heard like this, in certain cases. Now if she speaks against a black man, she's gonna be heard very loudly, but that's what racism does. Black folks don't have the power to be racist because we can't control anything. Now don’t get that twisted. Black people can support racism by supporting white supremacist agendas, which some people do, and they are people of color. If you want to extend the definition of racism, that's how a Black person can be racist by supporting racism. But as far as wielding the power of it, we can't create it.”

Participant twelve described a shepherd selection process in a White church seeking diversity. Only one candidate of color remained from the culled process where many had been before. He said, “The dominant corporate culture shepherds were like, ‘Well, I don't understand…we went through the process. It's not our fault if the results are what the results are. And I said, ‘You're absolutely right. Here's what I want to help you with.’ When you're trying to be diverse and equitable and inclusive, sometimes you need to slow down, and take the time to find out why you got the results that you did, not just dwell on the fact that everybody had a good heart and everything, right? Yeah, when you slow down you can see why things happen the way they did.”

Gender- Intersected with Power

Participant nine described a moment where access for people of color was pitted against access for women through the logic of scarcity in a church environment. He recalled, “I remember when we first had our very first conversation about the role of women. I don't know if that was the full focus of the conversation, but I remember making a comment about there being a lack of people of color involved in leadership at church. And I don't remember what the context was, I just remember the reaction was ‘You know, how do you think women feel?’ And I remember thinking, clearly, ‘This is like a wait your turn moment?’ I remember thinking that this wasn't a conversation that we could have all at once. Why didn’t we say, ‘Hey, what are we doing? How do we help? How do we help our brothers AND sisters feel valued, feel seen, feel heard, be given opportunities to use their talents?’ But it was more of a question about ‘How do we have this group and this group, and then maybe have people of color…’ After we have that group maybe we can help? I remember thinking somehow that it felt like a misguided opportunity, like a lost opportunity. And... you know, yeah, I'd say that to some degree, we're

still having those conversations."

Participant eight described feeling understood and how those conditions change. She said, "Women relate to each other in the way life is. Yeah, I find that more with women's studies than in studies intermixed with men. That's not to say you can't learn anything, but yeah, sometimes, if you have men there and it gets kind of like…Okay, I don't want to say too much because I don't feel like being misunderstood. I'm just like, 'I just have a wall up at that point because I just know that with women's groups and women's studies. I feel more heard."

Important Stories from Scripture

This final section reports the content of question eight from the interview. The question was "Which stories from Scripture are most important to you and why?" The chart below captures what scriptures were listed by participants and one reason why these scriptures and stories held meaning for the participant.

*Table 3: Overview of Stories and Scripture*s

	Scripture & Story References	Corresponding reason(s)
Participant 1	James; 2nd Timothy 4:5; Book of Ruth;	Speaks to hard realities; Give purpose.
Participant 2	The Old Testament: Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, Lot, Jacob, Esau, The Story of the Exodus; New Testament story of Jesus as God	God works in the messiness of humanity and still pursues us in Love.
Participant 3	The Story of David and Jonathans Friendship; The Story of Moses, Miriam and Aaron; The Story of Jews & Gentiles in Jesus	Encouragement, Ethnic particularity, Overcoming
Participant 4	Psalm 95 (Sung the Psalm Song in interview)	Scripture gives me new sight as I age
Participant 5	"The Story of the Woman at the Well"	Jesus doesn't classify or condemn her. I feel that I will be loved the same way.

Participant 6	The story of the Prophet Elisha and the Widow; The story of Jesus, a prophet in his own town; Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch	God makes the impossible, possible.
Participant 7	The Story of the Prodigal Son; 1st Corinthians 3:21	We belong to Christ and God still uses us for liberation.
Participant 8	The Story of Esther; The Story of Ruth and Naomi	They honor women of destiny, and we don't hear them enough.
Participant 9	The Story of Lazarus "Jesus wept"; The Story of Nehemiah rebuilding the walls; Ecclasiasties 12:1; Galatians.	Jesus' compassion is real. Building unity is costly, but a work of God.
Participant 10	The Story of Lazarus "Jesus wept"; The Story of Mary and Martha.	Jesus shows the humanness of God. Before God there is hospitality and worship.
Participant 11	Gospel of John "The Samaritan", "Jesus prays for us"; Luke 15 "The Story of the Prodigal Son"; Galatians 5:25	When we keep in step with the Spirit, like Jesus, we grow the attributes of God.
Participant 12	The Story of Rahab; The Story of Joseph "Escaping Potiphar's Wife", "Surviving Jail", "Being used by God"; The Damascus Road Story; The Story of the Shrewd manager. The Story of Jesus' Death, Burial and Resurrection.	Scripture tells the truth about life. God can lead you anywhere God needs you to be.
Participant 13	Acts 15; Revelation 19:20-21	Mutuality, obedience to Christ, and becoming a community on mission towards human flourishing.
Participant 14	The Story of Moses; The Story of David; The Beatitudes; The Story of Balaam and Balaak.	Encounter with God is a Grace of God. Revelation and new sight is a gift.
Participant 15	Proverbs 3:5-6; 1st Corinthians "Receiving communion in Christ"; "The Story of the Rich Young Ruler"	After we encounter Christ, we must ask: "Are we doing enough?"

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

"You stubborn people! In your thoughts and hearing, you are like those who have had no part in God's covenant! You continuously set yourself against the Holy Spirit, just like your ancestors did… Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, accept my life!" Falling to his knees, he shouted, "Lord, don't hold this sin against them!"

Stephen, Acts 7:51;55b-60

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to help Black Christians reflect on the experiences that have been most formative as they have participated in predominantly White churches. This is to discover the experiences of Black Christians in these spaces, so that their experience might be evaluated through a particular lens. If the ministry of reconciliation is to have efficacy in the current age, it must be reimagined. The following is the exploration of Black experience in Predominantly White spaces to allow the data to illuminate the complex nature of racialization.

Reflection

***We** are here now.* America is infected by the disease of racism that continues to metastasize. It grows and finds new parts of the body to kill and malform. Racialization has infected every functioning system and institution. It is choking out the near breathless Christian witness of the White evangelical church to young Americans. Unfortunately, there are many Christians who remain ignorant of this sickness. They consume victuals that increase the spread of the pathogen rather than slow it down or counteract it. Others choose to be distracted rather than do the hard work of diagnosing and healing. The White evangelical church often adopts the craft of pain management but when the anesthesia wears off the pain reemerges with crippling

effects. Who will save us from this body of death? We know the answer to this question. Christ stands at the ready with an important question he has asked before. John 5:1-15 tells the story of a man who laid near the pool of Bethesda as an invalid for years and years. "When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to get well?'"[205] Jesus asks this same question of us. Do you want to get well? Oshetta Moore says this:

> The old Spiritual "There is a Balm in Gilead" speaks to our inner pain and reminds us that there is healing for it. It's a cry from Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, the one who noticed that Jerusalem was inundated with sinful practices and adopting a culture of violence. He noticed how the culture undermined God's dream for true shalom, with manufactured peace, saying "Peace, peace when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14 NRSV). And so he cries out in Jeremiah 8:22, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" If you listen closely White Peacemaker, this is what BIPOC have been crying out. With every hashtag and every YouTube video, we're crying out for healing from the trauma of White supremacy. With every letter to the pastor and Instagram post, we're reminding you of the chronic pain we live with. With every conversation and memo, we're asking you, "What are you going to do about it?" Racial healing is never easy, White Peacemaker…The healing comes when we answer Jesus' question, saying, 'yes, I do want to be healed' and then he puts his hands over our eyes, and we see.[206]

Oshetta Moore goes on to describe the healing that can be brought by Jesus. Jesus is the balm in Gilead. Jesus' life stands as a testimony that "suffering is not in vain" because he sees. Jesus was victimized and sees the pain of real victims, rather than imagined ones. Jesus loves victims and victimizers, and Jesus is the one who helps his beloved ones to see. She continues with a declaration about how this new sight changes everyone.

