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# Receiving the Eucharist, Writing the Gift: Anglo-Catholic Epistemology for Secular Anthropology

Carolyn Dreyer

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In this article I address anthropology's secular underpinnings by presenting the discipline's epistemology as antithetical to that of Catholic Christianity. I consider this opposition through the lens of an Anglo-Catholic student chaplaincy in Oxford, England. Anglo-Catholics are members of the Church of England who desire to restore Catholic sacramentality to Protestantism, particularly through a theology of the Eucharist in which Christ inhabits and transforms material elements. Anglo-Catholic Eucharistic theology exemplifies an epistemology based on attachment and obligation between the human recipient and God as the giver of revelation. In offering an ethnographic account of Anglo-Catholic Eucharistic theology, I consider how a theory of knowledge based on gift exchange may remedy anthropology's struggle to comprehend and convey a level of difference in religious lives beyond the social register.

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## Introduction: 'The Spirit is in you, inside you.'

It is both the blessing and the curse of the anthropologist "studying up" (Nader 1974) that her informants are wont to beat her to the analytical punch. It is the enduring challenge of the anthropologist studying Christians that her informants will appropriate her secular project for their transcendent goals. When these two fieldwork challenges happen in the same moment, it behooves the anthropologist to reconsider not just her analysis of the event, but the grounding premises by which she approaches the world of her interlocutors. Moll (2018, 256-7) has argued that when anthropologists contest analytically what religious subjects debate normatively, they risk occluding both the product and process of an epistemological labor that bears significantly on their informants' lives and may potentially bear on the anthropological project itself. It is the aim of this article to consider a possible response to Moll's plaint by

engaging with Christian subjects as both ethnographic actors and analytical interlocutors. What if, I ask, anthropologists of Christianity allowed their informants to shape not only what the discipline knows about human religious life, but to shape what the discipline considers religious and ethnographic knowledge to be?

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork<sup>1</sup> at Bouverie House,<sup>2</sup> a chaplaincy and study center that serves the University of Oxford in England. My interlocutors were priests, professors and students of the highest academic pedigree. Their scholastic pursuits were myriad; their theology was Catholic—unified and "according to the whole." Bouverie House is Anglo-Catholic, which is best understood as a "discursive tradition" (Asad 2009b) whose adherents have, since a period during the 19<sup>th</sup> century known as the Oxford Movement, sought to restore a Catholic theology of sacramentality to the Church of England (CoE, Anglican Church). Sacraments are material signs of

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<sup>1</sup> This research was conducted in conformation with the ethical standards of the Association of Social Anthropologists. I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers whose comments have helped me develop the ideas presented in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> A pseudonym. All interlocutors are referred to by pseudonym and may be further anonymized by creation of composite characters.

divine presence<sup>3</sup> held exclusively by the Church<sup>4</sup> as a transcendent institution, and give shape to a semiotic system that links immanent and transcendent spheres. The Anglo-Catholic argument for sacramentality takes shape through commitment to the necessity of the Eucharistic ritual (communion), and a rejection of naturalism and historical rationalism in theological studies. Following Anglo-Catholicism's core aims, the mission of Bouverie House is to promote theological study alongside "holiness of life." Its founders and contemporary members recognize the House as a place of "sacred learning," where worship and scholarship are rightly reunited in remedy of the rampant "decay of faith" that plagues the surrounding city and university. The chaplaincy attends to students and faculty of the university who are struggling to negotiate their religious commitments in a secular academic space. Arriving at the chaplaincy to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, I presented myself as a researcher who was sympathetic (practicing Christian) but external (not British, Anglican, or Oxonian). Ignoring my attempted detachment, my interlocutors positioned me as a Christian graduate student trying to make sense of her faith while entrenched in a famously anti-Christian discipline—precisely the sort of person to whom they would minister.

Once, in a bout of fieldwork frustration, I expressed to an informant that I doubted my ability to capture in writing the depth of experiences, conflicts and commitments of those I studied. Julian was also a doctoral candidate, sympathetic but on the whole unimpressed by my complaint; she seemed to discern a lack of faith on my part, or perhaps prideful thinking that I had full control over what I wrote. Julian looked me straight in the eyes and replied matter-of-factly, "If you're baptized, the Spirit is in you, inside you." She told me that even if I wanted to write a methodologically secular ethnographic account, it would be impossible, because God was already present. "Carolyn," she sighed, "you go to mass every day. You know what the Eucharist is about; it'll come through in your writing. Maybe not everyone will see it, but the people who need to will find it there." The young

woman paused, pursed her lips in a half-smile. "Let those who have ears, hear,"<sup>5</sup> right?"

The concern I had expressed was a general one, perhaps even stereotypical to the ethnographic fieldworker: can a few hundred pages of printed text convey the tremendous richness of real human lives? My interlocutor's response, however, was specific in discerning my particular anthropological dilemma, answering a question I had not asked: can a secular discipline communicate the supernatural, spiritual gravitas to which one's religious subjects commit their lives? Julian immediately conflated the entirety of the Anglo-Catholic experience with the moment of the Eucharist. My ability to write well about these Christians was contingent not only on my relationship with those I studied, but particularly on my baptism and the fact that I attended mass at the chaplaincy every day. Julian was confident that my ethnographic account would convey something true about the Anglo-Catholics at Bouverie House, because the Holy Spirit was working in me through my baptism and, more pointedly, through Christ's presence which I ingested every morning when I received the Eucharistic host. For Julian and her Anglo-Catholic peers at the chaplaincy, the Eucharist is the ultimate source of revelation because the bread and wine consecrated on the altar manifest Christ to those who receive and consume. Christ is *Logos*, the physical embodiment of all wisdom, and so to receive the Eucharist is to receive knowledge—and to consume is to be transformed, to grow more like the divine source of knowledge.

It is the chief contention of this article that Catholic theology—the pursuit of knowledge about God—functions within a different episteme to that of anthropology—the study of humans. Julian described a kind of knowledge that is a gift existing only within (or as) a relationship between would-be knower and object of knowledge. Anything I had learned about the Anglo-Catholics at Bouverie House was contingent on my relationship and commitment to God, and the reception of His presence in the Eucharist. This is a dual-faceted point: I could write well about my interlocutors because I was baptized and had the Holy

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<sup>3</sup> The seven sacraments of the Church are: baptism, confirmation, holy orders (priesthood), marriage, unction (anointing of the ill), confession, and the Eucharist (communion).

<sup>4</sup> "Church" refers to the trans-spatial and transtemporal body of Christians, particularly in adherence to Catholic (universal) teaching, ritual and dogma that constitutes "tradition."

<sup>5</sup> A phrase used by Jesus in the gospels (Matthew 11:15, 13:9 and 13:43; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8 and 14:35).

Spirit inside me, but that ability was sustained on the premise of dedicated commitment to a specific relational field. It is no small matter that, by Julian's assessment, if I disengaged from the vertical (human-divine) relationship, I might well lose the horizontal (human social) knowledge which I sought. According to this epistemology, reception of sacramental knowledge is inextricable from one's engagement with and transformation by a certain kind of relationship based on production of likeness; the anthropologist is able to process theological "data" by virtue of having ingested it and attached herself to its source. Paralleling this Eucharistic theology, the anthropological episteme certainly considers the production of social knowledge to be contingent on relationship—is that not the very premise of ethnographic fieldwork? But the relationship is fundamentally one of horizontal (and ultimately incommensurable) difference—between those studied, between researcher and subject, between self and other (cf. Furani 2019; Abu-Lughod 1991). Failure to recognize these contrasting claims about knowledge on horizontal and vertical axes is, I argue, a major blockage for anthropologists who seek to understand Christians—their lives, their theologies, and their God.

In this paper, I present Anglo-Catholic Eucharistic theology as an epistemology that is not easily conceivable within—in fact actively challenges—the differential analytical framework that grounds a secular contemporary anthropology. Below, I outline a brief history of the rich and volatile relationship between the Anglo-Catholic tradition and the British academy. I proffer the Anglo-Catholic approach to knowledge as anti-rational, affective and relational. This epistemology takes shape through a sacramental theology of the Eucharist, in which knowledge of God is received as a gift that must be reciprocated by transformation in relationship. I then consider the implications of this epistemology for anthropology, a discipline whose historical links to Enlightenment-era rationalism have sustained a methodology of detachment and an emphasis on lateral cultural difference that limits the discipline's understanding of religious knowledge premised on vertical (divine-human) attachment. Here, I refer to Furani's (2019) dichotomous Cartesian and Augustinian epistemological frames; heuristics for "secular" and "theological" ways of knowing. Because knowledge is understood by Anglo-Catholics to be a sustained conjuncture rather than object, it is necessary to position my ethnographic subjects as interlocutors who continue to interject, correct, affect and create

(my) anthropological analysis in their own right long after the field is left behind. I therefore conclude this article with consideration of how an Anglo-Catholic epistemology based on attachment and reciprocity might serve anthropologists studying Christianity in deepening their understanding of their subjects' life worlds.

My interlocutors negotiate the secular academy primarily as a non- or anti-religious space. However, my own contention that anthropology is a secular discipline does not imply anti-religious sentiment per se, but rather refers to a Cartesian detachment of the researcher's self from the object of study and a focus on human difference; it is secular in the sense of a differentiating process that may result in the occlusion of religious knowledge. I draw on Hirschkind's (2011, 641) description of the secular as a "relational dynamic" based on oppositions (comparison afforded by intrinsic difference), and Casanova's (1994) simple definition of the secular as a process of differentiation between categories. Casanova (2006, 19) rejects ossification of the secular as identity or object (cf. Cannell 2010), instead employing the concept as "an analytical framework for a comparative research agenda." Links between anthropology and secularism have been widely documented; I argue specifically that anthropology is secular on an epistemological register (c.f. Asad 2009a; Furani 2018, 2019; Gellner 2001; Kapferer 2001; Lambek 2012; Mahmood 2008). By maintaining critical distance and difference from its religious subjects, a secular anthropology fails to comprehend a degree of that religious knowledge which has the power to transform its recipients.

### **The Secular Academy and its Anglo-Catholic Critics**

I will return to Julian's sacramental commentary in due course. First, however, it is necessary to situate her claim within the broader discourse of her tradition; clarification of the historical links between Anglo-Catholicism and the British academy will demonstrate the productivity of considering an Anglo-Catholic epistemological critique of anthropology. It is not an arbitrary claim of mine that Anglo-Catholics have something valuable to say about public scholarship. The tradition was gestated by priest-scholars of the University of Oxford, and the shape of contemporary British higher education is in large part a product of the cataclysmic Oxford Movement.

Anglo-Catholicism is a tradition in the sense of its members sustaining a “discourse” (Asad 2009b) or “argument” (MacIntyre 2011, 257) about themselves and their world over time. The chief contention of Anglo-Catholicism is that the Church of England is rightly part of the universal Catholic Church; therefore its members have equal access to divine grace conveyed through the sacraments, and to divine revelation held by the Church as truth authority (cf. Bandak and Boylston 2014) and mediating presence between God and humans (cf. Engelke 2007). The argument is one against the exclusivity of the Roman Catholic Church, but more importantly is an attempted remediation of perceived secularization within Anglicanism (cf. Coleman 2020). The Anglo-Catholic accusation is that the CoE is secular(izing), which sources to conflicting theologies of the sacraments. According to Catholic sacramental theology, to which Anglo-Catholics adhere, the sacraments are material instantiations of divine spiritual presence; Christ is present in the bread and wine.<sup>6</sup> The Anglican Church doctrinally affirms real divine presence, but emphasizes the spiritual transformation of communicants by their actions rather than the materials—that is, it is not Christ’s actual body or blood that is consumed. Per Keane (2006; cf. Mahmood 2009, 66; McDannell 2011), Protestantism has historically enforced a purifying differentiation between sign and signified, substance and meaning. Anglo-Catholics reject this purificatory theology because the detachment of immanent and transcendent frames equates to a secular process of differentiation, as introduced above. It is the physical consumption of the Eucharistic elements—material attachment—that provides divine revelation to Anglo-Catholic recipients. Sacramentality is the antithesis of the secular.

This sacramentally-tinged discourse took force in 19<sup>th</sup> century Oxford, when a contingent of theologians and Biblical scholars—all ordained Anglican clergy—fought against the decline of tradition in their Church,

and the decline of properly committed theological scholarship in their academy. Their ecclesiastical concern was prompted by certain Parliamentary measures to rearrange or eliminate the Church’s bishoprics in response to a general shift in the country’s ecclesiastical forms, specifically the emergence of evangelical Anglican and non-Anglican Protestant movements that pitted the freedom and duty of individuals against the state church’s rigid hierarchical structure (cf. Brown 2009). Traditionalists feared that changes to the authoritative role of bishops would result in the entropy of the hierarchical structure of the Church and, in turn, its sacramental authority.<sup>7</sup> I gloss this point, but it is important to hold in mind because the sacrament of the Eucharist is a particularly potent source of divine knowledge for Anglo-Catholics—loss of sacramentality to symbology, or spirituality without material presence, is loss of *Logos*, loss of incarnate knowledge.

Fitting to their concerns about access to divine knowledge, the first Anglo-Catholics (founders of the Oxford Movement) were fellows of the University of Oxford, who perceived shades of post-Enlightenment rationalism in their academic milieu as well as in their Church. At the time, the university was formally affiliated with the CoE; students avowed the 39 Articles of Faith of the Anglican Church upon matriculation, and faculty fellowship was contingent on ordination as a clergyman of the state church. The university was a de facto Anglican seminary and the nation’s chief forum for the development and dissemination of British theology (Rowell 1991, 2).

The Oxford Movement overlaps chronologically with major reforms of British university structure. The reforms were based on the increasingly popular German Humboldtian model, and sought to broaden universities’ population and deepen their intellectual rigor. Links between the state church and the University of Oxford were severed; Anglican affiliation was no longer required of students, and ordination ceased to be a condition for college fellowship.

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<sup>6</sup> Anglo-Catholics at Bouverie House are hesitant to explicate their Eucharistic theology, but it may be understood as consubstantiation: the consecrated elements are Christ’s real body and blood, and also remain bread and wine.

<sup>7</sup> The Catholic Church has exclusive right and duty to provide the sacraments. Priests are charged to instantiate the sacraments because they are ordained into the divine lineage of Apostolic Succession—priests are ordained by bishops, whose authority traces back to Christ conferring his ministry to his disciples. Thus, sacramentality and priesthood are co-extant for Anglo-Catholics; a conception of priesthood based on moral/teaching authority, rather than ritual/sacramental (characteristic of Protestantism, per Keane 2006, 62), would result in the loss of the sacramental value of the Eucharist, and thus the unique revelatory potential of the Church.

Theology, Latin, and Greek were made optional courses as strict disciplinary divisions were established (Goldman 2004, 582). The impetus for these reforms was an explicit reaction against Anglo-Catholicism (Brock 2000, 14, Brockliss 2016, 224). The Oxford Movement had gained fervor and considerable influence within the university; but so too did the movement gain enemies, who rejected traditionalism as archaic, legalistic, and close-minded (Liddon 1894). University reform was supported by evangelical Anglicans and other Protestant denominations who opposed the rigidity of institutionalized and ritual-centric religion (Hinchliff 2000, 98), and feared widespread conversion to Roman Catholicism (Brockliss 2016, 349). In short, the British university as we know it today—diverse in population, differentiated in subject-matter, divergent in scholastic teleology—is very much a product of a specific moment in time, a particular movement in British ecclesiology, academy, and society.

19<sup>th</sup> century Oxonian Anglo-Catholics fought passionately against the university reforms, declaring the new educational model to be dangerously secular, both because it restricted the role of the Church in academic pursuits, and because the model was premised on a process of differentiation between fields of study and between scholars and their objects of study. John Henry Newman, a leader of the Oxford Movement who later confirmed rampant fears that Oxford was a bridge over the Tiber, attacked parliamentary proceedings with his 1852 lectures on *The Idea of a University*. Newman argued that limiting the place of theology in higher academia would create false divisions between fields of study and irresponsibly grant intellectual and ideological power to individuals rather than valuing institutional cohesiveness (1859, 50f, 14). The university was for Newman a reflection of the Church; many members, but one body. Edward Pusey, peer of Newman and effective leader of the Oxford Movement after Newman's conversion, feared that the reforms would turn Oxford into a "godless" academy (Goldman 2004, 586). Newman and Pusey considered the purpose of universities to shape moral persons, not merely academics, and they predicted that society and scholarship would both suffer for the reforms (Liddon 1894). Namely, they feared a decline

in general theological understanding amongst the populace by virtue of ill-equipped clerics, the erosion of the Church of England's public sway, a shift toward individualism in scholastic pursuits, and most critically, a loss of teleology in both worship and academic practices. For Anglo-Catholics, then as now, academic scholarship has its rightful place *within* the work of the Church toward greater knowledge of God; insofar as all knowledge is ultimately theological, division of disciplines is for Anglo-Catholics tantamount to a fundamental misunderstanding of academic pursuit. Christ is given in the Eucharist as the *Logos*, the central ordering principle of all knowledge (cf. Bialecki and Hoenes del Pinal 2011). By ingesting divine wisdom, one's scholastic endeavors—even non-theological—become teleologically linked to pursuit of divine revelation.

Concern on the part of first-generation Anglo-Catholics regarding Britain's adoption of the German university model was closely linked to their concern regarding German theology, which during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by historical exegesis and the rationalization of miraculous Scriptural events. Paralleling Keane's Protestant purification, here the Bible's material form—like that of the sacraments—was divested from its spiritual implications.<sup>8</sup> This new critical hermeneutics took hold in English theology in accordance with a broader trend in the academy toward "scientific detachment" of researcher from object of study; one's ability to know depended on a critical distance from that which would be known (Candea, et al. 2015, 3-5). Pusey (1878) scorned critical rationalist theology as "scientism"—the heedless application of scientific principles to non-scientific questions in search of quantifiable (natural, perceivable) evidence—and mourned the resultant transformation of Scripture into a work of human "artistry" and an "object" of speculative inquiry (Asad 2003, 37) that, by virtue of scholastic detachment, could be profitably studied regardless of the reader's personal commitment to the text.

Anglo-Catholics fought for an anti-rationalist theology, arguing that the revelation recorded in Scripture and provided by the Church through sacraments is ultimately mysterious, and that knowledge of the divine is accessible not by so much

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<sup>8</sup> Shaffer (1975, 10, 12) describes a certain "modernity" of thought within the German school, in which the Biblical text was "liberated" from its prior divine source (and from the Church's authority on revelation, cf. Meier 1977, 14), now subject to scientific inquiry.



diligent logic-work, but by cultivation of a submissive relationship to God through devotion to prayer, worship, and engagement with the sacraments (cf. Larsen 2017). Bemoaning the state of Christianity in England, Pusey (1833) wrote that the Church's "own Ordinances afford the means of her restoration." The Church bears the truths that transform the world; those truths are preserved by adherence to traditional dogma and praxis. Thus the Anglo-Catholic must pray more, read more Scripture, fast and tithe more, go more often to mass. Remedy comes particularly through dedication to the sacraments. The Eucharist typifies the ideal approach to theological knowledge, mingling as it does natural material forms with mysterious divine spiritual presence that can be literally ingested to attach recipients to the source of knowledge, transforming their own material forms with the *Logos*.