> We see and we are moved to share suffering. We're changing the white supremacist narratives that you don't have to care, and I'm wise not to trust you. Healing comes when we have proximity to each other's pain when you hurt, I hurt; it's as if we share one throbbing nerve ending. Healing will never come if you succumb to White apathy, the

[205] John 5:6 (NRSV)

[206] Osheta Moore, *Dear White Peacemaker,* 118.

> condition where, when you encounter the pain and suffering caused by White supremacy, you ignore, explain away, reject, or give in to overwhelm.[207]

The previous line holds a challenge. This challenge is now set before the reader. Do not ignore, explain away, reject, or give in to overwhelm during this final analysis. Rather, as you read further, be attentive to the impulses that arise within. Remember, you are the beloved of God.

Summary of Project and Data Analysis Lens

Chapter One provided the context for this project. It introduced the racial stratification present in America and highlighted evangelical efforts against segregation through a particular call of the Gospel, the ministry of reconciliation. Many Black Christians began worshiping in White churches to desegregate and build cross-cultural unity in the name of racial reconciliation. Social justice became an unnecessary addendum to reconciliation during this time.

Chapter two explored the theological foundation for a ministry of reconciliation where justice is not simply an add-on. It asserts that reconciliation is Justice. Paul's conversion narrative is a case study of the restorative reconciliation of God. God initiates this reconciliation and Christ carries it out. Paul's reconciliation was multidimensional. It was between God (Vertical) and (Horizontal) others. Paul's salvation was an ongoing invitation to the beloved, just, and transformational community.

Chapter 3 explored the power of race in America. It described how white supremacy functions as racist power and tracks the adaptations of racism over time and through cultures. White supremacy obfuscates itself in order to remain hidden in control of shaping American cultures, spaces, and institutions. Racialization is the instrument, wielded by the hand of white

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[207] Ibid.

Supremacy, to silently sustain racial hierarchy with Whites are at the top and Blacks at the bottom in all facets of life. White and Black symbolize opposite ends of the spectrum with whites being conceptualized as the fullest representation of the Imago Dei. This malformation is the power of whiteness as a formative force.

The Civil Rights Movement made substantive gains in ending racist Jim Crow segregation laws. This was done by Black faith leaders as *A PART* of their Christian Faithfulness. Racialization became increasingly covert and pervasive following the Civil Rights Movement and enacted white supremacist power and racist policy through other institutions and means. All the while, the church is being shaped within this American racialized formation, obscuring Whiteness for White Christians while gaslighting Black Christians familiar with the continual imbalances across American society.

The ministry of reconciliation was initially formulated in the mid 20th century by Black Evangelicals seeking to address America's original sin of racism. The biblical concept of reconciliation adopted “racial” reconciliation with the intent of unifying the church, healing racial divides, and improving the quality of life for Black Americans. This message was resisted by White evangelicals because American life was a more concrete and formative force than tenants of the Bible.

The racialized structure of the American landscape is undergirded by great myths. These myths would claim that America is a chosen nation, nature’s nation, the millennial nation, the Christian nation, and an innocent nation. These five myths work together to obscure the central and most insidious myth: white supremacy. Codified by American religious ideology, these five myths work to obscure White Supremacy and make it invisible to most whites who do not experience its ill effects as outcasts on the margins of society as Blacks and other people of color

do. The ministry of reconciliation, which was largely abandoned in white circles, lay dormant and had morphed into a Gospel of liberation in many Black circles through the 70s and 80s. The gospel of liberation moved from the ground up, from horizontal to vertical.

After the Civil rights movement the message of reconciliation remained dormant until Evangelical fervor between Black and White Christians reinvigorated this message. In the mid-nineties White evangelicals began taking notice of the racial disparities (crafted intentionally by Whiteness) in American life. Reaching out to original Black founders of the ministry of reconciliation, they sought to make a change. Faith always seeks faith-oriented solutions to problems, and the wave of reconciliation AS the gospel swept across America.

The message of Racial Reconciliation swept across America through large racial reconciliation events in the mid 90s. Once bearing a more holistic notion of the justice focus of the original message was dropped in favor of a more palatable message. As it went, the wide-reaching popularized version of the message of reconciliation focused solely on healthy cross-cultural relationships and eliminating prejudice. This racial reconciliation could not account for any other dimensions of life, particularly material dimensions, beyond friendships. This watered-down ministry of reconciliation was nothing like the reconciliation of God which is full, and just, and seeks shalom. Moreover, there is a severe disconnect between God and God's people who won't pursue justice as God's holy initiative, God's very character.

Devastatingly, Christian witness would devolve into Christian Whiteness. Rather than being a culture shaping force for good, the church is complicit with notions of White Supremacy. Rather than becoming a counter witness, a signpost of the coming Kingdom, the church has become a product of culture. In many instances, the Evangelical church has become a creating force of racialization, baptizing supremacist ideas in theological language.

Unfortunately, the most racially uninformed people in America tend to be White evangelicals. Reconciliation has never left the bible or the goal of God to make all things new, Evangelical cultural tools tend to act as an armor against seeing Reconciliation and justice as one in the same. Evangelicals focus so prominently on the spiritual (vertical), the material dimension of interpersonal (horizontal) life falls hopelessly from view. Evangelicals often have the most difficult time imagining that which God never changed, still desires. Reconciliation is justice. The righteousness of God IS the saving justice of God, and when we are reconciled to God in Christ we are created anew and grafted into the church that is to become the embodied righteousness of God here on earth.

Chapter 4 discussed how Black Christians seem not to have completely lost this fuller notion of reconciliation as justice. Whether through marginalization or proximity to oppression, these Christians maintain a justice-oriented expression of Christian Faithfulness that speaks a word against the power of White supremacy to co-opt the church into the long list of American institutions that reproduce structural racism. In light of this history of racialization, this project explored the formational stories of Black Christians in Predominantly White Spaces?

Discussion

Many of these Black Christians entered White Churches decades ago. Many participants in this study reported doing so, for the sake of racial unity and racial reconciliation. Others have come for different reasons. Their presence is complex. It involves interpersonal interactions towards the pursuit of belonging and these interactions are always multi-dimensional. What shape might reconciliation and justice take when considering these intersections? The stories of the participants were most impactful at the intersections of multiple themes. These impactful

moments contain particularly transformational moments in the experiences of Black Christians in predominantly White Churches. The data will be discussed at these points of intersection.

Stories at the Intersecting Themes

The most impactful stories emerged at the intersections of themes. Three notable clusters formed and offered opportunity for reflection The first cluster of intersecting themes include these: *recent events, stressful interpersonal interactions, psychological racial trauma,* and *racialized formation*. The second cluster of intersecting themes include these: *resources, places, life giving interpersonal interactions,* and *emotional care*. The third cluster of themes include these: *identity, belonging, stressful interpersonal interactions, racialized policies, racialized trauma,* and *power.* Each cluster represents the complexity of racialization and presents the reader with an opportunity to imagine reconciliation and justice in light of these intersections.