### **The Eucharist as Knowledge, as Gift**

Given that sacramentality is a defining feature of Anglo-Catholicism, it is a frequent topic of conversation amongst members of Bouverie House, who often describe their uniqueness within the Church of England according to their Eucharistic theology. Peter was an ordinand, serving at Bouverie House while training for the priesthood. He had been raised between a non-denominational and an Evangelical Anglican church, and had over his teenage and young adult years gradually discerned a vocation to the priesthood within the Catholic tradition. While finding many merits in his Evangelical roots, he was quick to point out a fundamental lacking in those churches' worship practices and theology, particularly evident during communion. He described that at his home church, the ritual was symbolic; the actions at the altar were a memorialization of something that had been done two thousand years ago, and the purpose was to remind participants that their community was the spiritual reflection of Jesus' actions with the bread and wine. "It was showing physically your fellowship with the Body of Christ, with those around you," the ordinand explained. "There was this notion that because we all have the Holy Spirit, we *are* the Body of Christ, we as people are the most important things in the room. And that was true there," he mused. "But now [at Bouverie House], it's more, because we're consuming Christ himself." Following his Anglo-Catholic forebearers, Peter distinguished mainstream Anglican (and broader Protestant) communion as symbolic but not sacramental in the Catholic semiotic

sense because its practitioners do not recognize Christ's material presence. He described that the Eucharist unites the Church with God and transforms its members because of the "fulness with Christ being present in the host."

Peter's description ought not be taken as a besmirching of non-Catholic traditions, though considering Anglo-Catholicism's ongoing contentions with the Church of England, his may be a corrective stance. Certainly, Anglo-Catholics honor the communal aspect of the Eucharist emphasized by the wider Protestant tradition. The repetition of physical actions unites participants, and links them to previous practitioners of those actions, tracing back to Christ. Peter likewise affirms the importance of the Holy Spirit in the collective membership. What makes the sacrament "more" valuable than symbolic or spiritual representation is that it physically attaches Christ to the recipient through the material elements of the ritual. Christ is literally ingested by the participant, and by that reception and consumption the human actor is imbued with *Logos*, divine wisdom.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is clearly powerful in Peter's conception, but the ordinand's words themselves are vague. The Eucharist is "more," he said—more what? And the "fulness" he described—what is that filling content? It is worth dwelling on this vagueness, because the lack of descriptive quality reveals something of the Anglo-Catholic epistemological process. The imprecision of Peter's language is a statement about the impossibility of describing the Eucharist in any straightforward way; what is happening is beyond the bounds of rational knowledge. The semiotic potency of the Eucharist transforms the Anglo-Catholic understanding of theological knowledge so that one knows God only insofar as one attaches to Him—and, in the case of the Eucharist, only insofar as one receives rather than takes, is acted upon rather than acting oneself.

Peter was normally a vivacious and dramatic personality. He bore a stigmata and laughingly described himself as a "rosary rattler;" he was fond of relaying strange saintly miracles and tales of gruesome martyrdoms; once when ill, he slept with a crucifix on his chest so that if he died at night, he would be found looking particularly pious. When I asked the young man how he recognized God's presence, I was expecting a bit of thrill. "There are moments when you're slapped in the face by the Lord and He tells you He's there, these very blunt, punch-in-the-gut moments." Peter described his baptism as one such

moment, as well as a time when he visited a monastery on a pilgrimage. He recalled these moments to me with humor, drama, vivid description. But then he looked away, stared past me into space. “You know, sometimes He’s the earthquake, wind and fire, and sometimes He’s the still, small voice of calm.”<sup>9</sup> The sacrament of the Holy Altar is that still, small voice.”

Peter’s affective, non-rational explanation of the Eucharist is echoed by other members of the chaplaincy. One student told me that he often felt a shiver run down his spine during the Eucharistic Prayer. A priest described offering communion “propped up on the edge of a bed in a very busy hospital”; even in that chaotic, overstimulating and emotionally-charged environment, he found that while saying the prayers, “the place fall[s] away”, leaving him “awe-struck” at the sacrifice and “completely given over” to the moment. Another student echoed Peter in marking the unique experience of the Eucharist at Bouverie House. “I feel happy singing a worship song,” she told me, explaining her occasional visits to a nearby charismatic Evangelical church. “But the liturgy of the Eucharist is much more tangible. It’s sucking on the end of a pen, that sort of iron taste. It’s hitting the right note, a sudden shifting in quality, incredibly calming and incredibly glorious.” Rather than attempting to understand what, precisely, is going on in these “tangible” encounters with God, I want to consider Anglo-Catholic descriptions of the ineffable. Put another way, what matters here is how, not what, Anglo-Catholics think about revelation.

Each of these descriptions—a sense of calm, a shiver, a loss of orientation, the iron taste of a pen nib—connect divine revelation (recognition of God’s presence) to a change in physical state. Orsi, in his (2011, 93) description of “the holy,” rejects any claim that religious experience 1) can be explained in the purely rational terms of the post-Enlightenment science described above, or 2) is condensable into a Romantic emotional reaction against that detached rationalism. Instead, the holy is a third way-of-knowing. Orsi draws on Rudolph Otto’s seminal *The Idea of the Holy*, in which the “feelings” experienced in relation to the holy are not like normal human emotions; rather, the experience is “what Abraham felt in the hands of the living God . . . It [is] to feel oneself ‘dust and ashes’ or as ‘absolute profaneness’” (ibid., 94; cf.

Otto 1958, 9). Orsi’s description is a bit elusive, but as with members of Bouverie House, an understanding of holiness is gained from a shifting in quality, from one’s basic and inherent state of being, to a sense of “dust and ashes”—which is not an emotion but a positionality in relation to the thing being known (God). Stepping back from the descriptions themselves—how does one connect a shiver to God?—there is a shared theme equating revelation with a change or transformation of the individual pursuing knowledge relative to (and by the agency of) the object of knowledge. Peter’s calm comes from an external source, not from himself. The knower cannot maintain critical distance from the object to be known because it is the forceful imposition of the object onto the knower by which knowledge so becomes.

Christ’s body and blood are present to Anglo-Catholics alongside the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a sacrifice, as God gives himself on the altar (Marion 2017, 11). The gift of the sacrament is specifically that of *Logos*, wisdom incarnate. Christ *is* knowledge, and so the gift of his presence is the gift of divine knowledge. Catholic theologian Jean-Luc Marion (2016, 6) presents the concept of “givenness,” writing that “a phenomenon only shows itself to the extent that it gives itself.” That is, God is revealed—knowledge made accessible—only by God actually offering himself to Christians through the bread and wine. Marion parallels Mauss in his analysis of sacramental gift exchange; a gift is only such if it is received as well as given (ibid., 117). The Eucharist is a gift because God gives *and* because people receive.

The gift, of course, requires reciprocation. Mauss’s (2002) tri-part definition of the gift—to give, receive, reciprocate—was based on the Māori concept of *hau*, the “spirit of things.” Mauss described that “what imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive . . . it is the *hau* that wishes to return to its birthplace” which is the soul of the original owner (ibid., 15). As a gift, the Eucharist must be recognized not merely as an object conveying expansive meaning, but as a conjuncture—a relationship. And because the Eucharist is a gift of knowledge, the Anglo-Catholic must ask, *to whom does this knowledge belong?*<sup>2</sup> Or rather, who gave the gift; to whom must a gift be

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<sup>9</sup> Peter borrows language from 1 Kings 19, in which God passes by Elijah as a strong wind, an earthquake and a fire (v. 11-12), and then finally as “a still small voice” (v. 12, AKJV).

returned? The answer, of course, is God; those who receive revelation must return that gift in the form of personal transformation and commitment to the relational field. The sacrament of the Eucharist expands the bounds of theology for Anglo-Catholics, utterly reshapes what it means to know God and to live accordingly. In turn, the Eucharistic theology of Bouverie House impinges itself on the anthropologist who seeks to know what it means for Anglo-Catholics to know God, so that an ethnographic understanding of Anglo-Catholic religious knowledge may be contingent on the anthropologist engaging in an epistemological gift exchange like that of the Eucharist.

### **Epistemological Detachment and Attachment**

The Eucharistic theology of Anglo-Catholicism does not exist in a vacuum, but functions (at least in part) as a riposte to the secular epistemology that impresses itself upon the congregation of Bouverie House from their Church institution and the surrounding city and university. Anglo-Catholics, uniquely positioned in the history of British academia, have long sought to redeem secular scholarship for their recollective theological project. As Julian declared, reception of divine knowledge through the Eucharist transforms how the recipient negotiates even non-theological knowledge. With this in mind, it is necessary to consider if and how the chaplaincy's model of knowledge-as-gift speaks beyond their praxis. An Anglo-Catholic epistemology based on a sacramental framework of relational and transformative gift exchange contrasts sharply with that of the secular academy, which is grounded in the detached and differentiating premises of the Enlightenment (Kapferer 2007). For Anglo-Catholics, such knowledge is partial—following Orsi, it is only one of (at least) three ways of knowing. But beyond their critique of secular scholarship's productive limits, Anglo-Catholics so transformed by their Eucharistic theology recognize that extracting knowledge from relationship is actually dangerous because it dissolves the obligatory commitment of the knower to the object (or subject) of knowledge.

Anglo-Catholics equate knowledge acquisition with attachment to, and transformation by the known. One comes to know God in the Eucharist insofar as Christ (materially, spiritually) enters one's body. Theological knowledge is not merely information to be collected and recorded, however creative the means. Rather, this knowledge is a gift; not an object but a conjuncture of

exchange in which revelation is produced by and reproduces transformative relationship. This sacramental approach to divine revelation is profitably considered within what Furani (2019) describes as an Augustinian epistemology, which he contrasts with a Cartesian approach to knowledge characteristic of anthropology. Furani pitches Descartes' "I think therefore I am" against (in his own paraphrase) Augustine's "I am therefore you are in me" (ibid., 14). The Augustinian knowledge framework situates the self as a nexus of relationships, a participatory encounter between human and God by which knowledge of God may be conveyed (Knotts 2020, 99). Augustine's theology is Neo-Platonist (Cary 2000; C. Harrison 1992), wherein knowledge is the recollection of transcendent and transtemporal truth that is external to human experience (Bloch 1998, 70). Therefore Augustine, as Furani (2019, 119) describes, "immerses in truth in order to know truth, including truths about himself." An Augustinian epistemology, exemplified by the Eucharistic theology of Bouverie House, sources knowledge as a process of humans attaching themselves, materially and spiritually, to God.

Whereas Augustine conceived of knowledge as fundamentally about attachment, a Cartesian epistemology is dependent on detachment—detaching things from each other and detaching the self from the observed world. Descartes essentially sought to demystify revelation by re-locating the nexus of knowledge away from God as an externality, instead situating it within the individual's mind. Descartes' theology was derivative of Thomas Aquinas (P. Harrison 2016; Reventlow 2016), who is credited with introducing Aristotelian philosophy to medieval Christianity (Chesterton 2014, 56-7; MacIntyre 2011, 208ff); Descartes might then be said to be an Aristotelian of sorts. Aristotle understood the human mind to be progressively "created" as new knowledge is acquired and used (Bloch 1998, 70). Similarly, in a Cartesian framework, an intrinsic capacity for knowledge production enables humans to grow in understanding of their world (Foucault 2002, 66). Foucault (ibid., 58ff) traces an epistemological shift in the 16<sup>th</sup> century heralded by Descartes who established knowledge as a process of deductive comparison by differences between intrinsic qualities, rather than seeing things (including the human person and God) as holding a set place in an overall relation to the cosmos which can be discerned or discovered by human knowing. A Cartesian epistemology is

contingent upon detachment of the self (knower) from the world (that to be known) in order to perform categorical differentiation of the perceivable world (ibid., 356, 61). Furani employs this dichotomy to make a claim about anthropology's chosen epistemology, arguing that the discipline's Cartesian grounding obstructs its ability to understand religious ways-of-knowing that rely on the attachment of self to the material world and to God.

The Cartesian underpinnings of anthropology can be traced to the discipline's gestation. It was E. B. Tylor (2010, 2; cf. Lambek 2012; Meneses 2019) who commended early anthropologists to abandon theology, describing it as an "obstacle" to "real knowledge" within the study of human nature. Tylor sought to do away with "extra-natural interference" and begin this new scientific study of culture on the "more practicable ground" of cause and effect (2010, 3, 17). Tylor published this proposition in *Primitive Culture* in 1871. At the time, the aftershock of the Oxford Movement lingered on as a powerful intellectual and social force across Britain, and Anglo-Catholicism remained a considerable presence in Oxford upon Tylor's first appointment to the University in 1883. Oxford's traditionalists fought to maintain the integrity of an education system grounded in theology, while they watched theology as they knew it crumble under the weight of new historical critical methods. Envisioning a university beyond its traditional role as a handmaid of the Church, Tylor's call for a naturalist anthropology (laid out in the first chapter of his magnum opus, 2010, 1-22) was an effort to secure a position for the discipline within the modern differentiated academy, and to wrest scientific pursuit from the grip of irrational religion. Larsen (2014, 27-34), in fact, has recorded that Tylor specifically derided Anglo-Catholic liturgical practice, which he first witnessed in Oxford, as a "survival of sun worship" devoid of "purpose." His critique was grounded on the premise that Catholic teachings were antithetical to modern science; its rituals and sacraments could be debunked as contrary to the laws of nature. It is not so great a stretch, then, to contemplate that Tylor's repulsion toward a theological perspective within anthropology was in some part derived from the seismic shifts that the Oxford Movement and its discontents had brought to British academia.

Tylor proposed that anthropology undertake "religious criticism"—interpretation of religion as a "theory of mind" (Saler 2009, 55, 52). Notably, and here mirroring the contemporaneous rise in historical

critical methods in theology, the Tylorian anthropologist's comprehension of a given religion depended on the discernment of its naturalist and historical-geographic sources, and was diametrically opposed to personal religious commitment (cf. Larsen 2014, 20-23). Religion was an object of study for the new human science. Though Tylor's positivism did not produce anthropology as a natural science, the means to that end—a Cartesian approach to knowledge based on detachment and differentiation—remains at the core of the discipline's analytical methods, particularly evident in studies of religion. The result is what Meneses (2017) refers to as anthropology's "unstated teleology" and "implicit ontology": namely, secularism.

This claim requires some unpacking. Anthropology's ethnographic process exemplifies a rejection of the core Enlightenment tenant separating researcher from object of knowledge; the ethnographer must participate as well as observe. Adopting Christian language, Furani (2019, 130ff) describes participant observation as a eucharist, with the researcher becoming Tylor's (2007) "porous" subject, permeated by the forces of alterity in the field. However, in analysis if not ethnographic research, processes of differentiation and detachment undergird anthropology as an academic discipline. This implies neither apathy nor positivist claims to objectivity on the part of the individual anthropologist; analytical detachment is simply the maintenance of a degree of distance and difference between researcher and ethnographic subject in order to convey what Robbins (2013, 334) describes as "the power of otherness." To go beyond mere description in ethnographic record (cf. Fabian 1995; Engelke 2002), the anthropologist's task is to laterally compare entities that, while perhaps not stable or bounded units, retain certain qualities that distinguish them from each other and their researchers (Candea 2016, 13). Premised as it is on comparison of lateral difference, the kind of knowledge produced by anthropology is fundamentally Cartesian.

Anthropology's lateral differentiation overlaps with the more explicitly secular grounding and aims of the modern research university by the shared factor of methodological detachment. For example, in a recent consideration of ethnographic accounts of religious subjects, Carrithers (2015, 170) asserts that valid anthropological scholarship requires authorial detachment, and proposes four markers that create distance between researcher and subject: use of third person plural, qualificatory explanation, right and duty to make an argument regardless of its appeal to one's

subjects, and a “disinterested” affect. Carrithers claims that detachment is a necessary requisite for one writing as a “scholar” (ibid., 169), rather than, say, as an advocate or ally who strives for “community uplift” (Jacobs-Huey 2002, 798). The argument appears positivist—a disavowal of personal commitment or bias in favor of objective rationalism—but my focus is not on rationalism per se, but the associated value of producing distance between researcher and subject.

Of course, numerous reflexive critiques have been made of Cartesian detachment in anthropological analysis in an effort to reframe ethnographic knowledge as coproduction between researcher and interlocutors.<sup>10</sup> It is significant that Carrithers’ argument is made specifically in consideration of the anthropology of religion; the sustained appeal of detachment in studies of religion reveals anthropology to be fundamentally secular. “Secular” is not a reified state-of-being, but a process of “structural differentiation” (Casanova 2006, 19) between segments of society such as Church and university, and between categorical binaries such as sacred and profane, belief and knowledge, immanence and transcendence (Hirschkind 2011, 642). Exemplifying this definition, Gellner (2001, 339-340) defends a “minimal secularism” in anthropological analysis as means to translate “other systems of thought, including religious systems, for outsiders’ consumption.” Here, religious knowledge is fundamentally “other” to anthropology, and exists as an object that the researcher can manipulate (“translate,” “consume”) by virtue of Cartesian detachment. It is my contention that the appeal of Carrithers’ and Gellner’s methodology sources to an epistemological chasm between anthropology and theology, whereby secular detachment is desirable because it preserves (even “buffers,” à la Taylor 2007) anthropology from a kind of religious knowledge that is fundamentally transformative. The problem with such a secular and detached methodology is that, at least in the Anglo-Catholic context, treating theology as an object for

translation or consumption actually effectuates a mistranslation of what theology is; not object but conjuncture, a relationship with God. Emphasizing the relational aspect of theology may result in more apologetics than Gellner would have in his “universal and humanist” science (ibid., 340), but its neglect results in a more serious scholastic error: fundamentally misunderstanding the system of thought that the anthropologist seeks to analyze and convey.

In challenging anthropology’s secular underpinnings, I do not imply that any given system of meaning-making ought to be taken at face-value rather than being more deeply probed. Rather, my proposal is to engage with theological precepts normatively (per Moll 2018), as one would with philosophy, by adopting the epistemology (not the theological claims specifically) of one’s informants. This would enable the anthropologist to treat Christian subjects more seriously as intellectuals (cf. Jenkins 2012, 468; Robbins 2013) and expand the possible questions that can be asked about Christian lives (Robbins 2020, 152). Specifically, engagement with an Anglo-Catholic epistemology, in which knowledge is conjuncture rather than object, affords consideration not only of what certain theologies are or how they are practiced on the ground (e.g. Haynes 2018), but how and why theology transforms its adherents (cf. McKearney 2019). Furani (2019, 183, 85ff) neatly parallels the prophetic critiques of Newman and Pusey, arguing that analytical detachment produces false divisions between fields of knowledge and over-emphasizes horizontal cultural multiplicity in neglect of greater, vertical (divine-human) levels of difference (cf. Dalferth 2018, Robbins 2020). Adoption of an Anglo-Catholic epistemology would address these quandaries. If knowledge is conjuncture rather than object, there need be no boundaries between categories of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> And seeing knowledge of the other as a process of gift exchange positions the giver (the ethnographic subject) in a position of power that unsettles the relativism of lateral difference. Theology

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<sup>10</sup> Candea, et al. (2015, 9-11) helpfully track this attempt at ethnographic attachment through a range of 20<sup>th</sup> century turns in the discipline, from Writing Culture debates to feminist critiques and calls for political engagement. I would add that the Ontological Turn’s emphasis on ethnographic particulars and rejection of sweeping metaphysical claims (e.g. Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, 287) is another recent attempt.