Intersection 1

First, consider the intersection of recent events, stressful interpersonal interactions, psychological racial trauma, and racialized formation. Particularly the presidency of Donald Trump and speaking to White Christians who voted for Trump or support him was a significant part of Participants experiences. It caused participants to internalize shock and disappointment and remove themselves from what suddenly became an unsafe environment. The Global Covid-19 Pandemic and increase of racialized violence also hung heavy over participants during this time.

> So, I'm going to bring up something that changed my view in the last couple years. Let's go back to the prior President that we had. Those four years brought out a side of my brothers and sisters in Christ, Black and White, that was somewhat disturbing. If the perspective that I heard come out of the mouth of some of the people that I sit next to in church…if that is the perspective…I don't know if we're going to be in the same heaven. I stopped going to church for a few years because the environment was just too toxic.

(On racial trauma~ Participant four)
I don't think people understand how white evangelicals champion the cause around a president, who you and I know has broken several, I won't even say laws, I'll just say norms. (Recent events ~ Participant 9)
My son is an anesthesiologist, so of course he's in surgery during the pandemic. There are White people in the church like 'no we shouldn't stay away from church.' There's no such thing as COVID and it's not a danger to us and Trump is telling the truth. And I'd had it. I mean, I'd had it. I was standing by the door. It's not a big auditorium. I said "you know what? My son is risking his life. My only child. I'm here, no family. And I'm praying every day, and you're praying for my son. And yet you don't love him enough as your fellow Christian to wear a mask? What am I to do with this? (Stressful interpersonal interactions ~Participant 1)
Trump was elected, and you know we have Trump supporters at our church. After he was selected, you know, I had a couple members because, you know, I look at it as a racist move. And I had a couple of members come up and say "How are you? "I replied "Oh, I'm fine" ... "No, I really mean, how are You? How are you with this? Because I am upset." I had been there seven or eight years but had people greeting me for the first time as If I were new, but it was their way of saying I see you, I see that you're Black and I want to welcome you in the way I know how. (Racialized Formation~ Participant 5)

This powerful intersection of themes forced the first person to make a difficult but calculated decision to remove himself from the community. The second internalized disappointment and shock at the actions of Christian brothers and sisters related to political support that violated Christian values and shared commitments. The third person encountered a severe lack of empathy within the Church setting that was threatening, and personally painful. The fourth, experienced the intersection of recent events, and interpersonal interactions, but the noted outcome was emotional care in the community.

Emerson and Smith contend that because the United States is racialized, the religio-cultural tool kit varies by race. What does this mean? It means that Politics matter. Systems

matter. Cultural tools arise out of formation and need. Black Christians need political eyesight in their cultural toolkit because unjust structures render unjust outcomes. Free will individualism is important to White Protestants, and they tend to be anti-structuralist. Emerson and Smith say, "What is more, White conservative Protestants believe that sinful humans typically deny their own personal sin by shifting blame somewhere else, such as 'on the system.'" If one has ever heard the phrase 'I don't mean to be political, but…' typically someone is performing public reservation to maintain social norms, but they are about to say something political. What we mean by political matters a great deal. Lee Camp brilliantly teaches that Christianity is not a religion, it is a politic. He says this:

> We will no longer say "Christianity is not political." When we say, "Christianity is not political," we are only demonstrating that we are disciples of modern liberalism instead of disciples of Jesus. It is liberalism that has constructed the world in this way: (a) religion is a privately held set of beliefs pertaining to God or the afterlife or some such, and religion must be protected as an individual right so long as religion stays out of the realm of the public. (b) Christianity is a religion. (c) Therefore, Christianity is a private matter and is not, must not be, political.
>
> But if religion is defined as liberalism would have it, then Christianity cannot possibly be a religion. The primary task of the Christian community is not to be a so-called religious gathering concerned with souls floating off into the afterlife, nor is it to be a sort of spiritualized yoga class helping individuals find existential peace with themselves. The primary task of the church is to embody and bear witness to the end of history, an all-encompassing reality that has already broken into the world. The primary task of the church is to be an alternative politic. Jesus was clearly a political figure, calling his followers to a particular politic. His politic was a public claim and a public matter.[208]

Respondents did not report reacting negatively to Donald Trump based upon opposing political positions. Their trepidation was rooted elsewhere. It was rooted in the fruit of his life, and the dangerous white supremacy policies he not only embodied but flaunted. Racialized violence in America increased under his leadership. The fear was palpable on the faces of

[208] Lee C Camp, *Scandalous Witness: A Little Political Manifesto for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 121.

participants when describing this and corresponding events. By extension supporters of Trump and his antics might engender or endorse the same thinking and actions. This is true even in interpersonal relationships with White Christians in church. Perhaps they will espouse the same disregard for Black lives, which upon reflection, do indeed matter.

Now a question for the reader. We stand at the intersection of recent events, stressful interpersonal interactions, psychological racial trauma, and racialized formation. *How do these intersections spark your imagination for reconciliation and justice?*

Intersection 2

Second, consider the intersection of hope, racial policies, resources, emotional care, racialized formation, and the benefit of community, which all lead to belonging. Consider this story which holds a rich intersection of these themes.

> So, like I said, my story is a little different from most. When my father was living, he took all our family to church every Sunday… my mom, and all the kids, all 10 of us. I mean, until we got up to 11. He would drop us off, and he'd come back and pick us up. This was at the CME church. Carter's institutional CME church is where our roots lie. Once my father passed, we didn't go to church, but my mother was a very spiritual woman who grew up in a family with spiritual roots. We still trusted God, believed in God, and then our life… About a year and a half after my dad passed, our house burned down. My mother was almost killed in that fire, and she was in the hospital for six months. And at that time, it was so important because no one could just take in 11 children. So, we were put in different homes in our community, some with white families, some with black families, because even on our street, it was racially mixed. We lived on a court with about 10 houses, and we stayed with different people in our school district so that we could continue to go to school, at our school of origin. It was just…. that's where I learned community.
>
> (On the pursuit of belonging ~ Participant 10)

This story contains two important elements: vulnerability and innocence. It is easy for Christians to take care of those who are vulnerable and protect those who are innocent. It can awaken a protective instinct that need not develop into a hero complex. This story sits at the

intersection of hope, racial policies, resources, emotional care, racialized formation, the benefit of community, and belonging. Racial boundaries were crossed, and homogeneity discarded in order to provide care for Black Children. This story would not be possible without people willingly sharing belongings, money, time, and even their homes. Physical location mattered so that children could stay closer to home and attend their same school. Amidst vulnerability and innocence, there were safe interpersonal interactions with those who had more power, and the result was a racialized formation that held open hopeful possibilities. Finally, this is where this individual "learned community."

The generosity and protection offered by White Christians in community was an important emergence in the data. Two other participants reported similar kinds of stories. Participant eleven reported being defended and supported through a public racist encounter as a young girl. She was defended by the youth minister and subsequently supported by young White ladies and their parents who returned all of their purchased goods from the perpetrating party. They acted in protection and solidarity for this child. Another participant described the vulnerability of not having a father figure in the home during his youth. Raised by his mother, aunts, and grandmother, they were supported by White churches they were a part of while he was a child. These are all stories of proximity, and all three occurred outside of the church building. These moments codified spiritual understandings about who God is because of how God's people acted. Proximity, place, protection and the presence of vulnerability and innocence beg an important question for the researcher. At what point do these Black bodies shift from vulnerable innocence to culpable threat? Is this in an inverse relationship to Whites' feeling of control? Is the experience of perceived vulnerability and innocence of Black bodies in direct correlation to Whites' internalized feelings of controlling those bodies? Is this the inherent logic of policing so

that we have order, or perhaps in a less volatile situation, decorum? These are questions for another study.

Now a question for the reader. We stand at the intersection of hope, racial policies, resources, emotional care, racialized formation, and the benefit of community, and belonging. *How do these intersections spark your imagination for reconciliation and justice?*

Intersection 3

Third, consider the intersection of identity, belonging, stressful interpersonal interactions, racialized policies, racialized trauma, and power. These intersections created microaggressions. This was probably the most pervasive experienced intersection. Microaggressions were present for 14 out of 15 participants in the study and often surfaced multiple times in an interview. Each microaggression builds upon the next, creating a cumulative effect of belittling and othering Black Christians in predominantly White Churches. In this section, responses will be integrated in the discussion for their cumulative effect, but not reflected on individually. William Lofton Turner contributed to a collected work entitled *Reconciliation Reconsidered: Advancing the national conversation on Race in Churches of Christ*.[209] This collection was edited by Tanya Brice Smith. His essay is called *Seeking Higher Ground: Bringing to Light Microaggressions that Impede Progress on the Road to the Beloved Community.*[210]

Please consider this. Next year, 2024 will mark the 60th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which is a true landmark of legislation. It outlawed discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. If one were to anthropomorphize these 60 years, this

[209] Tanya Smith Brice, *Reconciliation Reconsidered: Advancing the National Conversation on Race in Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2016).

[210] Ibid., 165.

individual would be considered mature with good experience, yet young enough to enjoy all that life has to offer for the next 20, 30, or even 40 years. Civil Rights legislation is RECENT history, and America is still living into all that it means. There is still urgency in this proximity lest the Church becomes further disconnected from what is still a 'young' movement. It always astounds this researcher how Civil Rights pictures and videos are displayed in Black and White, as if they belonged to the 19th century rather than the 20th century.

Lofton calls Churches (of Christ specifically) to heed the urgency of the present day to embrace the biblical mandate for multiculturalism. The beloved community that Dr. King envisioned is threatened by the presence of microaggressions.

> The notion of the beloved community envisioned by King is a society based on justice, equal opportunity, and love of one's fellow human beings. The beloved community closely resembles the Church in that both are based on the values and teachings of Jesus Christ…Though made up of differing and often intersecting parts, woven tightly like the nap of a tapestry, there are tears and picks in the tapestry requiring attention and repair most of the time. I refer to the tears and rips in the tapestry as microaggressions.[211]

Turner shares a definition of microaggressions that is extremely helpful. This is the Scholarly work of psychologist Derald Wing Sue. It is a scientifically observable phenomenon of human behavior and experience. It is associated with the coercion and oppression of marginalized groups. Sue and his colleagues identify three types of Microaggressions[212]:

1) A Microinsult is characterized by Communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial Heritage or identity (for example, eye rolling and dismissiveness during discussion about an individual's racial identity.)

[211] Tanya Smith Brice, *Reconciliation Reconsidered* (ACU Press, 2016), 146.

[212] Ibid., 148-49.

2) Microinvalidations or Communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color. Examples of microinvalidation could be multiplied but two will suffice:

    a) A white person stating to a person of color that they "don't see color," denying the existence of racial and ethnic experiences.

    b) An individual who considers racial or cultural preferences to be childish or reflective of a character flaw. The argument, "If you would just toughen up and not be so sensitive, your problems would be greatly reduced" always invalidates and belittles.

3) Micro assault is an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim. This can happen through name calling, avoidant Behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions. micro assaults against African American people also appear in the form of unflattering and stereotypic depictions or the depiction of white actors/models and blackface, or associations between black people and negative and aggressive behaviors that paint all members of the race

Back when we had Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the church building, I'd come running in from my principal job with my suit and tie on my way to an elders meeting. Someone would direct me to the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, or the Narcotics Anonymous meeting and I was like 'thank you very much but I'm going to another meeting'. You know, it just got to a point where it's like, they weren't being rude, but the assumption was made that I certainly wasn't a member here and going to a leadership meeting. (On Microaggression, Participant Three)
And he wanted to show a video in the local downtown, about what people thought about Jesus. So he went one Saturday and talked to about ten people and got various opinions and views on what they thought about Jesus. And when he showed it. Eight of the people were white, and two were African American. Yeah. One was a woman. Very, you know, I shouldn't say very, but she's intelligent and articulate which, you know, we, we expect that most African Americans are most people who are intelligent and educated. And then the one African American he interviewed was somebody that was basically homeless, Toothless, not very well educated. So, it offended the black people that were in the audience.

(On Microaggressions, Participant fourteen)

Microinsults, microinvalidations, and micro assaults typify unjust racially blended spaces. What is the solution to this? This is one area where changed hearts would be helpful. Is the solution direct confrontation of these acts and attitudes each time they arise? Some participants certainly see that as a function of their belonging to their White Churches. This related to the counter formational theme that emerged specifically in relation to Black formation within predominantly White Churches.

And At first, they rebuffed but I like planting the seed for them to think differently. (On Holy Being a Holy Irritant, Participant 1)
God has really gifted me with the ability to say some difficult things in pretty gentle ways. Where they are still truthful, and I appreciate that deeply. I really really do, and I use it. And what's nice is that I don't lose my temper a lot. And I don't scream a lot. An advantage of when I get really angry is that I get quieter, so you're not gonna hear me yelping and yelling, but I will to the best of my ability try to speak the truth. (On being a persistent Holy irritant, Participant three)

Contact theory is a way to bring groups together to reduce prejudice. The logic is this: If group separation causes inaccurate perceptions of other groups, negative emotions, and discrimination, then under certain conditions, direct contact between members of different groups will reverse those inaccurate perceptions and negative emotions and discrimination.[213] This works because cross cultural interaction can provide information that flies in the face of inaccurate information. Cleveland uses the research of Nancy Schlossberg and discusses "the concepts of *mattering* and *marginality* to describe the subtle but powerful ways in which a group

[213] Cleveland, Disunity In Christ, 167.

of people can include or exclude, and empower and disempower different others."[214] She goes on to describe that "Mattering and marginality exist on opposite ends of a continuum, such that the more an individual feels like she matters and is empowered, the less she feels marginalized and disempowered, and vice versa."[215]

This chart from Cleveland's research describes the presence of five factors of belonging. Experiences of marginality and othering occur when there is an absence of one or more of these contributing factors.

Table 4: Factors of Mattering and Marginalization

Identification	Feeling that other people will be proud of your accomplishments or saddened by your failures.
Attention	Feeling that you command the sincere attention or interest of people in the group.
Importance	Believing that another person cares about what you want, think and do, or is concerned about your fate.
Appreciation	A feeling of highly regarded and acknowledged by others
Dependence	Feeling integrated in the community such that your behaviors/actions are based on how others depend on you.

The degree to which these factors are experienced often marks the degree to which people are accepted and empowered in their environments. When considering racial reconciliation, she shares an interesting thought worth noting. Cleveland notes that one time unity events are a worthy idea, but that based on social contact theory they may actually

[214] Ibid., 168.

[215] Ibid.

reinforce negative stereotypes. It is the opinion of this researcher that these events do not often have the capacity or design to create the depth of interpersonal contact needed to counteract negative perceptions. What is the alternative? The alternative is prolonged continual exposure to cross cultural relational opportunities. This begs an important question. It uncovers an inverse dynamic that is quite costly to Black Christians in White Spaces who often represent 'all Black people'.