<sup>11</sup> Anthropology has always been an inside/outside discipline, situated in the limen of the humanities and sciences (despite Tylor’s efforts); and it has long leveraged this marginality to critique not just its own knowledge practices, but those of neighboring disciplines as well (Kapferer 2007). One possible merit to going native epistemologically is a new angle by which anthropology can critique the broader academy’s reliance on positivism.

becomes a connective network; between certain humans and God, between those humans and others, between those humans and God and the anthropologist. But the question remains: is epistemological transformation possible—or even desirable—for an anthropology that seeks to know, but remain detached from, the religious other (cf. Asad 1993, 191-193)?

### **Going Native with the Repugnant Other**

It is my contention that a detached and secular analytical method is appealing to anthropologists of religion (or at least of Christianity) because religious attachment threatens to destabilize the epistemological foundations of the discipline. This is particularly clear in consideration of anthropology's enduring struggle with the religious commitments of its authors. Conservative Christianity is anthropology's infamous "repugnant other" (Harding 1991); and despite—or perhaps because of—the now well-documented genealogical relationship between Christianity and anthropology (Cannell 2005; Larsen and King 2018), the idea of an explicitly Christian anthropology remains repugnant (e.g. Bialecki's [2018] riposte to Meneses, et. al. [2014]; see also Merz and Merz 2017) in a way that, for example, a committed feminist or Marxist anthropology does not (Howell 2007). Perhaps unlike other situated standpoints to which anthropologists might adhere, religious commitment poses a threat to anthropology beyond research focus or agenda. Anglo-Catholicism, at least, actually challenges the basis of what its anthropologists take as knowledge.

Anthropology certainly supports the idea that the anthropologist is a participant in her informants' lives, rather than her informants being mere players in an academic thought-piece. But the idea of the anthropologist of religion converting to—being so transformed by—the studied religion is reprehensible. Harding (1987, 171) describes religious conversion as "going native;" an anthropological "fetish" that is, per Ewing (1994, 571), strictly "taboo." Here, "native" is a structural position à la Abu-Lughod (1991); the "other" to the anthropologist's "self." Used as such, the factor of difference is an analytical one between subject and researcher, not identity-based as between West/rest or insider/outsider (cf. Jacobs-Huey 2002). Following Harding and Ewing, the expression to "go native" is used in ethnographic accounts of religion to refer to conversion on the part of the anthropologist, more basically a personal transformation resulting from the

acquired religious knowledge. Theological transformation on the part of the anthropologist is taboo not because of personal identity, but because the conversion is ultimately epistemological, and thus challenges the anthropological project.

Situating this theoretical concern in ethnography, the Eucharistic theology of Anglo-Catholics becomes problematic for anthropology when practitioners impose their relational, transformative epistemology on the researcher. Julian's statement to me—that I know the Eucharist because I receive it daily, that I know something about Anglo-Catholics because I have been baptized—is important not just because it elicits something about the Anglo-Catholic worldview, but because it makes an assertion about what anthropology does and should do, what anthropology knows and can know. Reflecting an experience similar to my own, Susan Harding (1987, 171) describes that her Christian fundamentalist interlocutors were unimpressed by her claims to be "gathering information" in order to write a book. Instead, they located her within their world as "a lost soul on the brink of salvation." Harding "on the brink" and my writing being overtaken by the Spirit are examples of what Wagner (1981, 31) calls "reverse anthropology." Wagner wrote specifically about Melanesian cargo cults, describing that practitioners literalize etic (here, modern and Western) metaphors and produce a "pragmatic" (practical, useful) anthropology that "invents in anticipation of the future" (ibid., 32-33). Particular millennialist theology of cargo cults aside, this statement meshes well with the "reverse anthropology" employed by Julian, who adapts my project for pragmatic or practical use as a means to transmit Eucharistic theology. There is considerable discomfort in acquiescing to Julian's proposition and an anthropology with an explicit religious standpoint; the premise tugs at the seams of what anthropology understands itself to be. Within the discipline's "doctrine of relativism" (Ewing 1994, 578) and inherently "pluralist frame" (Candea 2016, 19) derived from its lateral comparative outlook, it is seriously problematic to propose an Anglo-Catholic anthropology that equates knowing the other with attachment to and transformation by that other.

Harding (2000, 60) describes the Holy Spirit's power of "speech mimesis" to transform fundamentalist Christians and act through them to transform others. Haddon (2013), in turn, suggests this theological model of conversion for anthropology, asking what it might look like for anthropology to actually re-shape the lives of its writers and readers.

Haddon considers the dilemma of transformation in his ethnographic account of Hare Krishna proselytizing, musing that his written account may in itself be a kind of proselytizing. In response to Haddon, Robbins (2013, 334) suggests that if the work of the anthropologist is to convey otherness, surely there is merit in the anthropologist becoming a “bona fide Hare Krishna missionary.” Recognizing the awkwardness of his suggestion, Robbins asks if the discomfort is because “there is more to deploying otherness critically than just offering one version of it wholesale, in its own terms” (ibid., 334). The fear of going native is that an anthropology which takes up “wholesale” each of its myriad religious others would cease to bear an epistemological standpoint of its own—would cease to be a detached self capable of differential comparison.

However, I argue that it is precisely the ossification of its epistemology that prevents anthropology from understanding its religious others as anything other than “others.” If religious knowledge—which, following Furani, is broadly about attachment and relationality—is only ever “other” to the academy which maintains critical detachment, then it is denied the opportunity to transform its anthropological students—in which case, it ceases to be the same theology it is for its adherents. Recall from the Anglo-Catholic Eucharist: something is known insofar as it is given; a gift must be received as well as given; and reception equates to transformation of the recipient by the giver. Members of Bouverie House know God because He gives Himself in the Eucharist, because they commit to receiving Him there, and because they are changed by the knowledge that they consume. If religious subjects can only obtain theological knowledge through an Augustinian epistemology of attachment, certainly the same applies to anthropologists of those religious subjects. Regarding Bouverie House, epistemological conversion may actually be an obligation of the anthropologist studying Anglo-Catholics. Here, the risk is not in going native, with the suspected dissolution of the discipline by virtue of it being subsumed into its religious others. If knowing is to become like what is known, then the risk is precisely in *not* going native. Refusing to be transformed by religious or ethnographic revelation is at best a rejection and loss of knowledge given, at worst the admission that there never was this knowledge to begin with. Instead, the anthropologist must consider her situatedness within—and inability to extract her analysis from—the epistemology of the ethnographic field.

In proposing “going native” on an epistemological register, I invoke certain parallels with “native” or “insider” anthropology (cf. Howell 2007). Following Abu-Lughod’s (1991, 468) assertion (and critique thereof) that the anthropologist is “a being who must stand apart from the other,” native anthropologists have problematized the necessity of difference between researcher and subject: in order to produce new anthropological knowledge (Tsuda 2015), preserve integrity of the data independent of its writer (Kanuha 2000; Jacobs-Huey 2002), or simply as an inevitability of studying what one’s “others” take for granted (Narayan 1993, 681). I find Kondo (1986) particularly useful in approaching the epistemological root of anthropological distance and difference. Kondo claims that the anthropological writing process has long been one of “distancing” the self (researcher) from the field in order to “reencounter the other ‘safely’”—in analysis, the researcher negotiates data without being affected by it (ibid., 82). Challenging this detachment, Kondo calls for acknowledgement of the “embeddedness” of anthropological knowledge in finite human relationships (ibid., 86). Here, the identity of researcher or scholar is itself a crucial nexus into which knowledge is embedded (Narayan 1993). One method to utilize this embeddedness, as Abu-Lughod (1991, 472) suggests, is by a focus on “connections” between researchers and subjects, between field and academy. By tracing the historical linkages between Anglo-Catholicism and anthropology, and situating contemporary Anglo-Catholic Eucharistic theology against the practices of secular academia, I have attempted to adopt this connective method for anthropological accounts of religion. Given the unique historical connection between anthropology’s epistemological development and that of Anglo-Catholicism, it seems appropriate to grant contemporary Anglo-Catholics their due riposte to Tylorian secularism. That is to say, if anthropology’s secular grounding is to be reconsidered, perhaps the modern academy’s original critics have a solution to offer.

### **Conclusion: The Obligation of Transformative Knowledge**

I return now to my conversation with Julian. Following Carrithers’ (2015) aforementioned program for appropriately detached anthropological analysis, I situate Julian in her social context, elaborate any opaque elements of her statements for my readers, and

form an argument about how Julian's words result from or contribute to an Anglo-Catholic lifeworld. Julian was in her mid-twenties; she and her husband had been attending Bouverie House for a little over a year. Julian was a doctoral candidate in religious studies, and found comfort and support at Bouverie House as she wrestled with questions of faith and secular academics. Her exclamation was, in part, an expression of her own concerns; and the passion with which she spoke—actually beating her chest a few times when referring to the Holy Spirit—demonstrates the chaplaincy's effect on her outlook. The priests of Bouverie House made statements like Julian's regularly, confirming that the Holy Spirit speaks through written language even when the human author does not so realize. Julian expressed a typical Anglo-Catholic confidence in the power of divine presence to inhabit material forms. This is true not just of Scripture or doctoral dissertations—it is the import of the Eucharist. In her brief declaration, Julian presented the Eucharist as a means to convey transformative divine presence and as the ultimate source of knowledge.

Crucial to my argument (and, incidentally, to Carrithers'), I can produce the above analysis and write something valuable about what it means to be Anglo-Catholic without it mattering that I was there, that Julian was speaking to *me*. Put another way, with the right background information and suitably thick description on my part, any thoughtful reader could draw similarly valid conclusions from this vignette. However, following Robbins' (2020) suggestion that engagement with theology enables the anthropologist to ask new and different questions, the claim I have been trying to make by this article is that there is more to say about Julian's and my conversation. That "more," like Peter's description of the Eucharist, evades secular epistemology, but is profitably found in consideration of knowledge as gift exchange. Some of the claims I have made about my conversation with Julian stand alone as ethnographic data available to be parsed by any visitor to the text. But there is also knowledge in the encounter that cannot exist independent of its actors—both of them. It matters that Julian said these things, because Julian is Anglo-Catholic and therefore something of an authority on the subject. It also matters that Julian said these things *to me*—not to a random passer-by, not into a void of academic thought-pieces and online journal databases. My role is part of the data production, and in an Augustinian epistemology, the continued validity of the

data depends on my active participation with it and with Julian.

As Augustine is both Furani's anti-secular muse and the father of Anglo-Catholicism's anti-rational epistemology, it is worth briefly mentioning his work here. Setting aside his rich theological contributions, I point to the structure of his (2006) *Confessions*, what may be considered an early work of theological anthropology. The first nine chapters are a vivid description of Augustine's personal struggle with continence and commitment. The final four chapters are a deep exploration of time and memory. Though set in a single volume, the two halves are disparate in purpose. Augustine's autobiographical account is a testimony of the conversion experience. In contrast, the theological treatise of the second half is intended exclusively for readers who are baptized Christians. Augustine (2006, 190) asks, "how do they know whether I speak the truth, since no man knows the things of a man but the spirit of a man that is in him?" Just as the unbaptized cannot receive the Eucharistic sacrament, Augustine felt that they could not receive—that is, could not understand—the knowledge of God he hoped to reveal.

Riffing Augustine, Rudolph Otto (1958, 8) issues a warning: any reader of *The Idea of the Holy* that "cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings" or experience is "requested to read no further" because the ensuing discussion would be useless. I suspect that very few of Augustine's or Otto's contemporary readers have heeded the authors' instructions. Augustine's treatise on memory and Otto's consideration of supernatural presence are, by virtue of having been recorded in discernible written language, knowledge products available for consumption by a variety of readers—whether or not a given reader has been baptized or lived a numinous experience. But what if we were to take Augustine and Otto seriously? The potential of adopting an Augustinian epistemology for anthropology is that it forces the anthropologist to take seriously the claim that she cannot know the religious other without maintaining some degree of attachment to, or even transformation by, that other.

To demonstrate this point, I offer two considerations of my conversation with Julian whose ethnographic revelation is contingent on my willingness to enter into a gift-exchange relationship. First, I had not asked Julian about the Eucharist, in fact had not really asked her anything. That her exclamation was about Christ's spiritual presence and



the Eucharist, rather than actually addressing my complaint, demonstrates that the knowledge revealed in the Eucharist (the *Logos*) transcends any and all forms of worldly knowledge—including her own life that would soon be reduced to a few lines in someone else’s (my) doctoral thesis. Rudolph Otto (1958, 19) argues that the “holy” is recognized in part by its “overpoweringness”—the sheer awe it produces, the total ontological domination of the moment. Julian’s words themselves do not convey any sense of this overpoweringness; the magnitude is demonstrated by the fact that she responded to a question that was not asked, that she dismissed general academic knowledge production as inconsequential in comparison to Eucharistic revelation. Julian has gifted me ethnographic knowledge that is contingent on our mutual presence in an encounter.

Second, Julian’s words to me are a gift that demands reciprocity. Her statement is a *potlach*-like challenge. If I have gone to mass every day, if I have the Holy Spirit inside me, if I do actually know what the Eucharist is about—then I have been transformed by it and cannot escape the obligation to write about it. In telling me about the power of the Spirit in Baptism and Eucharist, Julian offers me knowledge about the importance of these concepts to Anglo-Catholics; but she offers this knowledge with the expectation that I will do something with it. In response, I hope to have transformed my ethnographic analysis according to the obligations of this religious knowledge premised on attachment.

Here, I reverse Carrithers’ four-step scholastic detachment. Whilst still primarily speaking of Anglo-Catholics in the third-person plural, I have emphasized connectivity (as per Abu-Lughod 1991) throughout my account; incorporating myself as an ethnographic actor, and as a member of the secular academy with whom Anglo-Catholics seek to engage and correct. I have avoided extensive qualificatory explanation (or Gellner’s “translation”) for non-Anglo-Catholic readers—which may, at times, make this account somewhat opaque, but allows greater focus on the transformative potential of certain theological premises and thus maintains the integrity of that theology for practitioners. Thus, the argument I have presented is less an analysis of Anglo-Catholic Eucharistic theology, as it is an analysis *with* that theology. Finally, the ideally detached ethnographer maintains a “disinterested” affect—not uncaring, but diligently avoiding affiliation or conflation with one’s informants. I hope to have maintained Carrithers’ scholastic integrity, and avoided

mere apologetics (cf. Howell 2007, 372; Webster 2013, xx), by arguing on an epistemological register rather than adopting any specific dogmatic tenants. However, my interest should be apparent. This paper is a response to my interlocutor’s gift; in writing about the Anglo-Catholic Eucharist, I acknowledge an attachment to, and transformation by, the source of my ethnographic knowledge.

As the *hau* seeks to return to its source, I offer the Eucharist to the academy as epistemological re-orientation, honoring the historical connections between Anglo-Catholicism and anthropology’s secular grounding, and with hope for a new consideration of theological knowledge within ethnographic analysis. It is, I suspect, not for me to judge if I have fulfilled the obligations of gift exchange. Perhaps it is only the reader who can evaluate the success of my attempt to analyze the Anglo-Catholic Eucharist. Will not those who have ears, hear? Maybe some reader will recognize that voice of calm, will have felt the spinal shiver or metallic taste, will have momentarily forgotten the hospitable bed or been overcome by a sense of “dust and ashes.” Perhaps this reader will recognize the “third way” of knowing that Anglo-Catholics attribute to Eucharistic revelation and will understand the tremendous overpoweringness that this revelation imposes upon its recipients. Is that reader now related, transformed, obligated?

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# A Culture of Conflict: Race Reconciliation and the White Evangelical/Southern Church

Anna Burroughs

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The American church, part of the body of Christ, particularly the White Evangelical and White Southern denominations, have had a questionable relationship with race and racism and share the same system and systematic issues with race as American society has generally. This struggle has most recently manifested itself in the conflict between the White church and the Black Lives Matter movement. I investigate this conflict through study of its history, ethnographic research in a multi-cultural church in Texas, and investigations into Critical Race Theory and Liberation Theology. Somehow huge segments of the Christian population have become disenchanted with the principles that Jesus gave us, that love was the greatest commandment, and that loving our neighbor as ourselves is a mandate. They have forgotten that God is a God of everyone, including the disinherited. This article speaks to the history of race and the church and how the conflict between the church and racism does not align with the principles of God.

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The world, particularly the United States, has a history of racial tensions and divide. History, as well as current events, have proven such and the conflict is well documented. But does the same hold true in the American Christian church? The church and body of Christ, particularly the White Evangelical and White Southern denominations of Christianity in America, have also had a questionable relationship with race and racism and share the same systemic and systematic issues as the rest of the world. However, the Holy Bible clearly states that loving your neighbor as yourself should be a priority in the life of Christians, and when we join the body of Christ, we become one under one Father. John 17:20-21 states “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one, as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me” (John 17:20-21 NIV). Yet here we stand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the midst of a social revolution, and the White Evangelical/Southern church has taken a hands-off approach, even a stance of opposition to the racial and social injustice movement, particularly when it comes to Black Lives Matter (BLM). Instead of embracing the concept that the lives of our Black brothers and

sisters do indeed matter not only to us, but most importantly to God, the Evangelical/Southern church has used the nuances of the organization as an excuse to remove itself, and even oppose the fight for social justice. However, the Church as an entire body, exclusive of race, denomination, or theological perspective, should be leading the charge in an effort to embrace the Black Lives Matter movement.

Actually, scholars have invested years of research and written a plethora of material on the connection between the church and racism. Jemar Tisby in *The Color of Compromise* (2019) describes the historical tensions between White Evangelical Christianity and racism, a history that dates back hundreds of years in the United States. For many who are unaware or in denial of the historical context, there is no issue with race in the church. In fact, I once mentioned the tense relationship between race and the church in a paper for a class, and received back the comment from a professor that these issues of race may appear at times in the world, but of course we know they do not happen in the church. Tisby explains how the White church historically embraced theories of superiority and inferiority among the races, and how those theories both unconsciously and consciously manifest themselves in the church today. He asserts that the

church created and maintains racist ideas, policies, and practices and urges us to consider whether the participants continue to uphold these practices out of sheer ignorance or if the practices are ignored because of the position of power they afford White Evangelical/Southern Christians and churches. Tisby guides us through a religious journey that starts with colonial America and includes slavery, the Civil War, the Jim Crow Era, and the Civil Rights Era in an effort to educate us on just how we arrived at the Black Lives Matter Movement. In the United States, we are taught the bare minimum about American slavery. In essence, we learn that Blacks were enslaved and then set free by Abraham Lincoln in the Emancipation Proclamation. Based on those minimal facts, there is a segment of the population that believes that everyone should be satisfied now, and that Blacks are exhibiting the epitome of ungratefulness by supporting or participating in the Black Lives Matter movement. However, there is a profusion of injustices between emancipation and today that have purposely been put into place to keep Blacks under subjugation, many of which have been upheld by, ignored by, and even created by the church. Most people of any race simply do not know or understand this history nor the journey that has led towards the Black Lives Matter movement.

Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith launched a grassroots campaign via a survey that included 2,000 people as well as another 200 in-person interviews with White Evangelical Americans (2001). The results of the endeavor revealed that although the church as an entity was attempting to diversify congregations and address racial discrimination on some level, individual Evangelical Christians preferred to ignore, deny, or preserve the racial chasm in America. While some individuals may not have actively participated in racist acts, many denied the existence of systemic and systematic racism against Blacks. These individuals felt that God has granted all people free will, the ability to work, and the ability to secure a personal and individual relationship with Christ, therefore most problems that people face can be solved by repentance, eliminating sin in one's life, and simply working harder. In the eyes of these Evangelical participants, the lack of success was credited solely to the individual. This attitude falls in line with the theory of Max Weber on the protestant work ethic and capitalism (1976), as well as the prosperity gospel that rose to popularity in the Evangelical church in the last decades. This situation calls for an imperative response to race reconciliation, social justice, and the

church. If a large population of the White Christian community believes there is no problem to overcome, that could potentially become a brick wall to social justice efforts. If the church does not have a common sense of reality on this issue, even with a shared Father and scripture, how can we expect others to understand the systematic injustices put in place to hold an entire race at bay?

In *Practicing What They Preach? Lynching and Religion in the American South, 1890–1929*, Amy Kate Baily and Karen Snedker explored the relationship between lynching and organized religion in the American South between 1890–1929 (2011). And while these were the most prevalent years of hate-related lynching of Blacks in the United States, lynching continued, recorded and unrecorded, well into the 1960s. There have even been unexplained incidents of Blacks found hanging from trees that have occurred in the past six months that seem to correlate with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. The study revealed three patterns: Counties with more religious plurality, in terms of multiple denominations, experienced more lynchings. The conclusion being that the multiplicity of denominations weakened the moral bonds within the religious community, yet strengthened the bonds of White racial solidarity; counties with a larger share of the Black population worshipping in Black churches experienced more racial violence perpetrated by Whites, indicating an anger-based solidarity that perpetrated violence towards Blacks because of Black solidarity and success. The Tulsa riots from the massacre of Black Wall Street in Tulsa Oklahoma serves as just one prime example of this anger-based solidarity. And finally, counties with denominations that allowed racially mixed congregations experienced fewer lynchings and less racial violence.

The Baily and Snedker research attempted to find a link between institutional southern life, including economics, politics, government, legal, and cultural conditions, and including the Christian church, and a rise in the lynching of Blacks. What the researchers discovered was that during the time period between the end of the Reconstruction in America (1877) and the Great Depression (1929) two phenomena took place in the United States—a sharp rise in religious fervor, including newly emancipated Blacks opening their own churches, and a sharp rise in Black lynchings, particularly in the South. During this time period, approximately one lynching took place per week. Many were public and social gatherings, attended by

the newly enlivened White church members and their children. Often these events were public outings for the family. The correlation between the two seemed to stem from the racialized nature of southern denominations and the power held by Christian organizations that were also embedded in southern social and political circles.

In *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, Robert Jones offered an examination of the relationship between White supremacy and the American Christian church through a historical lens, personal experience, and public opinion surveys (2020). Jones goes even further by issuing a call to action for White Christians to not only face this legacy but to reckon with it. For centuries, Christianity's role in White supremacy has been ignored and the church has been complacent. Of those who acknowledge the link, many authors focus primarily on Southern American churches and the Evangelical denomination, but Jones pins the responsibility on other sects as well, such as Catholics in the Northeast and mainline Protestants in the Midwest. Jones implies that racism is embedded into the DNA of America, and he brings to the surface the repressed or simply ignored history of the relationship between the church and White supremacy. And while there has been some regret acknowledged in the church, Jones compels White Christians to move beyond apologies, accept responsibility, and work towards repair. That includes the support of Black Lives Matters. It is not an understatement, in Jones' mind, that the very integrity of the church, Christianity, and the American experiment are all at stake without repentance and action.

In the beginning America grew and the landscape began to take shape with the construction of churches in various shapes, sizes, and denominations. And as churches grew in number, so did the slave populations. In fact, in many respects Christianity, particularly in Southern and Evangelical populations, strongly upheld the institution of slavery and twisted scripture to support the slave-based plantation lifestyle. The following video gives a good depiction of the relationship:

### Slavery in "Christian" America

(Right click to open link.)



### [Slavery in "Christian" America](#)

PublicChristianity, YouTube

As noted, slave owners, including Christian slave owners, presented numerous justifications for owning, degrading, and dehumanizing those of African descent. That degradation often included rape and the procreation of children who were more often than not categorized as property as opposed to kin. Many slaveholders and other Whites held mixed thoughts and practiced misguided strategies regarding the education of slaves in Christian instruction. Some believed that any education whatsoever, including that of the Bible, could incite hope and thoughts of rebellion. Others believed the introduction of Christ was a moral obligation to fulfill their duties as Christian upholders of the Word and the superior race, while yet others did so to ensure the position of the slaves' immortal soul. The scale of instruction varied, with some taking slaves to church regularly, some allowing slaves to attend church on their own, and some only allowing Christian instruction under the careful eye of Whites. Upon accepting Christ, many slaves held secret prayer and worship gatherings that upon detection were punishable. According to Laurie Maffly-Kipp (2001), "In the slave quarters, however, Blacks organized their own 'invisible institution.' Through signals, passwords, and messages not discernible to Whites, they called believers to 'hush harbors' where they freely mixed African rhythms, singing, and beliefs with Christianity." The way that White religion was practiced, with its justification for abuse, was hard for Black believers to understand. "It is clear that many Blacks saw these White churches, in which ministers promoted obedience to one's master as the highest religious ideal, as a mockery of the "true" Christian message of equality and liberation as they knew it" (ibid.).



After Emancipation, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction eras of 1863-1877, came the eras of Jim Crow and Separate but Equal, of approximately 1877-1968. These laws applied primarily in the American South but manifested themselves in many ways in the North as well. After centuries of bondage, Blacks were free to practice religion, particularly Christianity, on their own, at least in theory. Establishing a formal religious community for the newly freed Blacks was just one of many issues faced by the community. Blacks were certainly not yet welcomed to integrate into any areas of society including the church. Therefore, Black churches began to expand exponentially also helping the community with employment, food, shelter, clothing, education, protection, and defense against social injustices. Many Whites, particularly in the South and including Christians, were resentful of emancipation, practiced segregation vehemently in the secular society and the church, and backed the establishment of separatist White hate groups, including the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan, formed in 1865 to proactively and violently counter any new liberties in the Black community, had its root in Christianity, with many of its member holding positions as deacons, preachers, pastors, and other prominent members of the church. This trend of segregation and violence continued through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. And in many cases the segregation continues today, fueled by tradition, both conscious and unconscious biases, racism, and the misunderstandings and misuse of the Word of God.

In 1962, Alan Cross, a young White southern pastor from Mississippi, was taken with the story of the Freedom Riders (Cross 2014). The Freedom Riders were a group of young Black activists fighting segregation in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King. Cross was familiar with racial tension and violence in the South but was particularly shaken by an incident in Montgomery AL. The Freedom Riders pulled into town and were almost immediately descended upon by a crowd of 500 angry Whites. Cross was in town on a preaching engagement and was stunned by the violence he saw up close. Montgomery was known as the City of Churches, and Cross had one question: Why hadn't the White Christians shown up to defend the Black Freedom Riders and allies? How could this be happening in a city with such a high Christian population? To his dismay, Cross later found out that many in the mob considered themselves Christian and were members of local congregations. In fact, within

just a couple of weeks of the incident, Cross found himself in the presence of the most prominent pastor in town, Henry Lyon Jr., who fervently spoke before the local White Citizens' Council, condemning civil rights and praising the beating of the protestors, all from a Christian perspective. "Ladies and gentlemen, for 15 years I have had the privilege of being pastor of a White Baptist church in this city," Lyon said. "If we stand 100 years from now, it will still be a White church. I am a believer in a separation of the races, and I am nonetheless a Christian." The crowd applauded. "If you want to get in a fight with the one that started the separation of the races, then you come face to face with your God," he declared. "The difference in color, the difference in our body, our minds, our lives, our mission upon the face of this earth, is God-given" (Cross 2014, 451). This pastor, like many others, saw himself as a devout Christian and upholder of the Bible. None considered themselves or were considered by their congregations or fellow Christians as extremists. In his book, *When Heaven and Earth Collide*, Cross continued his historical study by considering topics such as the southern way, the church and the status quo, and a theology of inaction, and how those considerations still manifest themselves today.

### **The Well Church**

Let us fast forward and shift the narrative to my personal experience and recent ethnography about the church and race. My husband and I grew up in the same Black church located on the eastern coast of the United States. The central nature of the church in our lives has shaped who we are today. There was little mixing of races in church circles—most of the Whites we knew were Catholic—yet there was very little, if any, noticeable tension between races in Christian circles. Theology, not necessarily race, seemed to be the basis of separate worship experiences. Moving to Texas in 2008 offered a different experience. This was our family's first encounter with the Evangelical faith and lifestyle, as well as the megachurch. Every church we visited was of considerable size, well established with not much room for allowing outsiders into the inner workings of church life, and very segregated. We remember visiting several suburban congregations on Sunday mornings with literally thousands upon thousands of congregants, all of whom were White. We were very often the only people of color among all of those in attendance. In one particular incident, we

were greeted cordially at the door, yet a bit aloof as always, and were seated on a pew near the back of the church. During the sermon, the Pastor asked that we turn and greet, and shake hands with our neighbors. We recognized the gentleman who stood immediately to our left as a church greeter from the entryway. He enthusiastically greeted those to his left, then turned and stared straight ahead and made no attempt to greet us, although we had turned in anticipation of greeting him. Twice more the pastor encouraged the congregation to engage with their neighbors, and twice more we were ignored by this gentleman. We were surprised but assumed positive intent. However, near the end of the service, the pastor called for the church elders to come to the front to offer prayer for any person who needed it. Our friend to the left quickly went up front to lay hands of prayer on those who came to the alter. We were a bit taken aback. Unfortunately, that was not the last time we had such encounters in these types of churches. While the churches we grew up around were segregated by color, that situation seemed to be more the result of a cultural preference than a racial segregation. This was different.

After many visits to many churches, we finally came upon a church that could be the subject of my intended ethnographic research; The Well Church of Keller Texas, a purposely multi-racial, multi-ethnic church situated in a northern Ft. Worth suburb in the buckle of the conservative Bible Belt. The congregation is approximately 48% White, 48% Black, 3% biracial or multiracial, and 1% Asian. Political affiliations also run the gamut from ultra-conservative to ultra-liberal, with every affiliation in between. In the political climate over the last several years, this often proved as interesting as the matter of racial difference. The church was a start-up and was meeting in a local movie theater. The young Black pastor of The Well Church had declared that God called him to plant a multiracial church in Keller, Texas. It would be different than any other ministry in the area. It would not only be diverse, but inclusive, and would stand for social justice.

The pastor grew up in his father's church as what is called a PK—a preacher's kid—in the Black church. His father's church was a typical Black Baptist church in which his mother was the choir director and he and his siblings were expected to participate and were held to high standards. The family lived in Racine, Wisconsin, a town that has experienced redlining and racial segregation well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This young pastor, only in his mid-thirties, remembers experiencing racism as a child. At a young age, he watched

his father, the pastor of a prominent church, being humiliated and demeaned by local police for no reason at all on a regular basis. The encounters stuck with him into adulthood. Although he carried that anger for some time, at some point the Lord shifted that anger into purpose. He currently sits on the board of the local Keller police department as a diversity and inclusion liaison. Many more such encounters over his lifetime strengthened his resolve to promote racial reconciliation, particularly within the body of Christ. The pastor's mantra is that we must take the less travelled road, avoid avoidance, confront our differences, offer love and acceptance, all before even considering inviting people into the kingdom. There is a road less traveled that may be direct but gets avoided because of our own thoughts, stereotypes, and biases. Taking that road takes courage, the revelation of truth—the real truth, not the truths that have been perpetrated by those in power—and sometimes Godly confrontation, before healing can begin. According to this pastor, social justice was a priority for Jesus and will be a priority for The Well Church of Keller.

One particular Sunday was preceded by a tough week in America. Yet another young Black man had been killed unjustly at the hands of those sworn to protect and serve, and the pastor took the opportunity to include the incident in his sermon. He used words and phrases such as “injustice,” “social justice,” and “privilege,” all spoken about in love and all in the context of scripture and the words of Jesus. We talked about what we could do as people and as the church to understand social injustices. Some White congregants were visibly unsettled, including a new young White family who had thought so highly of the church when they first visited just a couple of weeks before. Later that week, the couple informed the pastor they would no longer be attending the church. The couple was offended that “politics” had been introduced through the pulpit and that the church took a stance against the police. Interestingly enough, the only mention of the police in the sermon was that the young man was killed by an officer. And while some White congregants admitted to being unsettled simply because they were not accustomed to hearing this type of rhetoric from the pulpit, none were offended enough to leave. In doing my formal interviews, one young woman named Amy told of similar, yet opposite experiences in her life. Amy is a Black woman in her twenties, college-educated, and a newlywed. Before attending The Well, Amy and her Black husband attended a predominately White church in the area. She recalled

attending that church the Sunday after Philando Castile was killed. Neither the White pastor, nor the all-White leadership team, nor any of her friends said anything about the victim. However, they did pray for the police that Sunday. She recalls feeling unseen and unheard, hurt, and alone. She recalls wanting to cry out to the people she had communed with so often, “Why aren’t you grieving with me if you love me?” She recalls feeling very unloved in that moment. Upon bringing the subject up with fellow church friends, her feelings and sentiments were dismissed. Her comment to me was that “the church had a history of silencing those who are different.” Very shortly afterward, Amy and her husband left the church. No one in their church circle ever reached out to ask why. As one who had just recently committed to Christianity, she was confused and began to distance herself from God. Comparing the two experiences, Amy’s and the new White family’s, is quite telling. The White couple left the church because the pastor spoke out about social injustice, and the Black couple left for just the opposite reason—their congregation simply ignored the issue and they felt unvalued, unheard, and unloved.

One particular Sunday at The Well, the message focused on the church mantra—A Diverse Community Worshipping Jesus Together as One. As the pastor began to dissect the mantra he explained it like this: Worship without community is a cult; community without worship is a club; worship without diversity is a clan. He also spoke from Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our own image.” He taught that this scripture was proof of the Trinity long before the arrival of Jesus and the New Testament, as the “us” in the passage referred to God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He also spoke to the idea that if we are all made in their image, then the social construct of race was made up to categorize and subjugate people.

Later that week while at a community group meeting, one White couple named Archie and Betty asked to stay behind to talk. In private they admitted that they took issue with the sermon. For historical context, both come from a southern, rural background. Archie brought up their main point of contention. He said that the pastor had brought up the word “clan,” and they were offended. I asked them to tell me more. Archie then produced a pocketknife branded with the confederate flag. Although taken aback, I was silent. Archie went on to explain that they were not racists, but their families had fought for the side of the confederacy to save their land, and so the

fact that the pastor had said worship without diversity was a clan was offensive. I began to see a little bit clearer now. I explained that I did not think that the pastor was referring to The Klan, as in the Ku Klux Klan, but in the off chance that he was, I asked why the statement was offensive? My question was met with silence. Betty went on to emphasize that when Archie watched football with his family, and they began using racial references (the n— word to be specific) towards the Black football players, Archie never stayed for the second half of the game. And that, she emphasized, was his own family! I was silent for a moment, praying for the direction to go. Finally, I stated that the confederate symbol offended me, and explained that to me it represented hatred, the continued desire for a slave nation in the United States, and a reminder of the hundreds of years of degradation to Blacks. I then told him that I was hurt because I thought The Well was now his family. He put the knife away, we exchanged parting pleasantries, said “I love you,” and they left. That was the last time we saw them. They never returned to church again. It was indeed an interesting exchange and to this day I struggle with the meaning of their words and actions. Was this couple indeed racist? Did they not believe their actions were at least in the realm of racist activity? We may never know, but the encounter was thought altering for me regarding Christians and race.

As time progressed the membership began to grow, and the church moved to a bigger rented space. Although it was bigger and filled many of the needs that the movie theater could not, it was far less structured. The space, a gymnasium, was essentially a blank canvas that needed to be converted into a sanctuary every Sunday before the 10:00 a.m. service. That meant early mornings of intense labor. In a move to build community in the young church, the After-Party, a weekly free churchwide lunch was implemented. This popular new event added more labor to weekly set-up and tear down. One member called Johnny took notice of just who tended to volunteer for the labor. Most of them were the older Black men, ranging in age from mid-50s to early 70s. Johnny is a Black middle-aged man who could always be seen lending a hand in any way necessary. He was often seen setting up tables, carrying heavy items to and fro, and working up a sweat even before the service began. One day after service while cleaning up and gathering the trash, he was having difficulty removing the overfull bag from the can. The bag was stuck, the garbage began to fall out, the can began to fall over. It was quite the

animated situation that was hard to miss. Two White male members stood less than six feet away, facing his direction, in conversation. Neither man seemed to take notice of the situation or offer assistance. An older White woman called Mini saw Johnny's plight from across the room and rushed over to help. Mini is perhaps in her late 60s, is not American by birth, and interestingly enough, divulged in her interview that she does not consider herself a Christian. She does believe that Christianity has its merits, but does not firmly believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Johnny was upset by the situation and revealed that he was hurt that those two able-bodied men stood by while an older woman who was not even a Christian came to his aid. When asked if perhaps they simply did not see him and his struggle, he was hesitant to accept the possibility. Johnny did admit that in other situations that needed more hands than were proactively helping, the same men would always be willing to lend a hand if asked. But his final statement on the matter was that he should not always need to ask when things obviously needed to be done. Everyone knows of the labor needed yet the responsibility often falls to the Black male members. And while he considered service and helping his ministry, his thought was that you cannot say that you love someone and not lend a hand when you see them struggling. The statement seemed to resonate deeper than the garbage can situation.

Worship at the church was a bit reserved, and during one interview with a White congregant named James, he expressed that he would like to see more expressive worship and would like to hear more Black gospel songs during service. But he understood why we did not do this, especially as a church with White members and a Black pastor that stands for social justice. He then asked me a rhetorical question, what demographic was most likely to leave the church if they felt the service was leaning too far to Black church culture? Before I could answer, he told me, "White males." While he wanted a more robust worship experience with more cultures included, he knew his own demographic group and intuitively understood that compromise was necessary to the success of this niche church. Admittedly, his mention of White males being the first to leave the church when they felt uncomfortable touched on my personal biases. My immediate thought was the hundreds of years of shaping the world for the White male's comfort. I also realized that White males harbor feelings that diversity will shut them out from their place in society. I remembered the words of Frank Leonard (2020),

"When one is accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression." These sentiments are most likely key to understanding why the White church hesitates or uses excuses to not embrace the BLM movement.

One young Black woman calling herself Melanie recounted how she and her family previously attended an all-White Evangelical church. Melanie's husband was asked to be on the deacon board. Things were going fine, the family was making friends and forming relationships. That is, Melanie recounts, until President Barack Obama was elected. She noticed a shift in the atmosphere and people began to openly make negative comments even in their presence. There was also some discomfort for the family around the church's pro-life stance on abortion. The final straw for Melanie and her family was when the news media began to show that Black men and women were openly being killed by police on a regular basis. Her exact words were that "the climate changed, and it felt really uncomfortable." Their friends seemed to always find fault with the victims. Their pastor never mentioned the killings publicly or privately. They were hurting and no one acknowledged their pain. They left the church after being faithful members for five years.