Here lies a difficult conundrum for Black Christians in White spaces. Does one stay and expose oneself to microaggressions for the sake of the benefits of belonging to a group (even if that belonging is centered around shared work), or does one protect the degradation of his personhood and avoid long term racialized trauma by leaving and facing the loss of networks, materials, and opportunities? This choice displays a lack of power. When one is not offered the choice of full belonging to oneself while fully belonging to a group, it has long term consequences. Long term, it can lead to despair. Perhaps it is simply easier to embrace the consumer mentality and go to a place that 'meets my needs?' Homogeneity is not that bad right?

Emmerson and Smith say that networks tend to form in racially homogenous groups, to the detriment of other groups. All things equal it actually creates injustice. When resources and benefits remain with one group of people, and are not shared, enjoyed, or co-created by other groups, this furthers disparities between groups. Ingroup members may enjoy ease of interaction with low barriers of entry and fewer conditions of belonging. However, integration seems the better option for all involved. Gaining valuable perspective helps one's intrinsic humanity, and gaining resources helps one survive. Community can provide this, but the conditions of belonging are often quite difficult for outgroup members.

> At its core, racialization is characterized by separate networks and differential access to valued resources, such as health, wealth, and status. The mere existence of racially

> homogenous groups contributes to racially separate networks. Racially homogenous groups, especially strong religious groups, also contribute to differential access to resources, given the preexisting context of inequality by race.[216]

In other words, homogeneity is not benign. All things being equal, homogeneity is not equal or equitable. This imagined neutrality in homogeneity creates imbalances of power and resources because White Supremacy is working in the background against everyone. White supremacy continues the segregating effects of racialization through policies and structures so that its footprint can stay out of sight. Those with whom we don't share proximity, will be othered; They will quickly become 'them'. This othering could be self-protective, but what are people afraid of? What constitutes 'them' versus 'us'? Additionally, people tend to assign positive traits to ingroup members and negative traits to ingroup individuals, while assigning positive traits to outgroup individuals, and negative traits to entire outgroups. We are good, but they are broken. He is not one of us, but he is the exception who they are. This is racist ideology.

"When you're Black, certain things are associated with you whether you are involved in them or not. Here is an example. If something good happens to a Black person, sometimes the majority says that person is an exception. If something bad happens to a Black person sometimes the majority says that's the way, they all are. It's a weird dynamic."
(On Identity, Participant four)

At this moment in time, the researcher can hear the familiar counter questions begin to be asked. Why are you still here if it is so bad for you? What about human agency and pulling yourself up by your bootstraps? Can't people simply stop whining about it and decide to create their own way instead of staying stuck with false choices they do not like? Ultimately it is the responsibility of each individual to seek his own health and happiness, right? White Evangelical respondents in Emmerson and Smith's study made these remarks.

One Baptist man, for example said:

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[216] Emmerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 160.

> There are a lot of people just sittin' on their butts, saying because of circumstances in the past you owe me this and you owe me that. There's a lot of resentment in the white community because we just need to get over all of that and move forward. Everybody is responsible for their own actions. Life is not the circumstance; life is how you deal with the circumstances and how it makes you better and how you move forward.[217]

A Wesleyan Woman remarked:

> A lot of them don't care. They don't want to work…. You go downtown and you see some of these apartments low-income housing. It's trash. I mean, they don't care and then they complain. Well, get off your duffer and do something. Make a better life for yourself. Clean up your house. Pick up your trash, get some kind of job. [218]

And a Nondenominational man had this to say:

> I think they choose to live like that because it is an easier way out. I am a firm believer in this: God said he would provide for our needs, and he does. But if you want out of a gutter, you're going to have to work to get out of a gutter. [219]

Emmerson and Smith go on to describe that this thinking persists in White persons who are isolated from a network of relationships with African Americans, and that African Americans violate a core tenant of white conservative Christianity. Namely, that despite their Christian association, African Americans are not free-will accountable individuals, are relationally dysfunctional, and sin both by relying on programs rather than themselves and by shifting blame to structurally based reasons for inequality. At the heart of the matter lies a White supremacist idea. While African Americans may be Christian, they are not good White American Christians. Black racialized knowledge of this racist sentiment displayed prominently in the data.

So if you're going through something where you say, yeah I was at work and I got passed over for this promotion just because I'm Black, and there's someone else to say "I know exactly what you mean" versus in the white congregation. They say "Well I don't know if that is necessarily the case. Maybe it was something else" Nope.

[217] Ibid., 102

[218] Ibid.

[219] Ibid.

(On belonging, Participant six)
And like I said before. Being Black is to be different; it is to be othered. And just knowing that you always have to present yourself in an appropriate fashion, you know against stereotypes. The stereotypes like 'you lazy' and don't do anything, don't work. Don't care about your appearance. You know, it's the respectability politics of it all. (On identity, Participant eight)
I'm a Black Woman. And so, what does that mean to them? It could mean nothing to them or it could mean whatever societal stereotypes they put on you… you know sometimes I think about it and it's almost like, "Why aren't you really bitter? That, you have these experiences, and you know, I've done literally everything society told me to do… I work, I went to college, I'm educated, I'm a good person. I've done everything society tells me as a Black person they want me to do, and still I am faced with many, many problems. (On racial trauma, Participant five)
In one leadership meeting, we were constructing an announcement and I said 'You know, the way that an announcement is worded, it makes it seem like, we want the folk that feel they are different to go to this service and we want the mainstream folks to go to this service.' And I said 'That can send a lot of messages, and I don't know if that's the message that I can support.' And the person that was constructing the announcement was like 'Oh! Absolutely not. Let's change this right here.' But one of the other men in the room said, 'When are you going to get over it? We were living in this back in the 20th century, and we are WAY past this.' And I said, 'When am I going to get over what? Get over being Black? Every morning I wake up and look in the mirror, I'm still Black. And there are still places in society that remind me of it all the time. What do you mean? (On racial trauma, Participant 3)

There are more instances of Black identity and belonging being tied up in centering racist White opinions in their self-description. These will not be shared here. However, the data clearly displays that in the midst of being marginalized, there is also internal marginalization within Black Christians. Self othering often happens in congruence with the othering happening at the hands of White Christians.

The full effect of this continued othering is costly. Here, again lies a difficult conundrum for Black Christians in White spaces. Does one stay and expose oneself to microaggressions for the sake of the group benefits and belonging to a group (even if that belonging is centered around

shared work), or does he protect the degradation of his personhood and avoid long term racialized trauma by leaving, but potentially face loss of networks, materials, and opportunities? Again, this choice displays a lack of power, intrapersonal and interpersonal rejection, and eventually despair.

> "And after a while, we're exhausted... But I believe it's a cultural thing. That's what you give up. And I think about it sometimes. And I think you know, was it worth it?"
> (On despair, Participant nine)

What should be done with and by those who exist on the margins of a group? Black Christians in White Churches present a margin that cuts on a minimum of three sides: your identity is dissociative, you don't belong to Black people, and you will never belong to White people. It's worse when you are female in a male dominated institution. Boesheck and DeYoung describe an incarnated justice important to our understanding of justice, and the bringing of justice to the wronged. Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55 talks about God filling the lowly with Good things and sending the rich away empty handed. The pertinent concept is the act of lifting up and laying low. "They are at the bottom not because of their own fault; they are there because they are downtrodden. Those at the top 'trample the head of the poor into the dust of the Earth' (Amos 2:7) 'When center and circumference are one's basic metaphors", Wolterstorff argues "It is akin to the metaphor of those in the center and those on the margin. Those on the inside and those on the outside."[220]

"The undoing of injustice will be described as including the outsiders. When up and down are one's basic metaphors, the undoing of injustice will be described as lifting up those at the bottom. The poor do not have to be included in the social order; they have always been there,

[220] Boesack & DeYoung, Radical Reconciliation, 61

usually indispensable to its functioning. They have to be lifted up."[221] Microinsults, microinvalidations, and microaggressions make the experience of the beloved, just, and transformative community into a charade. What we cannot be for one another before God, we cannot be for the world as a witness to what God has done.