One woman called Angela admitted that she came to the church only to support the pastor. Angela is an older Black woman who grew up in the segregated, Jim Crow South. As an actual relative, she was concerned about him taking on a church. She herself was a pastor's wife and understood the trials, commitment, and stress that came with the job. But a multiracial church supporting social justice in Texas would prove even more challenging. Again, having lived through the ugliness of Jim Crow, separate water fountains, separate waiting areas, separate hospitals, separate schools, and of course separate churches, the idea of coming together to worship somehow felt unnatural. She also admitted that her fears for her relative pastoring a church may have stemmed from the type of church planned. She harbored a distrust for White Evangelical/Southern Christians because of her life experiences. I would assert that the unnatural feelings she had when worshipping with other races or cultures were the result of society conditioning us all to harbor biases that God never intended.

Several other older Black participants who all grew up in the segregated South shared similar experiences. All attended all-Black churches growing up, all had experienced racism, and all felt that White supremacy was widespread in the White Evangelical/Southern church, and because of that, social justice concerns

were necessarily ingrained into the fabric of the Black church. Voter registration, the call for equality and equity between races, and maintaining a strong community to combat racism were concepts that were a part of everyday church life. However, none had experienced a call for race *reconciliation* from within their Black churches. Yet as adults in their senior years, all expressed that the church should be responsible for race reconciliation. When asked why, one said that, “segregation is still very much alive in the minds of many Americans” (implying that it should not be). Another commented that, “a place of all races, nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures is what Heaven will look like and we have got to do a better job at getting people prepared for that now.” And yet another responded, “we need to teach and live that loving thy neighbor as thy self is the greatest commandment.”

In fact, out of all interviewed, those who had spent their childhood in church experienced a segregated environment no matter the race. One gentleman who will remain unnamed recalled growing up in the Lutheran faith. He is a White male millennial. This man grew up as a believer. He remembers experiencing no racial diversity at all. And the church that he grew up in did not participate in any type of race relations, reconciliation, or social justice issues. Not only was the church all White, but so was the community. He admitted that when it came to race relations he had been operating with blinders on. Now, as his faith rebuilds and relationships form with new people in a multiracial, multicultural environment, he stated that “a personal relationship with Christ goes hand in hand with civil rights and with what Jesus teaches us.”

One woman going by Debi did not grow up in the United States. This was one of my most interesting interviews because it provided an “outside looking in” perspective. In Debi’s country, Christianity was viewed as somewhat of a cult. There, some did believe in a higher power but did not fully accept Christianity. Although they felt Christianity could be a good thing, they saw what they considered to be hypocrisies between what the Bible taught and how Christians acted. Also, because Debi had very little context of the Black experience in the United States, she had fully bought into the idea that Blacks were entirely to blame for all that was currently happening regarding race in America. And in her innocence, she could not understand why Blacks just could not “behave.” Admittedly I was taken aback. Her only experience with Blacks was stereotypical depictions from

American television and the people she had met at The Well. I asked if the people at church fit the stereotypes she had been shown and she admitted that they did not. Our scheduled one-hour interview turned into a several-hour session discussing the history of race in America. We both left the session enlightened and with a perspective we did not arrive with. Since then, she has fully supported Black Lives Matter.

The SPECS Movement is a non-profit division of The Well Church that works with the local community on race reconciliation. The purpose of SPECS is to create healthy engagement around race in order to deconstruct perspectives that produce racism. The hope is that these healthy engagements will in turn produce anti-racist transformation. The mission is to encourage others to see life from someone else’s perspective or through someone else’s SPECTacles. SPECS hosts events that bring the community together. In the summer of 2020, after the several murders in the Black community, the Black Lives Matter movement became highly active. Protests and marches were taking place all over the world. In fact, a protest was being organized right in small town, conservative Keller TX. One particular church community group wanted to participate and wished to extend the invitation to the entire church. As a show of respect, the leaders of the group contacted the church board of elders. The pastor was on vacation. Most of the leaders were on board, however one elder was hesitant. He did not agree that this should be a church-sanctioned event and felt that if the small group wanted to participate it would be at their own decision as individuals outside of the church. He insisted that the group not wear any church insignia. He suggested that this event might be best served by SPECS, but without the pastor’s consent, the elders would not consent. The group was disappointed but planned to proceed on their own. And then one member received a late-night text from the pastor. He explained that although on vacation he planned to attend the march and wanted to extend the invitation to others at the church who might be interested. The member was elated and relayed what had transpired to the elders regarding the march. The pastor gave his blessing. SPECS and the community group took the lead, and within 24 hours phone chains were established, t-shirts with “Black Lives Matter” on the front and “The Well Church Keller” on the back were designed and ordered from a local vendor. The initial participation list grew from ten to seventy-six church members. The church would support Black Lives Matter strongly.

Soon after, one White family made the abrupt decision to leave the church because of what they felt was the church's position on the Black Lives Matter movement. The husband and father of the family said he had done some research on the organization and did not feel that the movement was Christlike. Interestingly enough, the church had not taken a stance on the Black Lives Matter organization. Upon further research, I found that the Black Lives Matter movement was created in response to a 17-year-old who was killed unjustly and whose murderer was acquitted. BLM strives to eradicate White supremacy, seeks to build the power to fight back against acts of violence towards Black people, and endeavors to create a space for imagination and innovation in the Black community. Nothing un-Christlike at all. However, the church did take a stance that Black lives do indeed matter, and condemned the killing of unarmed Blacks. It also supported the idea that using your platform, may it be athletics, entertainment, or pulpit, to promote biblically based social justice initiatives was in line with the Word of God. One congregant approached me to state on record that in retrospect there had been prior signs that this White family took issue with social justice. In this congregant's opinion, and based on conversations they had had over the years, the family was fine with multiracial, multicultural churches as long as those outside of the majority or mainstream assimilated, conformed, and did not "make trouble." Their leaving the church based on unfounded hearsay, then, felt more like an excuse than a principle.

One noteworthy experience involved two church members—a biracial woman named Jennifer and a White man named James. Jennifer is a quiet yet passionate, mild mannered, middle aged woman who helped organized the BLM march and the members' participation. She recalls receiving a text message from James about his excitement and experiences of the day that they participated in the Black Lives Matter march. He had forwarded Jennifer a YouTube video that he said reminded him of her. The video was of a very militant young Black woman, adorned in full military fatigues, strapped with military-style assault weapons, and draped with hundreds of rounds of ammunition. She seemed angry as she rapped and sang about how the government should fear her and her attempts to overthrow it. Jennifer admitted that she was initially taken aback, and a bit hurt by the comparison. She shared the video with her close family and friends who, given Jennifer's mild personality, were just as

bewildered by the reference. Jennifer expressed that she realizes this is how the world sees people of color who seek social justice: as angry, militant, and trying to overthrow the government. Many people of color who speak up and speak out have historically been labeled as such, including the peace driven Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sometime later Jennifer reached out to James to get a better understanding of his point. He was oblivious to the fact that the video could have been offensive, but apologized.

## Critical Race Theory

As we make an historical and socio-political analysis of racism in America, we realize that racism is not just a person-to-person issue. Tenets of racism have been systemically and systematically worked into the foundation of the country. Critical Race Theory (CRT) explains just how in great detail. The CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationships between race, racism, and power (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Principle contributors to the theory include Derek Bell, formerly of Harvard Law and New York University. Bell authored most of the CRT foundational writings. Other major contributors include Alan Freeman, who taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo Law School, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Cheryl Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, Paul Butler, Devon Carbado, Lani Guinier, and Angela Onwuachi-Willig and Patricia Williams. Leading Asian scholars include Neil Gotanda, Mitu Gulati, Jerry Kang, and Eric Yamamoto. The top American Indian critical scholar is Robert Williams; prolific Latinos of a critical persuasion include Laura Gomez, Ian Haney López, Kevin Johnson, Gerald Lopez, Margaret Montoya, Juan Perea, and Francisco Valdes.

CRT explores how racism has embedded itself systemically into the American economy, education systems, healthcare systems, and religious organizations. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, Critical Race Theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 26). For example, the concept of equality focuses on the idea that the racial system is balanced by everyone receiving equal portions of resources, a principle long thought of as fair.

However, CRT theorizes that the balancing force for societal oneness is actually *equity* or the idea that every person receives what is needed for success. However, for many, there is a perception of inequality or unfairness in the concept of equity. Why, in some minds, should some receive more than others? Don't we all have access to the same American Dream? Don't we all have equal access to opportunities? On paper, one would think so. That is what the version of history we have been taught has tried to convince the public. In the minds of many, slavery was abolished, the federal government supported civil rights, and thus anyone not able to attain the American Dream is simply lazy, not working hard enough, or not applying themselves and thus not deserving of prosperity. The version of history we have been taught lacks reference to the hidden atrocities that have occurred during the last several hundred years in American history, atrocities such as the Black Codes, Jim Crow Laws, loopholes embedded in the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and a plethora of spoken and unspoken rules that exist in local, state, and federal practices. These atrocities have not only been embedded in our political institutions, but also and more pointedly they can be found in the hearts and minds of people—the same people who attend and govern our churches.

CRT has five basic tenets as well as an activist component; not only is the movement theoretical, but it also promotes change. The theory seeks to shed light on how society organizes itself racially, but also seeks to transform it for the better and spread ideas globally. The basic five tenets of CRT include the following: 1) racism is ordinary, not aberrational; 2) the dominant group has a material interest in maintaining the status quo; 3) race is a socially constructed concept designed to create social categories, not a scientific truth; 4) people are racialized differently and with different consequences to how they are viewed depending on the interests of the dominant group; 5) people with minority status have a burden and an obligation to tell their stories to members of the dominant group, who may or may not believe them.

**Tenet #1:** *Racism is ordinary, not aberrational.* According to CRT, racism is business as usual, particularly in America. People of color experience racism as an everyday occurrence. In fact, I once heard a quote stating that racism is so American that when it is protested, people think we are protesting America. Because of this ordinariness, racism is

embedded in the culture and thus difficult to address. The existence of racism is simply unbelievable to some, goes unacknowledged because of its normalness, or goes unacknowledged because of the uncomfortableness of the blame, shame, or guilt associated with racism. The “colorblind” mentality (I do not see color, therefore I have no racist tendencies) is embraced as an attempt at equality, when in fact it is a front for assimilation. The lack of acknowledgment of the struggles that people of color have endured in essence represents a lack of knowledge of or belief in true historical accounts and a sheer disbelief that these struggles are real or have any bearing on the standing that people of color have in society now. Whatever one's lot in life, it has been brought on by personal actions or inactions, and is thus deserved. Also, the White-over-color ascendancy that continues in the unconscious biases of Whites against others has both a material and psychic purpose for the dominant group. It allows for the more blatant of racist offenses to be addressed (housing discrimination, for example), while at the same time allowing the subtleties of everyday actions to go unaddressed (such as giving preference to resumes with White-sounding names with fewer qualifications over those with Black sounding names with full qualifications) (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 47).

**Tenet #2:** *Interest convergence or material determinism.* The authors of CRT point out that there is self-interest in racial disparities. According to the theory, racism has advanced the gains of White elites. In its simplest form, less for “the others” means more for the elite. There is a distinct material gain associated with the elite class. In some sense, this speaks directly to Karl Marx and conflict theory. The theory looks at society as a competition for social, political, and material resources that include food, shelter, education, employment, and residual time for leisure. Those in the position of social, political, and economic power do everything they can to remain there. Take the idea of renting property as a primary residence, for example. The low wage-earning renter continues to pay rent to a landlord without ever gaining a vested interest in the property, and thus never building wealth. In this scenario, however, the landlord continues to reap benefits and earn money, continually building wealth. The cycle perpetuates generationally as the landlord is able to pass his wealth on to his children through education which results in lucrative employment. The renter does not have the same

opportunities and is caught in a vicious generational cycle of poverty. This is obviously advantageous to the dominant landlord and the dominant power structure. Although to Marxism this is just a class struggle, in the United States these inequities are historically often along racial lines. Social institutions like government, education, and religion reflect this competition in their structural inequalities and help maintain the unequal society. The White working-class benefits psychically by having the upper hand over marginalized groups, both in their own mind and in society, and has a distinct advantage for employment, housing, and in the larger social hierarchy. This leaves little incentive for Whites to eradicate the racial situation.

**Tenet #3: *Social construction thesis.*** This thesis suggests that race has no scientific merit and is simply a social construct made up to categorize people. These are categories based on physical characteristics, such as skin tone, hair texture, nose shape, etc., that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient for the powers that be. While there is no argument that people possess varied physical characteristics, these are simply adaptations that God in His wisdom has endowed for survival. For example, wider noses in hotter climates allow for more air to reach the brain quickly to prevent the brain from overheating. Smaller noses in colder climates control the airflow to the brain to keep it from freezing. Darker skin in climates closer to the equator are to regulate the absorption of ultra-violet radiation, and lighter skin in colder climates to absorb vitamin D. However, many societies have used these adaptations to assign levels of superiority and inferiority and have associated these characteristics with intelligence or strength, neither of which have proven scientific merit. According to the authors of the theory, this tendency to ignore scientific truths creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics.

**Tenet #4: *Differential racialization and its consequences / intersectionality and anti-essentialism.*** Intersectionality refers to the overlapping and interdependency of disadvantages. For example, there are disadvantages to being a woman in many societies, as well as being disabled, or black. However, the intersectionality of being a black disabled woman adds to the complexity of being disadvantaged or marginalized.

Essentialism and anti-essentialism speak to the idea that marginalized people of the same race or ethnicity

may share a problem at a common core but those problems need to be addressed differently because of the complexity or subgroups within the group. For example, African Americans may share historical discriminatory experiences but solutions may be different based on geography, socioeconomic status, or even skin tone.

The dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs or convenience. For example, in one era a group of people may be seen as simpleminded, happy-go-lucky, and content to serve the needs of Whites, yet in another era, this same group is seen as radical, brutal, menacing, and capable of insurrection, and thus in need of mass incarceration. Or perhaps in one era, a group is seen as exotic yet pious, albeit different, yet in another era, the same group is seen as radicalized religious zealots who pose a national security threat (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 10).

These kinds of views are essentialist in that they suggest that all of the members of a group are alike. Anti-essentialism, then, is an effort to resist this kind of stereotyping and prejudice based on group membership.

**Tenet #5 : *The voice-of-color thesis.*** Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with anti-essentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism. This carries a burden, obligation, and a privilege. The burden and obligation lie in the idea that the minority in the room is willing and able to represent their entire racial group and is obligated to represent that entire group in any and all settings. The privilege is double-edged and lies in the invitation to tell one's own personal story of oppression to a group that has historically not listened, but also lies in the privilege of the dominant group to believe those stories and choose to act upon those truths or not.

There are two schools of thought regarding Critical Race Theory (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Idealists hold that racism and discrimination are matters of thinking, mental categorization, attitude, and discourse. This school of thought believes that racism can be erased or reversed through changing the



system of images, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings, scripts, and social teachings by which we convey to one another that certain people are less intelligent, reliable, hardworking, virtuous, and American than others. In other words, the general public is uninformed, but once they know better, understand history, and understand the detriment caused, they will want and strive to do better. The recent shift in multimedia to highlighting families of color or multi-racial families in commercials, corporations providing safe and brave spaces for listening sessions and open conversations on race, and unconscious bias trainings all speak to the idealist school of thought and are valid attempts to rectify the situation.

In the contrasting school of thought, realists believe racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status. Racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people's homes. Members of this school of thought point out that anti-Black prejudice sprang up with slavery and capitalists' need for labor. This notion rests on the systematic dehumanization of a group of people, making it easier for the dominant group to assert superiority. In other words, if the dominant group feels that another group is naturally less intelligent and biologically inferior, then, as the dominant group, they have the natural superiority to rule. In some cases, the dominant group feels a natural obligation to shepherd or save "the other" from themselves, creating a great White savior effect. This effect often manifests itself in missionary and church dynamics.

In reality, the crux of the issue probably lies between the two sub-theories, and beyond. There is a segment of society that truly does not know or understand the historical implications of racism and how those implications manifest themselves even today. Yet there is another segment that knowingly benefits from the system and chooses not to change it. And yet there is another facet of society that is operating in racist tendencies out of fear. Much of racism is rooted in fear. There is the fear of losing a share of the American Dream as if there is not enough to go around. This again speaks to Marx and the conflict caused by the fear of the false notion of a lack of resources. There is the fear of losing hierarchal status in society. There is the fear of losing privilege and becoming the oppressed.

CRT asserts a specific relationship between being White and male, and the privileges those attributes

afford, often termed White privilege. The term in itself invokes a sense of outrage and fear for many in the White community. Though often misquoted as implying that Whites have not or do not have to work hard to get ahead, the term does not mean that at all. White privilege asserts that being White automatically extends the benefit of the doubt. For example, if two men walk into the board room, one White and one Black, both with the same level of education and experience, the White man is often given the benefit of the doubt regarding intellect and authority. The Black man often has to prove himself before being afforded the same respect.

There is also the unfounded fear of retaliation from people of color for the centuries of imposed poor treatment. Interestingly enough, people of color in America historically have not sought retaliation. Most historical civil rights movements have been a fight for equal rights. Again, ethnocentrism shows itself in the idea that if my group has gained status through physical domination and retaliation, surely other groups would think and operate similarly, thus generating fear.

Addressing these issues can be a challenge. Education and rebranding through media can certainly mitigate the issues for a percentage of the population. But just how do we mitigate these issues with those who do not believe there is an issue, fear change, or simply refuse to shift the status quo? As a microcosm of the United States, the White American Christian church has a significant biblical and spiritual responsibility for addressing that challenge. And while as Christians, we are called to respect the governance of this world, we are also called to be "in the world, but not of the world." Christians and the church ultimately answer to a higher calling in which every person is in God's image, a theology that leaves no room for racist behavior.

There is an opportunity to define how Critical Race Theory applies to the church, the role of the church and race reconciliation in society, and the history of the church, missions and cultural competencies. As defined previously, Critical Race Theory speaks to the relationship between race and power. And while the theory does address racism strongly on many points, there is admittedly a lack of theological perspective. What does the Bible say about racism and how does it theologically address the obligation of the church to attack social justice issues? On the other hand, arguably many predominately White churches simply do not address racial or social justice issues. Critics of the theory from within the church contest that CRT

has no place in Christianity. Unfortunately, this argument has a colorblind approach: There is no problem; the problem does not affect me, therefore it does not exist; these problems seem made up, exaggerated, or self-inflicted. This blind eye approach has been allowed to prevail in the church for years and is a defense to protect power and mitigate fear.

## **Liberation Theology**

When considering a theological analysis of the church's role in race reconciliation, I have found myself drawn to Liberation Theology. This theology focuses on understanding Christianity through a salvific lens and process of liberation. The theory goes beyond reflection and analysis, beyond thoughts and prayers, and takes tangible action in the lives of the disenfranchised. Liberation theology wants to be a part of the transformation process in the world. Not only does the theology focus on being part of the transformation process but it encourages the disinherited to take action in changing the process. And Black Lives Matters is such a transformation movement.