Now a question for the reader. We stand at the intersection of identity, belonging, stressful interpersonal interactions, racialized policies, racialized trauma, and power. *How do these intersections spark your imagination for reconciliation and justice?*

A New Definition of Racial Reconciliation and Racial Justice

Chanequa Walker Barnes provides this definition for our consideration. Racial reconciliation is part of God's ongoing and eschatological Mission to restore wholeness and peace to a world broken by systemic injustice. Racial reconciliation is a social justice movement that focuses upon dismantling white supremacy, systemic evil that denies and distorts the image of God inherent in all humans based upon the heretical belief that white aesthetics, values, and cultural norms bear the fullest representation of the Imago dei. White supremacy thus maintains that white people are superior to all other people, and it orders creation, identities, relationships, and social structures in a way that supports this distortion. Racial reconciliation is a holistic process that requires confrontational truth-telling, the liberation and healing of the oppressed, the repentance and the conversion of the oppressor, and an ongoing commitment to building a beloved community. Reconciliation is an iterative process. The tasks are neither linear nor mutually exclusive, and they are often cyclical in nature as our journey into reconciliation draws us ever deeper into confrontation with the ugliness of racism and the hidden ways in which it has manifested in our psyches, our relationships, and our world. Genuine efforts toward racial

[221] Ibid.

reconciliation are at once spiritual, political, social, and psychological. They are really comfortable; more often than not, they are painful. and the seeming intractability of racism within our world makes reconciliation feel more like Mission Impossible than the mission of God." [222]

Implications

At the conclusion of each interview participants were offered the opportunity to come together for one special time as a group and offer feedback on the compiled themes. A subgroup of participants voluntarily gathered to offer reflections on the emerging themes and ideas for what should happen next. They have been deemed the diaspora of wisdom. Their perspective comes from the margins and needs to be centered in White Churches who desire not to squander the gift of proximity these Black Christians provide by being in their midst. Their reflection is summarized below.

Group Reflection

Isolation, fatigue and burnout were the most concerning portions of the research to this group and many of them confirmed the reality of this. There was a rich discussion on the cost of staying in spaces that need you but hurt you at the same time. There was deep encouragement provided and a question posed, "At this point in your life, can you imagine yourself back in a Black church? Grow where you've been planted. The Lord has a purpose for you there." This discussion bloomed into a conversation about the Nashville three, and this generation of young people that are coming up. One person said (and I have felt these undercurrents personally), "We are on the verge of another Civil Rights Movement in this country and these young folks are

[222] Walker-Barnes, *I bring the Voices of My People,* 204.

coming. They are not going to be silenced and they won't put up with these old forms of control that people rely on. The movement is coming."

One of the interesting factors in the research of this project was the difficulty I had finding participants younger than myself. They are generally not present unless the White Church has made an explicit effort to pursue racial justice. I wonder if their White Gen Z counterparts are not far behind them in abandoning spaces that will not take justice seriously: justice for the poor, justice for the marginalized and justice for racially oppressed people. One person remarked "Our young people are over it, and the Church needs to be at the forefront of this change. Where was the Church of Christ in the last Civil Rights movement? We are sitting on an opportunity to get it right this time. To participate, to march, to advocate, to protect the poor, and to care about Justice. If we don't get it right, they are going to do it in spite of us. Regardless, we need to get it right this time."

Turning a practical eye towards existing as Black Christians in predominantly White Churches, they recommended this to other Black Christians.

1) ***Press in, and stay woke[223], and make sure you get a seat at the table...*** You're needed, and you have to speak up otherwise they (White Christians) won't get your perspective.
2) ***Find two or three White allies…*** These are people who you can be yourself to and simply name what is happening and they will stand in solidarity with you, support you, and hear your voice. These will be people who you can trust to carry

[223] "Lead Belly - 'Scottsboro Boys,'" *Www.youtube.com*, last modified July 2, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrXfkPViFIE. "This song Scottsboro Boys debuted 1938 and was sung by artist Lead Belly. The call to 'stay woke' was a clarion call to not fall asleep to "Be careful, keep your eyes open" because the Scottsboro boys were falsely accused of assaulting a group of white women who happened to be riding on a train with them."

your voice into other spaces where you are not welcomed. The work won't get done without people who can speak in places where you can't.

3) ***Connect with one another and leverage one another's voices in your personal context***…This research and this group experience has been encouraging, and we need to stay connected. Also bring each other's voices into conversations in our contexts. Sometimes a prophet is not accepted in his hometown. Jesus knew that we should too. I can come to your church, say things that need to get said, and leave. That way we'll spare one another the consequences of White-lash that happens by being too outspoken.

Personal Recommendations

There is a deep dissociative identity cost to being a Black Christian in a Predominantly White church. There is an abiding and pervasive loneliness. We are often judged, misunderstood, rejected, or ostracized by members of the Black community at large for participating in white communities. The definition of how to embody Blackness often feels rigid, fixed, and weaponized against us. Standing in opposition to We are never fully at home in White communities because belonging is ever just beyond our grasp, and when belonging is experienced, it cannot provide the immersive experience of cultural heritage, anchoring, knowing where you come from, and who your people are. You are diaspora. You stand in the middle passage between an America that may never receive you fully and an Africa that has become so distant a past, that it is at best the foreign familiar. This is the trauma of racialization. The more intersecting identities one occupies, the greater the strain on any hope of integration… Healing is needed. "Holy Spirit, let your healing water flow, let your holy power fall." Come Holy Spirit.

As we wait for the Spirit, I have a few personal recommendations as well. First, I will make some recommendations for my Black brothers and sisters:

1) First, protect your health. A ministry colleague often reminds me that the best thing we can do for the people we are called to is to bring our healthy selves to what we do. This is true. I affirm your need for more days off from your contexts because of the systemic complexity you bear existing as your vulnerable selves where you are. If you embrace the practice of sabbath keeping there are rich resources for you to draw upon that are biblically sound and Practical wisdom. The other component to this self-care I would offer is to intentionally practice Joy and to laugh. Laughter is necessary.
2) Second, make time to reflect and practice the contemplative practice of Examen. Paying attention to things that are life giving and life thwarting can be an exercise in forming your ability to attend to yourself and hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit. You will need the Spirit's power to survive where you are because grit alone will not suffice. Seeing a spiritual director to help facilitate this reflection might not be a bad idea. If you can't find a Black one, find someone well versed in the effects of racialization and can speak into things that you know you need to name. Right now, I have one personally, and she is a White Nazarene woman who is trained specifically in antiracism in Spiritual direction and calls out things that I am afraid to say but know are real. Yes, there is such a thing. Who knew?
3) Third, don't isolate yourself and withdraw. Find ways to seek an experience of a lifegiving community that comes with some level of ease. The cocktail of deadly

> isolation, grief, depression, and despair are not to be trifled with. You must find people who get it and can walk with you.