This theology asserts that the only way to understand Christian practice is at the axis and through the perspective of the oppressed and the oppressor. Liberation Theology has adopted elements of Marxism to analyze what has become of Christianity and to implement radical changes to traditional doctrine. However, one could argue that the ideas of Liberation Theology are not as radical as proposed, and even that this theological approach is exactly what Jesus preached and lived during His mission here on earth. Some simplify this theological approach to seeing God through the eyes of the poor. However there is a social justice element that cannot be removed from the mix. The emergence of the Liberation movement positioned the church to take an active role in advocating for social, political, and economic change, initially in Latin America. The church and the oppressed formed an alliance not only to redefine the role of the Catholic Church in daily life but to reignite the role of the church in the pursuit of social justice. This paradigm shift attempted to redefine the elitist position that the church had developed, and involved the oppressed in their own liberation from economic and political bondage. The collective poor consisted of the underemployed, the underpaid, those we might call the working poor today, and specifically those exploited by capitalism.

Although the local Latinx priesthood was comfortable defending the poor, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church took issue with the theology. Despite the positive humanizing process intended, the Vatican dismissed the theology as Marxist rhetoric, much like the White Evangelical church today dismisses the collective program to help the disenfranchised as "socialism." In 1949 Howard Washington Thurman wrote *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1996), a biblical interpretation of the teachings of Jesus through the lens of the oppressed and nonviolent response. This writing by Thurman was one of the foundational pieces of scholarship on which the civil rights movement was begun. Martin Luther King was said to have carried the book with him regularly. Thurman famously determined that oppression breeds three distinct characteristics: fear, deception, and hate. Fear becomes the safety device with which the oppressed surround themselves in order to give some measure of protection from complete nervous collapse; deception stems from the nervous system, and through the ages, at all stages of sentient activity, the weak have survived by fooling the strong; and hate is what Thurman calls one of the hells that dog the footsteps of the disinherited in season and out of season. Thurman comments that during times of war, hatred becomes quite respectable as it masquerades under the guise of patriotism (1996). Thurman assigns these attributes to the oppressed, however, these same attributes and actions can easily be assigned to the oppressor. Keeping the marginalized oppressed and keeping oneself from becoming the oppressed can drive fear, deception, and if the fear is strong enough, invoke imagined delusions of war, producing hatred disguised as patriotism. This has become evident in the hate-driven events in Charlottesville, VA, the recent uprising in supremacist activities, and the insurrection at the Capitol Building in January 2021. The solution, Thurman contends, is that proximity can breed love. In other words, getting to know one another in the community can ease these tensions on all sides.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, what does the phrase Black Lives Matter invoke in you? Most likely the phrase invokes thoughts and feelings as soon as you read it. Perhaps thoughts and feelings of curiosity, indifference, anger, or empathy, pride, justice. Or perhaps the counter phrase, All Lives Matter, comes to mind, with a feeling of defensiveness. And of course, the phrase "all lives

matter” in itself is an absolutely valid statement. All lives do indeed matter—Homeless lives, Muslim lives, Black lives, Gay lives, Immigrant lives, White lives, Jewish lives, Christian lives, Atheist lives, Addicted lives, Rich lives, and Poor lives. The list goes on. However, when the statement is used in rebuttal to the Black Lives Matter statement, it takes on another connotation with racist undertones. And while the intent may not be to defend racism, the impact undoubtably does. So what does the Bible say about Black Lives Matter? Of course, the Bible does not speak specifically about the Black Live Matter movement, but it does give us Matthew 18:12, which says, “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them gets lost, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and go in search of the one that is lost?” Here Jesus seems to be referring to lost in the sense of wandering off. And I am in no way implying that the Black community is lost or somehow has wandered off. In fact, sometimes the lost have not wandered off on their own, but have been led astray, intentionally segregated and separated, or driven off. Consider the story of Joseph in Genesis 39. Joseph was separated from his family because of his own brothers. Thus, as the Holy Spirit often guides us in the adaptation of God’s word for circumstances that apply today, this scripture could justly be applied to not only the lost, but to the orphan, the widow, the poor, the oppressed, and the disinherited. While Jesus obviously called for the care of all of the sheep, he calls us to intentionally and purposely leave the ninety-nine to go to the aid of the one currently in danger. Thus, the church should be focused on the Black lives that are currently in danger in America.

America has roots strongly tied to racist behavior and activities. That fact needs no proof as it is well established by written history. The White Evangelical/Southern American Christian church is, by extension, aiding and abetting the current problem with racism by omission, commission, compliance, or simple ignorance. The Bible mandates that we create oneness within the Christian community (John 17). Yet how do we convince those who feel that social justice is just a political matter with no place in the church? How do we convince the church that what many condemn as Marxism has elements of what Jesus preached as a revolutionary while here on earth? Somewhere in the past, Christianity and power formed

an alliance, making the church reluctant to address social problems. Of course, Christianity and power have had a long-standing relationship, but particularly in the U.S. a political alignment and agenda to maintain the status quo have taken place. Somehow huge segments of the Christian population have become disenchanted with the principles that Jesus gave us—that love was the greatest commandment, and that loving our neighbor as ourselves is a mandate. We have become fixated on one or two points of the Bible, obsessed with legalism, turned from true patriotism to nationalism, and aligned ourselves with racially divisive politics that have twisted movements like Black Lives Matters, meant for the good of all people, into a false narrative of offense against God. God is not offended by justice.

I will leave you with one final thought: We align ourselves with intuitions that we do not fully or 100% agree with on a regular basis. We work for corporations that are not godly, we buy from companies that do not align with our values, we attend churches that stand on theologies and doctrines that we do not fully understand or believe. Why, then, do some White American churches take so much offense at Black Lives Matter? Is the struggle *with* Black Lives Matter (the organization) or *that* Black Lives Matter (the people). “Let a man examine himself.” Regardless of the critiques of the organization, as Christians, we are all fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and have a mandate from God to love our neighbors as ourselves, support the oppressed, and support the fact that Black Lives do indeed Matter.

After much prayer, you may find yourself seeking opportunities to understand and do more. There are five ways to grow in the area of race reconciliation: Educate. Conversate. Advocate. Activate. Donate.<sup>1</sup> 1) Take time to further educate yourself and others within your circle of influence on the real relationship between the church and race, as well as the five hundred years of the Black experience in America. 2) Have a conversation with someone who does not look like, think like, behave like, or vote like you. Listen to their experiences and share your own. Talk to your children and the young people in your life about race and race relations. 3) We all experience a level of privilege, no matter our race, gender, abilities, orientation, etc. Use your position to advocate for a

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<sup>1</sup> This material comes from my work as a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant for D.E.I. Solutions. <https://www.deisolutions.net/>

marginalized group of people who need a voice—those who are subjected to racial injustices, the poor, the homeless, widows, those who are differently abled, etc. 4) We may not all feel comfortable participating in social justice marches, but we can all be an activist within our own circle of influence. Speak up and speak out for marginalized and disinherited people and communities. 5) And finally, donate your time, money, and other resources to causes and entities that support underserved communities, groups, and people that God called us to support.

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# Protests Over Social Injustice: A Christian's Perspective on the #Blacklivesmatter Movement

Nakia Vongvirath

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Researching the active protests stemming from the death of George Floyd is an important step towards understanding why the protests matter to our society. People by the thousands have come out and protested, and they have various reasons for showing up. Most importantly, there are multiple races who participate with just as much conviction as any other race, including African Americans. This article will examine why the protests are so diverse and why the fight for African American social justice is not only important to the African American race, but to the Caucasian race as well. Christians have to take a stand against social inequality to ensure the hope for peace does not fade into antiquity. Christians have something to offer to the #Blacklivesmatter movement. We have a unique perspective on peaceful protesting that can be an example to others. This article will discuss what Christians can do to join in the fight for social change without confusion over whether or not we belong in the struggle.

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## Introduction

The current protests for social change mirror the struggles of the past in that once again African Americans are standing with other races to let their voices be heard. But unlike the protest movements of the past, the #Blacklivesmatter protests of today are being heavily attended, and sometimes organized and led, by Caucasian Americans. The #Blacklivesmatter movement has morphed into a multi-racial, multi-cultural movement that is fighting for equality for African Americans. The protest for social justice is a continuing struggle for equality in America, and that struggle is shared by Christians and non-Christians alike. The protests show that people of all backgrounds and beliefs can work together if they have a common goal. While observing the #Blacklivesmatter protests I witnessed people who follow Christ stand with people who do not, with like minds marching with one voice shouting, "Black lives matter." According to God's teaching, we are the Church and this is the example the world needs to lift up not only the people of the world, but the Church as well. Unfortunately, not all Christians believe in protesting for social change, but there is a significant link between protesting and the

people of God. A link that is not hard to find in both the Bible and in history. As Christians we are the light of the world, and now is our time to stand up and teach the world how the Church overcomes evil.

## Caucasians and the #Blacklivesmatter Movement

On July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, I attended a demonstration in an area of Atlanta called Cabbagetown. Cabbagetown is known by the locals and is famous for its artistry which lines the streets of the neighborhood. When I arrived at the demonstration for #Blacklivesmatter I was greeted by a scene of all White protesters. I have to admit I was surprised to not find a single person of color at this demonstration. To my delight, not long after I arrived a Black woman showed up and walked right up to me. She was known by the other participants and they greeted her with smiles and laughs—and an offering of home-grown tomatoes. I was the obvious outsider, so I was greeted as well by this very friendly woman and she told me she was happy to see me. It wasn't long before more people of color showed up and joined the rest of the protesters. It appeared to me that this was a community protest, held by the community for the community. Everyone knew

everyone and there were cars driving by honking in support. Music was playing as they stood on the street corner holding up signs and raising their fists. The same woman as before came up to me and saw I didn't have a sign, so she gave me hers with a smile and a thumbs up. I wasn't planning on participating in the demonstration, I was only going to observe and record, but I didn't want to be rude, so I accepted her sign with a smile. For the next hour I held up that sign and sang and danced to inspiring music blasting from their boom box. All the songs had a meaning of unity and were really good to dance to. I saw when I looked around, all the protesters were dancing and enjoying themselves. Most of the protesters were middle aged and older women, there were very few men in attendance. It was my impression that this protest was organized by one of the neighborhood clubs, so when it was promoted the news went through the women and not the men.

The longer I stayed, the more comfortable I felt. Then I heard a song that made my eyes bug out in surprise. The name of the song was 'Ebony and Ivory,' by Paul McCartney and Stevey Wonder. The moment I heard it I looked at the other protesters and started laughing. They immediately started laughing with me. We danced and laughed as the song played and I felt like this protest was more for the community's healing than for yet another demonstration to make the nation aware of the problem. Through an interview with a participant, I discovered that this corner, where the protests were being held, is down the street from the police station from which officers were dispatched to the Wendy's where Rayshard Brooks was killed. The lighthearted nature of this protest demonstrated how different races can come together and stand for equality even close to the scene of a tragedy.

I was told by the woman who gave me the sign that this protest was organized by #Blacklivesmatter. But when I asked another woman, she told me she was the one who put the protest together. She was an anthropology major herself, and after retiring from a career in social work she couldn't just stand by and do nothing. She wanted to get involved, so she started #BLM on the Corner. A group of neighbors gather every weeknight and protest on that corner. She continued to say, "at first there were only three, but at one point we had up to 30 people show up." I was impressed with her determination, thinking she must be sacrificing to bring awareness to the cause. But then she said, "these nights are the highlight of my day!" I didn't blame her, I looked around and saw people

holding signs and dancing to the music. It was beautiful, and as I fought back tears I realized just how much I wanted to be a part of such a close community. I felt so much emotion, while thoughts of all the racist remarks ever directed at me every time I was left out because of the color of my skin filled my mind. All those emotions swelled up, and I was so happy to be standing next to people who were on my side. The protest only lasted an hour, but that was the most fun I'd had in weeks. It was hard to leave these wonderful people, and as I left the parking lot, I said a prayer that their effort would count for something. This protest was organized by a majority White group of women that wanted the community to know it was okay for Caucasians to stand up for their Black neighbors.

### Cabbagetown Protest







On August 1<sup>st</sup>, I found myself headed back to Georgia. Georgia was where the majority of the protests were. The protest I attended was in a very up and coming part of town called Sugar Hill. As I waited in my car for the protest to begin, I realized the people present are mostly White men. I walked up to the small gathering and sat down on a bench over to the side of the building. I was greeted by the attorney who was scheduled to speak and the woman who organized the demonstration (both African Americans). As I was sitting there, I noticed the people who were standing around were talking about what is happening in the world. A White man started talking to the Black attorney and their conversation caught my attention. The White man talked about the history of White elitism and how White people are educated to think that what they have, they have worked for; that we are all equal, and if you have more it's because you worked harder than anyone else. He made a good point, saying White Americans are not taught to see themselves as a group, they are taught to be individuals. That way they can skirt their responsibility for the past crimes committed by the Caucasian race. This man is an atheist who believes religion gets in the way of having a scientific conversation with people. The attorney was a Christian, and even though I was a fly on the wall in this situation it was interesting to see these two men, seemingly on different sides of an important issue, come together and agree that unity is key for change.

Before we reached the end of the march, I started talking to a Jewish couple who arrived late. They were interested in the project I was working on and asked me why I was studying the protests. I told them I wanted to know what was bringing people of all races out to protest and why they believed this time would be different from protests of the past. It seemed to fascinate them, and they received my answer with

bright smiles. They were well intended people who had gone to the early protests in Los Angeles. "The riots were scary," they said, and they were glad to participate in a peaceful protest. I agreed with them, after leaving a peaceful protest you feel more accomplished and better about yourself.

### Sugar Hill Protest

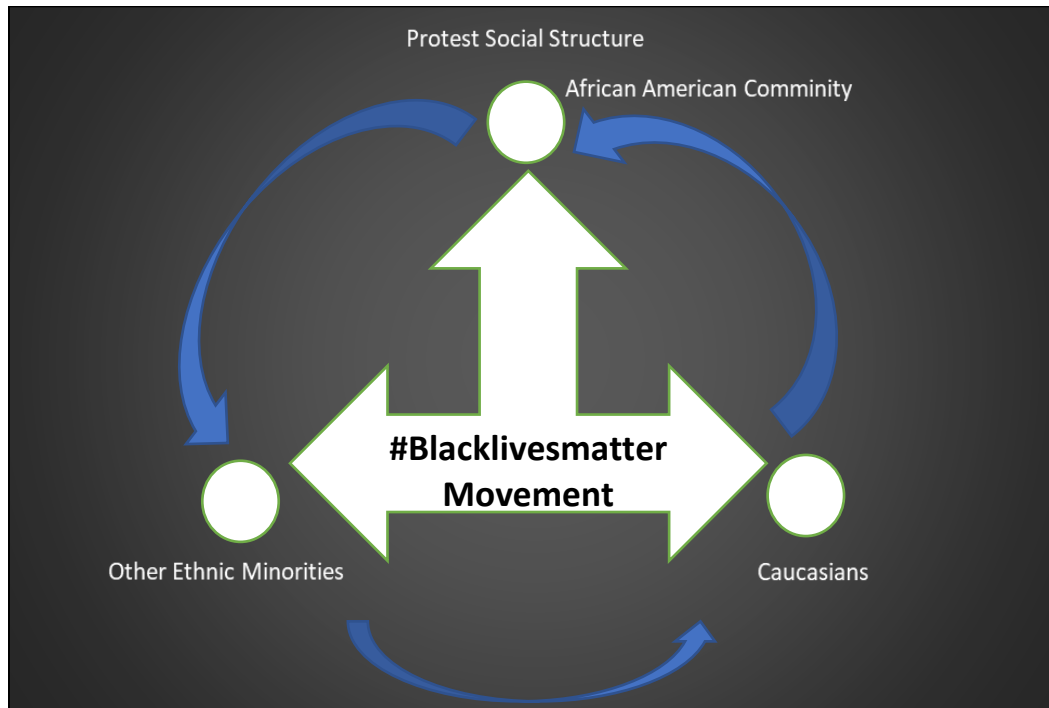


The people I had observed were from all walks of life. From young college students to the elderly, all wanting to make their voices heard. There were families with little children, all protesting together trying to make a difference in any way they could. And from those observations, I had noticed the protests have developed into a quasi-kinship phenomenon that has spread across all ages and races. Whatever differences they may have had prior to the #Blacklivesmatter movement have been pushed aside to accomplish their common goal. Having a common goal brings a kind of kinship and a sense of comradeship and friendship between the participants. From observing the participants while they are marching together, one can see that no one stands alone. The experience of people feeling the same emotions,

speaking the same language, and looking for the same results, draws individuals together to stand as one. As you can see from the diagram below, the movement is

comprised of the African American community, other ethnic minorities, and Caucasians, all working together for a common cause.

### Multi-ethnic and Multi-racial Support for the #Blacklivesmatter Movement



From my observations I have also noticed the chant is one of the unifying symbols of the protests because it unites the crowd. People who are complete strangers take the first step and speak the words, “Black lives matter.” Then, all the crowd is united in one cause and one language. The language matters and is repeated at every demonstration. The chants, “no justice, no peace” and “say their name,” are also staples in the social justice movement, and for a reason. The chants are the common thread that binds violence against Black minorities to the Black Lives Matter movement. That is why they have been used at every demonstration I have attended or seen on TV. From my observations, no matter what group organizes the protest, they all use the same language for the march.

From what I observed at demonstrations and from my interviews, the language is also an expression of the pain that is driving the movement to continue beyond the interest of the press, and this movement has a lot of pain to bear—not only for African Americans, but for Caucasians as well. The pain of African Americans

is seen through the tears of those who have lost a loved one to police brutality and from those who hurt for the families as well. I don’t know an African American who hasn’t been touched by racism, so when you hear of another Black person who has died or been beaten due to racism, I know from personal experience that the pain is felt by all Black people, not only the ones it directly effects. Unfortunately, pain is what binds all African Americans together.

But, I have observed that this movement has gone beyond the pain of African Americans. All races are seeing our struggle and responding with pain of their own. Many Caucasians have come to not only know but acknowledge the pain of African Americans. This is why the turnout at the protests is so diverse, at times dominated by a multi-racial crowd. Caucasians have come out in large numbers to support the Black Lives Matter movement, at times more fiercely than the African American community. At the protest at Sugar Hill, I noticed more Caucasians showed up than African Americans, and I believe that is what upset the



organizer the most. The Black community drove by and honked their horns in support but didn't come out to march. It was a similar scenario in Cabbagetown. The demonstration was a majority White gathering, and again the Black community drove by in support, but did not come to help demonstrate. However, another protest I attended at Johns Creek, Georgia had a majority African American crowd, so a conclusion could be that the diversity of the participants depends on the area in which you have the demonstration.

But I believe the matter of who comes out to participate in demonstrations is more than demographics; history also plays a role. According to their municipal websites, Cabbagetown was founded in 1881, Sugar Hill in 1939, and Johns Creek was incorporated in 2006. Areas with rich histories and backgrounds of White dominance carry the load of their predecessors' racist beliefs—generations of a mindset to silence the African American voice. So, even now when Blacks are demographically significant, it should not come as a surprise that the Black communities of these cities do not believe their voices will make a difference. They are all located in former slave states. And from my interview with Nin, I found out that Cabbagetown was the area where the White community lived when the town was founded. From what I observed while I was there, the White community wants to live in unity with the Black community, but the history of the town is getting in the way. Members of the Black community still do not feel comfortable coming to the White dominated demonstrations. I believe they need to do this so that the pain can be replaced with another emotion, love.