For my White brothers and sisters, I say three things. The first thing is to listen. Listen well, listen deeply, and listen for a long time. With the power you have, offer to help create spaces of listening that are Black only spaces in your context. Do so without fear and without strings attached. If you are then invited to hear the reflections of those cultivated spaces, join in with humility and good questions more than excitement and ideas. That part will come, but we must do the work of attending to the creation of a loving and just community first.

Secondly, make space to reflect and examine yourselves. God's reconciliation unto justice in you, must be throughgoing. The hospitality of God is a self-forgetful love that makes room for others' fullness. It does not commoditize people nor does it collapse their identity and worth down to their usefulness. We Black folks are more than our voice, more than our talents, and more than what we offer to you. You need to examine yourselves and see if you believe this. We can tell the difference even if you are not yet self-aware enough to know it. Remember…do not be ye afraid. We want to co-labor with you.

Third and finally, be healed and seek the healing of others. This is the kind of healing one has to fight for. In Mark chapter 9 there is a story about the disciples attempting to remove a demon from a young boy. They would later learn that "this kind only comes out through prayer and fasting". Nevertheless, as the story goes, this demon would throw the child to the ground and cause him to be outside of himself with self-injurious behavior. This demon stole his speech and silenced him, rendering him mute. This demon would throw the child into harm's way seeking to destroy him, and his dad fought to get him before Jesus. This father's impassioned plea to Jesus

was this: “If you are able to do anything, help us! Have compassion on us!” Jesus replied with humored indignation, “If you are ABLE!” Then Jesus assured the man. “All things can be done for the one who believes.” The man cried out in return “Lord I believe, help my unbelief!”

Jesus healed that vulnerable child from a demon that day. White supremacy is a demon. It must be cast out by Christ’s will and power. Diagnosing and eradicating white supremacy within us and around us is nothing short of a Spiritual pursuit in which we must partner with Jesus, and actively resist. Fight against White supremacy and invite Christ the liberator to liberate you. Some are already familiar with this work and are committed. To those I say, please teach others to receive the same grace of God that comes through participation with the Spirit. It will not be easy, but it must be done.

Final Thoughts

Race is complex and multidimensional. Consequently, racism is also complex and multidimensional. That may be frustrating and overwhelming, but it is still true. Racism in structural and interpersonal. Racism is systemic. It is more than personal choice. It is woven in the very fabric of the American experience, including the American Christian evangelical church. The church does not stand condemned but called, called to reflect, examine and act. The reality is that racism is alive and well in complex systematic expressions within all spaces of interaction, including church; thus rejecting this is naive.

Racism does not mean one thing, nor does it have a singular expression as prejudice actions. The sooner White Evangelical Christians on a whole, come to grips with this reality, the sooner they might begin offering generative solutions to race-informed work in America. The current oversimplification of the ministry of reconciliation is a formation unto death. Racial unity is a byproduct of the reconciliatory process, but it should not be confused as its end.

Interpersonal relationships and changing "one heart at a time" will not overcome the destructive power of White supremacy in our country. Good human relationships alone, will not undo the historical and thoroughgoing effects of racial violence. It will not offer respite for the costly racialized wisdom Black people must have in order to survive a country that was built *on them* but not *for them*. Simple solutions will not do.

Oversimplification is a benefit of privilege. The ability to whittle down the scope of racialized problems and subsequently offer ineffective and incomplete solutions displays a disheartening level of ignorance. As a Black researcher I do not have the same privilege of living in an oversimplified world. However, I must confess, I also have a disheartening level of ignorance about the full impact of racialization. I have known it all my life, yet it would seem that I am still discovering its full meaning. I am still discovering the ill effects of racialization in my own experience while showing up with my vulnerable self to love the people right in front of me.

Being a Black minister who has served in predominantly White communities alongside people whom I love and call brothers and sisters in Christ has been incredible. It has been incredibly delightful and debilitating, triumphant and tiresome, wonderful, and wearying, fantastic and fatiguing. As a son of two spaces, Black and White, I always feel my "two-ness"[224] and I'm not just talking about my enneagram number. Nevertheless, I have been formed by the same internal logic that proliferates the religious imagination; that my faith-based assumptions and beliefs are central to the formation of other views. My faith informs all areas of life, and when I look for answers, I look towards God. I turn towards the community of faith as an interpretive community to help me make sense of current events.

[224] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Reprint Editions. (New York: Dover, 1994), 2.

Why does all this matter? It matters because the ministry of reconciliation is still God's work. It matters because if we are in Christ, it is also our work. In the particularity of the American context, reconciliation can be many things. It can take on many forms, but one thing it cannot do is ignore racism as an embodied part of reconciliation. To ignore America's original sin, is not to allow God to deal with it. NEW CREATION!! What would it look like if we came to Christ to participate in new creation and rather than codifying the death-dealing dominion of decay from old creation? Walker-Barnes says that "Racism is about a matrix of power and domination that is designed to support and maintain White supremacy."[225] She goes on to describe the need for racial justice to address the multigenerational impact of displacement, stolen labor and land, inadequate education, and discrimination in employment, housing, environment policy, healthcare, and the criminal justice system.[226] She describes these reparations as the entry point into reconciliation because reconciliation happens among equals.

White supremacy impacts all people psychologically, physically, spiritually, and relationally. Walker-Barnes says this.

> When the complexity of the task of remediating racism is laid bare, it begs the question as to whether racial reconciliation is even possible, or perhaps more appropriately, whether it is a social movement worth engaging. Confronting the realities of racism whether through dialogue, or social action is unrelentingly difficult. It is emotionally and psychologically arduous, even traumatic, labor that can make a tremendous toll on our well-being and our relationships. Yet, it is precisely this complexity and this difficulty that point to the necessity of God's redemptive work in racial reconciliation That is, racial reconciliation is ultimately part of the mission of God to restore a broken world. It is both an Edenic and an eschatological mission, one that began in the Genesis creation story and that will ultimately be completed by God. Yet, it requires our participation, as God has called us to be ambassadors of reconciliation.[227]

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[225] Walker Barnes, *I Bring The Voices of My People*, 207.

[226] Ibid.

[227] Ibid.

Walker-Barnes continues by saying that to be Christian is to be committed to God's message of reconciliation. It is tied to God's offer of new life in Christ.[228] Some authors and Christian thinkers avoid using the ministry of reconciliation to describe Christian life because of its historical abuses. Reconciliation that has been unidimensional serves injurious purposes rather than moving towards healing and wholeness. Walker Barnes contests this conclusion. "We cannot opt out of it. We are either working towards justice and reconciliation, or we are not Christian – period. The question for Christians is not whether racial reconciliation is possible. Our Faith calls us to believe in the impossible every day." After all, we confess that God became flesh, was born in vulnerability to an unmarried teenage Jewish girl, grew up among humankind, walked the earth, healed the sick, cast out demons, challenged the religious status quo, and was crucified, buried, and resurrected days later. Walker Barnes continues with this assertion. "In Merely human terms, racial reconciliation is most certainly impossible. But as followers of Christ, possibility is not a criterion for our faithful obedience. The more pressing question, then, is how we sustain our quest toward the impossible."[229]

One final note from Michael Gorman stands in solidarity with what Chanequa Walker Barnes has laid out for us. Gorman says "Justification, then, is about reconciliation, covenant participation and faithfulness, community, resurrection, and life. And this reality is brought about by death — Christ's death for us in the past and our death with him in the present, all due to God's initiative and grace. Those who are justified — who are in Christ — will be conformed to his covenantal faithfulness and love." Gorman finalizes in summary by saying this. "This symbiosis of faith and love is not an addendum to justification but is constitutive of justification

[228] This is according to 2nd Corinthians 5:14ff.

[229] Ibid. Walker Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, 208.

itself — the restoration of right covenant relations. Put differently, Paul understands justification as participatory transformation in the justice of God in Christ that creates a just people. Justice is inherent in justification."[230]

Conclusion

It is my deep hope that this project will be a blessing to those who encounter it. I love God's church and am committed to being a co-laborer in the Gospel of Christ. My question for my White brothers and sisters is this. Will you be like Saul or be like Paul? During the lynching of Stephen, Saul stood by in complicity holding the coats of those doing the killing. Paul encountered Jesus and by God's power he was reconciled to Christ and those he formerly persecuted. God changed Paul by the power of the Spirit and helped him offer all his tremendous gifts towards building beloved communities who seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. I'm not going to encourage you to BE Jesus, because we only need one savior. That savior is Jesus, and he wasn't a White man. He wasn't a Black man either. However, we can all walk shoulder to shoulder IN CHRIST following his lead into God's world to participate as ministers of reconciliation (and justice!), by the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

[230] Gorman, Becoming the Gospel, 227.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Is this Our Story? Is This Our Song?
Discovering the Formational Stories of Black Christians in Predominantly White Churches

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the lived experience of Black Christians in predominantly White churches. This study is being conducted by Chris Shields II, a graduate student in the Hazelip School of Theology at Lipscomb University under the supervision of Dr. Judy Cummings and Dr. John York. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you have been identified by the researcher's prior or current knowledge of your experiences as a Black Member/Churchgoer in a predominantly White Congregation. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to describe experiences of Black Christians in a predominantly White Church. This study is designed to provide a detailed description of past and current experiences of Black Christians who attended/attend a predominantly White Church. Interviews will be transcribed, listened to, and coded for thematic analysis by the researcher. Approximately 8-10 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to begin by reading and singing this informed consent document, and a media release form (30 minutes). Participants will be sent a digital demographic survey to complete (15 minutes). This will provide contact information, brief participant context, and help the researcher connect interview responses to the correct participants. The researcher will conduct a one-on-one interview the participant utilizing the digital platform Zoom. Interviews can be up to but will not exceed 90 minutes. This study will take approximately a 3-hour total time commitment from each participant. All elements should be completed within one month of the completion of the survey.

Risks and Benefits:

The study has some known risks. First, it is likely that recalling emotionally sensitive or emotionally intense experiences may cause a reoccurrence of those same emotions in the interview. Displaying a range of emotions will be a welcomed and natural part of the interview, however, participants experiencing an undesired level of emotional intensity will be given opportunities to take a short break before continuing. Second, it is somewhat likely that participants may describe events that include microaggressions, or racialized trauma. Interview termination conditions: Participants should try to answer each question to the best of her or his ability. If a question is too painful to answer after taking a break, the participant may ask to move to the next question. If after multiple breaks during multiple questions, you find it too difficult to continue the interview you have the right to terminate your involvement in the study. It is advised that you pursue mental health services for any lingering effects of emotional distress from participation in this study. This will need to be pursued at the expense of the participant. The researcher may terminate the study under the following circumstances: Data breaches by the participant, excessive emotional distress on the part of the participant, aggressive behaviors towards the researcher from the participant, non-responsiveness by the participant after multiple contact attempts.

While it is the researcher's hope that creating spaces for hearing black voices produces positive effects in the participant, there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified, or identifiable and only group data will be presented.

I will keep the research results in password protected file on my computer located in my home. Any physical records will be stored in a locked safe, and only I and or advisor will have access to the records while we work on this

project. We will finish analyzing the data by August 31st . We will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Lipscomb University in any way.

New Information:

If during course of this research study we/I learn about new findings that might influence your willingness to continue participating in the study, we/I will inform you of these findings.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Chris Shields II at 248-310-0980 clshields@mail.lipscomb.edu ,or Dr. Judy Cummings 615-480-6530 / drjudycummings@gmail.com. You may ask questions now or later and Dr. John York (john.york@lipscomb.edu), will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. Justin Briggs. Chair of the Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board at jgbriggs@lipscomb.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study. Please check the box for consent or sign below: ☐

Signature of Participant	Date
Signature of Parent, Legal Guardian, or Witness	Date
Signature of Researcher	Date

APPENDIX B: MULTIMEDIA RELEASE FORM

LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY

IRB RESEARCH STUDY MULTIMEDIA RELEASE

To be completed by the researcher			
Principal Investigator:	Chris Shields II		
Research Study:			
Type of Release (check all that apply):	☑ Audio	☐ Video	☐ Photo

To be completed by the research participant

Name of Participant: _____

In consideration for participating in the research study referenced above, I hereby grant to Lipscomb University ("Lipscomb"), and those acting pursuant to its authority, a non-exclusive, perpetual, worldwide, irrevocable license to record, use, reproduce, exhibit and distribute my presentation, likeness, voice, name and/or identity on a video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic, Internet or other medium without restrictions or limitations (the "Recordings") for the following purposes and uses (*please initial and check all of the following that apply*):

	Initials	☑	**Recording Purpose**
1.	_____	☐	The Recordings can be used for educational purposes, which means the researcher can use the Recordings to transcribe the interview for the purposes of their research.

I hereby agree to defend, hold harmless, indemnify, release and forever discharge Lipscomb and its trustees, officers, agents, representatives and employees from and against any and all liability, claims, actions, causes of actions and damages (including reasonable attorneys' fees) of any kind whatsoever in law and in equity, both past and present and whether known or unknown, arising out of or related to (a) the use of my name, likeness, identity, voice, photographic image, video graphic image and voice, and the Recordings, and (b) any personal, intellectual property (including copyright), proprietary or other rights that I may have in connection with any use of the Recordings. To the extent required, I hereby grant and assign to Lipscomb all copyright in the Recordings and any video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic, or other medium utilized in connection therewith. I hereby acknowledge and agree that Lipscomb shall have exclusive ownership of the copyright and other proprietary and property rights in the Recordings. **I acknowledge and understand that my name will not be used in any publication.**

I have read and understood this Multimedia Release, am at least eighteen (18) years of age and fully competent, and execute the same as my own free will.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Is This Our Story, Is This Our Song? – Discovering the Formational Experiences of Black Christians in predominantly White Churches

Interview Form

This research has two parts. The first is this interview session we are about to share. The second part will be a gathering on Zoom with other research participants. I will analyze interview data for themes. You will learn about the themes discovered and have an opportunity to respond to the info as a group. Once we end this session, you will have a chance to let me know if you'd like to participate in the group session. We will begin by collecting some basic background information. All information will remain confidential.

Name: Gender: Age:

Name of Church/Denomination:

Interview Questions

1) What does it mean to you to be Black?

2) What does it mean to you to be Christian?

3) Tell me about your experience(s) in a predominantly White church. What led you there and what makes you stay?

4) What have you gained from being part of a predominantly White church and what have you had to give up?

5) When have you felt misunderstood within this context and what was it like?

6) When have you felt understood within this context and what was it like?

7) How has being a Black Christian in a predominantly White church shaped who you are?

8) Which stories from scripture are most important to you? Why?

As we conclude our time together, I want to remind you of the opportunity to participate in a group reflection session with other participants from around the country. Interviews will be coded for themes, and those themes will be presented to the group. Participants will have opportunity to say more about those themes and offer suggestions to churches based upon the themes present.

Would you like to participate in that session? (YES /NO) Will you maintain the confidentiality of others in our group session? (YES /NO)

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences. This will be a benefit to churches and people across the country who read this dissertation.