From what I observed, emotions ran high at all the protests I attended, whether they were peaceful or not, whether they had a high turnout or not. The people who take the time to come to the protests are serious about what they want from the law makers. For instance, the councilman from Johns Creek wants healthcare reform, along with education and criminal justice reform. Ade from Cabbagetown wants the police to lose their legal immunity so they can be prosecuted. Zai, whom I met at a protest in Atlanta, Georgia, says he and his organization, the Community Movement Builders, also feel police are treated differently when they commit crimes, and wants to see police funds used to create an alternative option to calling the police when there is a problem. Even though Zai sees non-Black participation in #BLM protests as a distraction, both he and Ade (who is a

White woman) have proven that common ground can be reached if two different parties on the same side stop and listen to one another. Despite their different backgrounds, they agree that the police should not be given legal immunity. This is the unity needed to end social injustice in our country.

The Councilman was one of the older people I interviewed, and he seemed to want to encourage the young people more than anything else. He mentioned he was around to witness these same protests 40 years ago and he didn't want the young people of today to lose hope. In December 1979, a man by the name of Arthur McDuffie died from being beaten by police. Six months later, when four White officers involved in McDuffie's death were found not guilty by an all-White jury, thousands of Miamians took to the streets, sparking unrest that led to 18 deaths (Pinsker 2020). This happened in the Councilman's time, but it reminded me of the Rodney King beating by police, which happened in Los Angeles in 1992. Then too, the police involved were not convicted, even though they almost beat him to death. Fury over the acquittal—stoked by years of racial and economic inequality in the city—spilled over into the streets, resulting in five days of rioting in Los Angeles (Sastray & Bates 2017). Even though the attack had been caught on camera, the police were still released without consequences. This is why Ade from Cabbagetown believes that police should not be given immunity; the threat of consequence needs to be implemented to make officers think before they act.

I discovered a reference on YouTube to the Rogersville #Blacklivesmatter protest I had attended by a reporter named Jeff Bobo. While listening to the crowd on Bobo's recording of the Rogersville's protest, I heard a man say, referring to how the town was run, "This is a good ol' boy system." A "good ol' boy" is a White Southerner who conforms to the values, culture, or behavior of his peers. This mindset gives organizations like the police and our political leaders the idea that as long as they stick together they can get away with anything. This is the comfort zone that needs to be eliminated in our society, but a tradition that is so imbedded in our social reality will not be removed easily. From the perspective of an African American living in the south, this form of comradery is decades old and the ones that use it do not want it to go away. The fight to change the social norms of our country on this point is a movement for equality for all, instead of privilege for some. To succeed, the tradition of privi-

lege, for the police and for White people generally, will have to be reevaluated.

Noam Chomsky has tweeted, “The more privilege you have, the more opportunity you have. The more opportunity you have, the more responsibility you have.” People of privilege normally have greater platforms to voice their opinions and greater opportunities of influence. So, it is only natural to believe that the level of influence warrants a greater degree of responsibility to advocate for the common good of all. This is why it is so important that Whites be involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. But privilege can also mean, in the words of the sociologist and activist DaShanne Stokes, “not knowing you’re hurting others and not listening when they tell you.” This kind of privilege is especially hurtful when thinking of the families of the victims of police brutality who have pleaded with officers to spare their loved ones and were ignored. But this is also why the images of the protest marches of today are so important—images of different races standing together. The coming together of all races to stand as one voice against discrimination is a powerful statement to the privileged that all eyes are watching them, not just the eyes of African Americans, and to the underprivileged that their voices have been heard.

The participants in the protests that I interviewed had specific reasons for being there that were personal to them, but multiple people were there for the same reasons. Most couldn’t stand to sit at home and not help bring about the change they longed for. Some were so fed up with the brutality that they were seeing on the news that they had to act. The older generation wanted to encourage the younger generation so they would not give up the cause. And others wanted to show the law makers that there are hundreds of thousands of voters who don’t believe like they do. Whatever the reason, the people who attended protests were highly motivated and unyielding in their determination for social change. None wanted to give up and all believed in this new movement. It was John Lewis who said, “Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America” (Thome 2020). These are the words these protesters are standing on. A new movement, fueled by the past to make a brighter future for us all.

## Christians and Protesting

The group, Reconcile.com, partnering with Black Lives Matter, was responsible for a demonstration in Atlanta, Georgia on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Due to Covid-19 restrictions I was not allowed into the park. I had to try and find a shady spot on the sidewalk and listen from afar. The speaker focused on how this movement was different from the 60’s because all races and the church are coming together to stand against inequality. He was encouraging the people to take advantage of the opportunity God has given us and not go back to business as usual after the media has left. The message continued in this manner and was well received by the crowd. No one was here to cause trouble. In fact, it looked more like a church revival than a protest.

The language used at the rally was: freedom, peace through Jesus, prayer, unity. This language was different from other rallies and from what I had heard on TV, which was more like: stop killing us, no justice no peace, and fight—more angry and aggressive language than the language of the Reconcile group. The feeling of unity and hope was everywhere. I saw a mask that said, “Jesus is love,” which let me know that there is more than one way to protest for justice. After looking around for a while, I did notice that not everyone was expressing their feelings through Jesus. Children were wearing, “I can’t breathe” T-shirts, a message that I hope will cause them to realize the importance of these protests for the future.

While I was at a protest in Nashville on the Fourth of July, the crowd was chanting, “Black lives matter” and “no justice no peace.” This was something I had heard before, but the energy of the crowd made it new. There was no one to talk to during the march this time. Everyone was focused on moving and chanting, but I did find people on the sidewalk to talk to. Stopping to get a break from the heat, I was able to take a few pictures and have brief conversations. One was with a group of four young people who were resting on the sidewalk under a tree. The man in the group was a young Christian who wanted to express his outrage with the police brutality in our country. When I approached him and explained why I was at the rally he became excited and started asking *me* questions. He asked, “Do you believe the protests will last?” I told him since new cases are continuing to be found, which is fueling the fire, I don’t believe the protests will end any time soon. He agreed with me and added he couldn’t just sit at home and do nothing, that is why he

and his companions were protesting. After our talk, I began marching again with the crowd.

He later caught up with me and explained his church doesn't believe in protests. Even though they are the result of injustice, they don't support them. He didn't know how to talk to his congregation, and he asked me if I knew how he could talk to them. I felt a little awkward about giving a total stranger advice, but I could tell he was really upset about his situation and was looking for any kind of help. I thought about what I had learned in theology class when it came to having tough conversations with people who do not believe the way you do. I told him to begin by asking them a lot of questions and to try to find out why they believe the way they do. Then he might find a common ground from which to start a conversation. "You just need one thing that could help you have a beginning," I said, "then you can move on from there." After I said this his friends started calling him away, so we exchanged phone numbers and he said he would text me later so we could talk more. Then he went back to his friends. I don't know if he will actually text me or not, but I hope I was able to help him. Upon reflection I wish I had reminded him of the many instances of marching and protesting in the Bible. I believe having something to show his congregation would have made them think more about whether or not their beliefs were correct.

"The presupposition of all valid and coherent Christian thinking is that God has acted to reveal and effect his purpose for the world in the manner made known in the Bible" (Newbigin 1989, 8). There are moments of revolution in the Bible, where social injustice ruled, and with God by their side the people rose up and fought back, stories where injustices were overthrown by people who believed in righteousness and truth, and had beliefs that led them to act. There are people who question whether Christians should be involved in the protests. With so much violence being shown in the media, is protesting something that Christians should do? As I have witnessed in Georgia, protests can be peaceful and even Christian led. The very first protest I went to in Olympic Park, Georgia was organized by a Christian organization, and the demonstration was full of uplifting prayer and positive language. The world needs prayer *and* protesting, and as I have discovered through studying the Bible, standing publicly for justice is not against God's teaching. For instance, the march around Jericho was a peaceful declaration of the Israelites' victory over the people of Jericho. God gave the Israelites specific

instructions to follow, and if they obeyed his word, they would have victory. The act of marching was used for the purpose of awareness and intent by the Israelites. Marching outside the walls of Jericho the people couldn't help but notice the Israelites and acknowledge their existence; it forced a response. The Israelites were there intending on taking the city that was promised to them by God. They marched and demonstrated God's way. So, based on this Bible story, a peaceful demonstration for justice is not beyond the scope of Christian beliefs or practice.

When the Israelites left Egypt, that was a march for freedom and liberation, again led by God, out of oppression by the Egyptians, a mass exodus out of the city and into the wilderness because the Israelites longed for social equality. The struggle for social equality is something African Americans have dealt with for far too long. Even in our modern society, where I live African Americans continue to be looked down on and segregated against. It is a mindset that I have personally witnessed being passed down from generation to generation in the Caucasian families in my community. How else can such a representation of hate last throughout the years. "Reason does not operate in a vacuum. The power of a human mind to think rationally is only developed in a tradition which itself depends on the experience of previous generations" (Newbigin 1989, 8-9). It is as though evil has attached itself to entire households and the families can't or won't realize it is there. The citizens of Rogersville come to mind. They loved their history, a history filled with slave trade and slavery, but believed racism wasn't in their town. Yet, when they saw a White protester marching with the Black protesters, a man said, "you're on the wrong side," a statement he did not hesitate to make and, by the look on his face, felt absolutely justified in saying. I cannot say racism resides only with the social elite, because I have seen Caucasians of all economic standings that believe in White supremacy. The African American race has escaped the whip of their subjugators, but we are still not completely free of them. They continue to try and make us afraid and to strive for the privileges they believe they are naturally entitled to. The march is a peaceful way to express and acknowledge the need for change. Some choose to let God lead the way, and some do not, but even if they don't, I have found the cause is no less noble, and no less rooted in God's call for justice.

As a Christian I want to lead by example and show that unity can work. When like minds come together

something amazing happens, they become a congregation. It is human nature to desire to be around others that share your beliefs. As a Christian I am a citizen of the kingdom of God and that is a social journey. By studying the life of Christ, I have learned how to interact with people around me as a Christ follower. "A kingdom's subjects have a collective *interdependence* based on the policies of their king. The kingdom of God is a network of persons who have yielded their hearts and relationships to the reign of God. It flourishes as God rules in our hearts *and* our social relations" (Kraybill 2018, 18). At the demonstration in Nashville on the Fourth of July, Christians and non-Christians stood together to protest for human rights. As a Christian I wanted to show the love of God, so I decided to speak to the police that were present and not just pass them by, and I wore a Christian T-shirt that was surprisingly well received. Being around secular people is an excellent time to show how God would handle the situation. Even though the protest was peaceful, I could sense the tension between the protesters and the police by the looks on their faces, both sides assuming the worst of the other. Riots prior to the Fourth of July protest had police on alert since the protesters had destroyed part of City Hall. I watched the protesters move on by, which showed that even though they were angry with the police, they did not give in to the temptation of violence. As Christians we are supposed to follow God's example and live a kingdom life. Christians attending a protest with non-Christians are able to show a kingdom example and influence non-Christians in the ways of the Lord. Rooted in the deep love and abiding grace of God, kingdom people seed new ways of thinking and living (Kraybill 2018, 17).

In order to help Christians to understand where the protesters are coming from a confusion of their practices needs to be cleared up. The act of kneeling at the protests is a topic of debate in Christian circles. My pastor spoke openly of his feelings about kneeling at the protests. He felt kneeling should be reserved for prayer to God, not used as a practice in a protest for social injustice. "You have to be careful who you kneel to," he would say in his sermons. Then, he would continuously kneel during his sermon when he was talking to God, as if to give an example as to how it was supposed to be done. However, in my view, the act of kneeling in the protests was not in submission to another entity, it was a recreation of the act that took the life of George Floyd, and the two should not be confused.

George Floyd's death was a tragedy that showed how deep the racist emotions of some people can go. For a man to dismiss the fact that he was being watched and commit an act of murder in plain view of the public is discouraging and scary. "Floyd 'took himself to the ground' while handcuffed at 8:19 pm., according to the charge document. That is when Chauvin placed his knee on Floyd's head and neck area while Floyd was lying prone on the pavement" (Graves, 2020). Eight minutes and forty-seven seconds later, George Floyd was dead. Several protests I have attended and witnessed recreate this act of kneeling on the ground for exactly eight minutes and forty-seven seconds to remember what happened to him and to put themselves in the moment of his death. I did not participate in this action, but standing there with the other protesters I was still aware of the length of time that poor man had to suffer under the officer's knee. It was a powerful and saddening feeling waiting for the time to expire. It felt like I was waiting for hours even though it was only a few minutes.

The act of kneeling holds a significant meaning for Christians and all who love God, but the debate should not be about protesters using the act of kneeling in their demonstrations. It should be about this sacred act being used to murder someone because he didn't fit into someone else's narrow worldview. Many of the scriptures in the Bible that talk about kneeling have one thing in common, they all reference prayer or worship. Romans 14:11 (KJV) says, "for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'" This moment is to be revered as precious and intimate, because at this moment you are relinquishing your pride and submitting to the power of God. Psalms 95:6 says, "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!" In the Christian community kneeling has special significance as part of our worship and honor to God. It should not be used to show submission to anything or anyone, because they would never be more worthy than our Lord. In that regard I can see where my pastor is coming from, and his kneeling during his sermons is his way of reminding the congregation of the importance of submitting to God. But as I said earlier, this is not the message the demonstrators are trying to convey. Being present at the protests gave me the perspective of a Christian in the middle of the demonstration, and I wasn't alone. I met several Christians that wanted to voice their outrage at the acts of law enforcement officers who abuse their authority and believe they are

above the laws of God and humanity. Many of these Christians chose to kneel along with their secular counterparts because the reasons for doing so were clearly explained by the organizers. The purpose was to recreate the last moments of George Floyd's life, not to replace the sanctity of our time of worship with our Lord.

From watching the news coverage, I can see how this protest movement has lit a fire in the people of America and across the globe. Why are so many people so vocal about the death of African American men and women? As the enemy tries to sow fear and hatred, our God is also moving the hearts of the world. Kat, a Caucasian woman from a protest I attended in Cabbagetown, became emotional with the first question of her interview. I asked her why she participated in the protests, and she immediately started to cry. Then she said, "because enough is enough." She told me her heart was broken at the pointless violence she saw on television. She is not the first non-minority to sympathize with non-Whites in their struggle with social inequality, but I do believe God has his hand especially on his own, the Christian community, and that he is proving love is more powerful than hate.

"Call to a Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom" is a report on the meeting Martin Luther King Jr. had with his inner circle before the Freedom March in Washington D.C. I reference this report because it helps us understand the link between protests and prayer. In advance of the march, King, Randolph, and Wilkins convened a planning session at Washington's Metropolitan Baptist Church (King, Randolph, and Wilkins 1957, 151). The men gathered to pray and to assure a peaceful protest against segregation and social inequality. As important as the march was for social change, the prayer meeting was important too. It showed the Christian beliefs of the organizers and how they decided to march with God and follow his lead instead of their own. It set an example for Christians who want to protest peacefully for social change without questioning whether they belong in public marches. "As we approach the third anniversary of the ruling of the United States Supreme Court against racially segregated public school systems," they wrote, "we invite all believers in the God-given concept of the brotherhood of men and in the American ideal of equality, to assemble, review the national scene, give thanks for the progress to date, and pray for the wiping out of the evils that still beset our nation" (King, Randolph, and Wilkins 1957, 151).

The demonstration at Olympic Park was more like a church revival than a protest for social equality. Three speakers at the demonstration prayed for the people and the families of the victims. It gave me hope to see so many people come to a Christian led demonstration. If you think back to the struggles for social equality of the past you can see a pattern of protest and prayer. In 1965, on Bloody Sunday, John Lewis met with close to six hundred demonstrators at Brown's Chapel before the march started. "I read a short statement aloud for the benefit of the press, explaining why we were marching today. Then we all knelt to one knee and bowed our heads as Andy delivered a prayer" (Lewis 1998, 337). I can see from my observations and the media coverage a spiritual war is raging in the hearts of the people, a war that began in ancient times and will continue to go on until the evil is removed from this world. Since Jesus is the only one who can accomplish such a feat, prayer is our best weapon against the wickedness of racism. Prayer invites God into the struggle and allows the people to rely not on themselves, but on the power of the All Mighty which insures victory. 1 Corinthians 15:57 says, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

### **A Christ Led Solution**

As an African American, I am devastated every time I see a news report of another Black man or woman killed by police. The situation has become so desperate that protests have been happening every day. Prayer is my solution to the social unrest of our nation. We need to bring God into the picture, or we cannot have hope of a peaceful ending. Isaiah 32:17 says, "The effect of righteousness will be peace." I have looked at the issues talked about in the interviews I had with protesters and now offer my reflections based on a Christian's perspective.

The councilman, whom I met at a protest in Johns Creek, Georgia, wanted to encourage the young people and remind minorities to vote. He believed this would bring about the change he wanted. But I believe the people of our nation also have to return to prayer, because this is how we are going to see real change. God can change the minds of the people in our neighborhoods as well as the law makers. The councilman was alarmed that the same crimes against Black Americans are happening now that happened 40 years ago. But I believe that this time is different. The world is different and God can change the minds of

those whose hearts were hardened in the past. A new awakening is happening in this country. Those who would undermine a better way of thinking about race can no longer live in the shadows. The wickedness in their hearts and minds are exposed for the world to see and sides are being taken. The time is *now* for God's people to speak up and minister to these people, encouraging them to listen to the Bible and become kingdom people. A kingdom person follows Jesus's example of forgetting about the self and focusing on uplifting others. The councilman did believe that with police reform there could be a coming together of Black communities and law enforcement. But I believe that coming together is going to take more than new laws; there has to be an understanding of pent-up emotions on both sides of the issue. Black Americans have gone on camera and asked, "Why?," with no response from law enforcement. No one is answering this question. Without understanding there can be no healing, and without healing there can be no coming together.

Nin, from Cabbagetown, Georgia, wanted to do more than complain about the protests, she wanted to actively push for change. She wanted new laws that would make it easier to stand against racism and bring awareness to the subject so people who say racism doesn't exist would have to face the facts about our country's society. She also wants our government to form a committee to address the antiquated laws of individual states so they can be done away with. I admire her courage and determination to see this movement through to the end. I would also remind her that she is not alone in her fight. God walks with all of us and he goes before us. With him the battle is already won, so we need to allow God to fight our battles for us. But this does not mean that we do not take action. Ephesians 6:11 says, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."

I did not expect the emotions I felt while I was at the protest at Cabbagetown. There was a genuine feeling of belonging and joy when I was with those people. I prayed for their community because I wanted that feeling of joy to spread to the hearts of their neighbors. That was a community on the forefront of the conflict, since the police station that deployed the officer who killed Rayshard Brooks was from that area. I was happy to see the people have not fallen into despair and that they were open to voicing themselves without violence. It shows God is on the move and he is using his people to influence the hearts and minds

of the ones who can influence others in their community. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

Kat, also from Cabbagetown, is the one who became emotional while she was answering my question, why do you come to the protests? She was an older woman and she felt like she had been dealing with racial inequality issues her whole life. She wanted to finally see unity come from the protests. Cabbagetown is more proactive than other towns I have visited. They have community meetings where the local police have attended to communicate with the community. I suggest that during these meetings the religious leaders can also take the opportunity to reach out to the community and to the officers to bring about the unity Kat wants to see. Even if none of the attendees are Christians, a Christian perspective will be helpful in positively defusing the issues in the community. This is also an opportunity to educate police on the needs of the community and allow them to get to know the people they are policing. The point is to bring back the value of human life. Also, if you know the person you are about to kill, you will think twice before you pull the trigger. Mark 12:31 says, "The second [commandment] is this: 'You should love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." These words are a message to live by. If the people of this nation would take this message seriously then the unlawful killing of minorities would stop. It is worth asking ourselves the question, "What do you believe needs to happen for this problem to decrease or stop?" I asked this question during my interviews and Kat mainly focused on education of people and police and finding an alternative to calling the police for low-risk situations. Both are very good ideas, but unless the education involves a call to Christian love the lessons will be forgotten and we will find ourselves in the same situation again.

Clay, another resident of Cabbagetown, believed in numbers to bring awareness and change. Even though she was determined to bring awareness, she was not convinced real change would happen with this movement. She mainly wanted to let African Americans know that not all White people oppose #Blacklivesmatter and that there are White people that will support African Americans. Clay was hoping the demonstration would result in a greater voter turnout,

and that a new president would bring change and a new attitude in society. Social equity is the goal she is working for. The people of Cabbagetown are very dedicated to the #Blacklivesmatter movement, and they have come up with their own ideas on how to improve the situation. So, while Clay doesn't believe the change will happen this time, I believe it can. I have faith that this time will be different. While I was engaged in this research, the election occurred and Joe Biden is our new president. Change has already begun, and a new start is within our reach. After every election I always pray for the president and his time in office, and this time was no different. I appreciated Clay wanting to let African Americans know she was on our side, but one demonstration is not enough to touch the hearts of Black Americans. There needs to be ongoing interaction between all races to make a lasting impression. With their community meetings, Whites can make a point of inviting the minorities into their community. It's important to fellowship together and be seen with one another so a feeling of unity can be felt by everyone. Stand together, eat together, laugh and minister to one another. This paints a better picture of unity than just demonstrating while the Black community drives by and watches from a safe distance. 2 Corinthians 13:11 says, "Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."

Ade, of Cabbagetown, feels a deep sense of conviction that what has been going on with the police and African Americans is wrong. Her brother is an officer of the same precinct that responded to Rayshard Brooks' shooting. Her family supports the police, but Ade doesn't believe the police need to be supported. She is protesting to defund the police and use the funds for mental health programs. Ade wants the police to be held accountable for the crimes they commit and their immunity to prosecution removed. From what I could tell, this is an issue that has not been addressed yet by her family. Improving police-citizen relations is essential for the healing process needed for social change. While listening to her speak I felt there was a missed opportunity in their routine. After every demonstration on the corner the protesters gather at Ade's house to discuss race relations and how they can improve. This would be a good time to not only discuss race relations, but to pray with organizers and participants. When you involve God in what you are doing it makes you feel like you are not alone in your fight. That can give people the push and the courage

to keep going. The small demonstrations like the one in Cabbagetown are just as important as the larger demonstrations. The small protests are more intimate, and the participants can develop relationships with one another. Praying with someone is a good way of getting to know them on a deeper level. If they are worried about their safety, you are going to know. If they are depressed from what they see on TV, you are going to know. These meetings can be used to strengthen the minds of the participants and develop quasi-kinship relationships that would give the movement the longevity it needs to bring real change. When I say real change, I mean in the person-to-person relationships between people of all races. Developing new legislation is good for the nation, but the people can change how they see and act around each other on a day-to-day basis. This is the change that can happen now, a change that the current generation can hope for, if they will put faith in more than the movement.

Zai, of Atlanta, wanted to bring change through a grass-roots organization with local people. He wanted community control with direct democracy. Through protests, the Community Movement Builders would gain the visibility he wanted to promote his organization. He was promoting liberated talk, community patrols, and self-policing through the demonstrations. He wanted an alternative to calling the police, and instead to have people who are experts in de-escalation respond. He was pushing to de-militarize the police and transfer the power to the people. Zai is prior military, and he compared what is happening with police tactics to what he experienced in Iraq. He viewed the streets a war zone.

He told me a story about what happened at his first demonstration. On that day, the people who showed up were from an anti-Trump rally that had happened earlier in the day. He spoke with enthusiasm about how the protest was disrupted by police who showed up to arrest one of the protesters. He had to wrangle the rest of the participants away and finish the demonstration. He referred to the incident as fun, as though it added a little excitement to the protest. Now, he works security for other demonstrations. His duties include, should the police turn violent, making sure people turn on their phone cameras and finding people who know first aid.

As he was talking, Zai recalled a protester that cursed out a police officer and threw things at them. He condemned his behavior saying, "that's not what we wanted that day." Rather, he advocates for controlled violence, that is, to allow violent protests as

long as they are planned. As a Christian I cannot condone violence of any kind. Conducting this interview was the hardest for me to do. Objectively, I asked my questions and allowed him to answer without any input from me, but internally I wanted to minister to him. I could sympathize and empathize with his point of view. Years of pain and mistrust have built up and the outcome is to distance yourself from what is hurting you. The protests give African Americans a platform to voice our anger and frustration at the cause of our suffering, but following the dark path of segregation will not give us peace. 1 John 2:11 says, “But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

Even if a self-governing community were possible, it is not the direction we as a people need to be going. The Community Movement Builders are in a position to move the people in either a positive or negative direction. There is nothing wrong with empowering the people, but human power should always be under God’s authority and exercised according to his example of how to live and grow in our communities. Ephesians 4:29-32 says, “Let no corrupted talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” I want so badly for the people on both sides of this issue to be able to embrace these teachings and have the peace they are seeking. God has shown us the way, the question is, why can’t we follow him? I believe tradition is what is getting in the way of God’s path. African Americans have been taught to not trust officers from the moment they are old enough to understand directions. And now that police brutality has taken over the media, mothers and fathers of Black men are telling their children to be even more cautious of police. I pray for the Lord’s protection every day. I teach my children to do the same, and we have been blessed because of it. Allowing God to take over your actions can start a new tradition of prayer, instead of passing down fear and mistrust.

The people of Georgia taught me a lot about social interaction. I spoke with African Americans that wanted to peacefully protest to voice their position on social inequality, but I also talked to African Americans who would choose a more violent option if it suited them. Both ways will get them noticed and I could understand why they would use them. When I was in Rogersville and was surrounded by people who didn’t trust me because of the color of my skin, I was not able to contain my anger. I spoke out with intense emotions and wanted everyone to hear what I said. I used my anger not to provoke anger in others, but to make others acknowledge me as a human being with feelings. It was Aristotle who said, “Anybody can become angry—that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.” Gamson’s study has proved that violent protests can have a greater effect on achieving your goals:

Gamson argued ([1975] 1990) that violent social movements are more likely to achieve their goals than nonviolent movements. Analyzing data on American social movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Gamson argued that movements employing strikes, violence and other disruptive techniques are more able to draw attention to their goals, impose costs on political incumbents, and ultimately achieve their goals than movements using non-disruptive techniques. (Rojas 2006, 2148)

Yet I do not believe this is the way God has taught us to demonstrate. When you add violence to a protest, you provoke violence in others.

By the examples in the Bible, peaceful demonstrating is something I know God approves of. The key is making God the center of the movement. When you do that, you always have hope of success. You can rely on his word to get you through the times when you feel your message is not being heard. As humans it is so easy for us to take over and believe that because we are involved, we need to take control, especially when we are personally invested in the outcome. But the movement for social equality is bigger than any organization. We need help from the one who can go before us and pave the way for our victory. This is the message I would give the members

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Art of Rhetoric*. See <https://philosiblog.com/2013/08/07/anybody-can-become-angry-but-to-be-angry-at-the-right-time-and-for-the-right-purpose-is-not-within-everybodys-power/>. Accessed 7/26/21.



of the Community Movement Builders. I can tell they have a lot of dedication in their organization and they only want to protect the African American communities of our nation. But they are not looking at the big picture of the social equality movement. Isolating Black Americans in their communities is not going to make them safer than they are now. All races need to come together. If we can stand together under God's authority, we will have peace with justice because both will come from God.

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# Accepted Power: Black Authority and the Multiethnic Church

Robin Scott

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Black people, specifically American descendants of slaves, and the American church have had a complex and painful relationship. From the slave plantation, to Jim Crow, to the Civil Rights Movement, and Black Lives Matter, the relationship between Black Christians and the church seems to have improved. Black slaves are no longer being beaten or imprisoned for secretly having their own worship services, nor are Black Christians openly being told they can't sit on a pew in a White church, nor are Black Christians the only ones speaking out about racism and injustice, as many White Christians have joined in the fight. In an effort to unite Christians in America, the multiethnic church movement has gained momentum. But what does the dynamic between Black Christians and the American church look like now? I investigate this question through study of the contemporary multiethnic church movement. While Black and White Christians have come together in churches, it is not without relational issues that are the result of the unreconciled past.

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Since the establishment of America the label for descendants of African slaves has had a journey of its own. From the derogatory “n word” to negro, colored, African American, black, and now Black. As the label has evolved, so has the race into an ethnic group with culture and language. The awakening of America concerning the plight of the black American has caused an evaluation in how we identify this group. The consensus is that respect is owed to black Americans to be honored as a race and ethnic group. In July, 2020, Coleman from the New York Times wrote,

W.E.B. Du Bois had started a letter-writing campaign asking publications, including The Times, to capitalize the N in Negro, a term long since eradicated from The Times’s pages. “The use of a small letter for the name of twelve million Americans and two hundred million human beings,” he once wrote, was “a personal insult.”

The Times turned him down in 1926 before coming around in 1930, when the paper wrote that the new entry in its stylebook—its internal guide on grammar and usage—was “not merely a typographical change,” but “an act in recognition of racial self-respect.”

Decades later, a month-long internal discussion at The Times led the paper on Tuesday to make, for

similar reasons, its latest style change on race—capitalizing Black when describing people and cultures of African origin.

“We believe this style best conveys elements of shared history and identity, and reflects our goal to be respectful of all the people and communities we cover,” said Dean Baquet, The Times’s executive editor, and Phil Corbett, associate managing editor for standards, in a memo to staff.

Conversations about the change began in earnest at The Times and elsewhere after the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests, said Mike Abrams, senior editor for editing standards. Several major news media organizations have made the same call including The Associated Press, whose stylebook has long been an influential guide for news organizations.

“It seems like such a minor change, black versus Black,” The Times’s National editor, Marc Lacey, said. “But for many people the capitalization of that one letter is the difference between a color and a culture.” (Coleman 2020)

For the purpose of this article I will reference Black and White Americans with capital letters.

## Segregated vs. Multiethnic Churches

Black lives matter is a statement. It is a factual statement. It is a statement that historically, in America, has not been accepted as fact. Since the start of American slavery, the Black life has been assigned to the lower caste of the American racial caste system. The Black life was sold for money and was minimized to nothing that resembled a human life. The Black life was emancipated only to find itself *still* bound by a system that sought to maintain its hold in a “lesser than” position, despite the freedom given on paper. And the American church found itself at an intersection, with a decision to make, which side to take? To represent the Kingdom meant to go against this caste system and usher in God’s way, Kingdom culture. To represent America meant the acquisition of power, position, and money. The cost for it all was the cross, if the church would only put down the cross and accept the rules of the caste system. The decision was made, and not only did Black lives not matter in America but Black lives didn’t matter in the dominant American church. But today, in the midst of the demand for social change, God has provided the church with yet another opportunity, another intersection, at which to make the right decision.

I decided to spend some time studying the church I believe to be at the center of this intersection, the multiethnic church. What I found was a movement with a vision to bring together all ethnicities in America, especially Black and White Christians, and to build a culture of unity in the American church. The Black life matters more in the multiethnic church today than it has in White churches in the past. However, the multiethnic church is yet limited by the rules of the American caste system for the exercise of power and authority. As a result, the Black life, the Black voice, has limited power and hardly any authority in the multiethnic church.

“What are you?” This is a question I was often asked while growing up with such a fair-skinned complexion. It became even more puzzling to my friends when they would meet my white-skinned, green eyed, Black momma. My family is Creole and originated from Louisiana. Creole people in Louisiana were a mixed race consisting of French and Black (and sometimes Native American) origins (or ancestries). My mom was someone who was able to “pass” racially. Racial passing in the US meant that a light-skinned Black person could present themselves as, or “pass,”

for White. In their article, “Passing as Black: Racial Identity Work among Biracial Americans,” Nikki Khanna and Cathryn Johnson explain that racial passing “has generally been understood as a phenomenon in which a person of one race identifies and presents himself or herself as another (usually white)” (Khanna and Johnson 2010, 380). However, my mom and her siblings always answered the “what are you?” question with “Black.” Back then to be Black in America meant that you had a drop of blood from African ancestry. F. James Davis, a sociology professor and author of *Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition* explains:

To be considered black in the United States not even half of one’s ancestry must be African black. But will one-fourth do, or one-eighth, or less? The nation’s answer to the question “Who is black?” has long been that a black person is any person with any known African black ancestry. This definition reflects the long experience with slavery and later with Jim Crow segregation. In the South it became known as the “one-drop rule,” meaning that a single drop of “black blood” makes a person a black. It is also known as the “one black ancestor rule,” some courts have called it the “traceable amount rule,” and anthropologists call it the “hypo-descent rule,” meaning that racially mixed persons are assigned the status of the subordinate group. This definition emerged from the American South to become the nation’s definition, generally accepted by whites and blacks. Blacks had no other choice. (Davis 1991, 4)

Having a Creole mother meant that I spent a lot of time going back and forth between two worlds: the Black and the White. It was not because my mom was trying to pass for White, but my mom was often forced (or socially pushed) to go wherever she could be accepted at that time. Sometimes it was White spaces and other times it was in Black spaces.

In Houston during the 1980s, diversity was not a “hot topic” of conversations. I remember growing up attending an all-White Catholic church. Although my family—whose skin tones come in multiple shades of what we Americans call Black—were the only Blacks in this White church, my mom decided to take my sisters and I to this church because it was closest to our home. On one particular Sunday, however, we attended the Black Catholic church a little further away. I remember feeling a sense of community once inside.

Kids were running around playing with each other like they were cousins or brother and sisters. Families held full conversations beyond the courteous “good morning” greeting. It was a very different experience from our mornings at the White church, where people smiled and greeted us, but conversations hardly ever went past that. When worship began at the Black church, parishioners sang aloud jubilantly and even clapped their hands! I could not believe what I was seeing and hearing. After the service had ended and we were on our way home, I remember asking my mom, in a somewhat begging manner, if we could return the next Sunday. We did.

Early on in my life I had a clear understanding that church here in America meant Black or White. It meant that Black people went to their own church and White people went to their own church. In 1954, *Brown vs The Board of Education* ushered in a new era of societal integration. However, due to the separation of church and state in America, this ruling had no effect on the American church. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1960) made a famous observation saying, “it is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.” Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and center stage is a new church, the multiethnic church—a church where Black people and White people come together into one unified body of Christ.

The multiethnic church is supposed to represent a place where Black people are accepted and free to be “themselves,” and White people worship alongside them as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is supposed to be a place where racial stereotypes, both Black and White, are discredited. It is supposed to be a place where the outside racial issues of America are reconciled under the blood and banner of Jesus Christ. It is supposed to be a place where the unjust American racial caste system of power has no authority. But the multiethnic church does not fully promote or accept Black authority as I will demonstrate below.

America is not the first place where a diverse group of people have come together in churches. During the first years of the New Testament church, scripture suggests that people from different backgrounds and ethnicities came together to hear the Good News. In fact, it was quite a diverse scene at Antioch, the place where followers of the Way were first called Christians.

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the

word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. (Acts 11:19-26, ESV)

In order to fix a crooked line of tape you have to lift it up with your hand press firmly on the beginning and start at the beginning laying the tape yet again, with hopes that this time it doesn’t stray from the straight path. Something happened between the beginning years of Christianity to the formation of the American church that greatly altered our understanding of what it meant to be Christians, an offspring of the New Testament church. It is necessary for the American church to trace back to the beginning of *the* church, so that it can see how Christ brought together both Jew and Gentile into one people. Despite the cultural differences and preferences Paul instructed that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Today, many Americans claim that separate churches are needed because Whites and Blacks have different worship styles. But it is profoundly absurd to say Black and White Christians can’t worship together because of worship style preferences when the early church in America showed that even White Christians enjoyed the preaching style of Black preachers. (Mitchell 2004, 50). It is profoundly absurd to say Black and White Christians can’t worship their same God together because of worship style preferences when those same Christians can be found eating at the same restaurants, shopping at the same stores, watching the same movies, engaged in the same TikTok dances and even going to the same music concerts. This illusion of a need for separation due to worship style preference is an illusion crafted by the

enemy. If we can be unified in various ways in the world, we certainly can and should be unified in lifting up the banner of Christ.

We must use the New Testament church as the example of a diversified body because that is exactly the reason that Christ established it, so that *everyone* who believed could come together by the blood of the cross into one body. It was to establish his Kingdom. If Revelation 7:9 tells us that every nation is coming together into a multitude that is praising the Lord together, then we quite urgently need to figure out how to do that sooner rather than later.

One of the central pieces of research found within the multiethnic church movement is a study conducted in 2003 by Michael O. Emerson and Karen Chai Kim. In the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Emerson and Kim's research, called "Multiracial Congregations: An Analysis of Their Development and a Typology," defines and analyzes the types of multiethnic churches and hypothesizes the various issues that can arise within these churches. In it, Emerson and Kim observed:

Although some institutions must abide by laws aimed at decreasing racial disparity, religious congregations will remain beyond the reach of legislation. By virtue of their voluntary nature and the separation of church and state, religious congregations largely remain segregated by race . . . despite the racial integration that has been occurring in other institutions, the vast majority of the more than 300,000 religious congregations in the United States—the largest and most active voluntary associations—involve members who are of the same race. (2003, 217)

In 2003, sociologist George Yancey wrote *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches*. In the opening of his book, Yancey, a Black man married to a White woman, shared about his experience of being uncomfortable at a predominately White church in Texas where he lived. He mentions that his wife expressed his concerns with her women's study group and their response was somewhat expected. "They maintained that they were not prejudiced and that their church was quite open to people of all races. They stated that anyone was welcome, including people of other races. They simply could not understand why racial minorities did not come to their church" (Yancey 2003, 14). Yancey (2003, 14) concludes that, "the reason why this church

was going to remain predominately White for the conceivable future was not because the church leadership intentionally barred racial minorities. Rather, it was due to the inability of this church, like most American churches, to create multiracial Christian environments." It is important to mention that the multiethnic church movement started in predominately White evangelical churches. Most authors writing on this topic are speaking from the notion of transforming these predominately White churches into multiethnic churches. Yancey (2003, 18) stresses that, "multiracial churches can include any combination of racial groups in our society. . . [but] multiracial churches are more likely to be White and either Latino or Asian than to be White and Black."

Many multiethnic churches are trying to create an environment of *cultural pluralism*. Cultural pluralism is the idea that minorities can participate fully in the dominant society yet maintain their cultural differences. However, one of the main concerns in the multiethnic church is that minority integration into majority church settings will allow the dominant race's power to "overwhelm the integrity of the minority culture" (Yancy 2003, 30). Therefore, it is unable to maintain *cultural pluralism*. Yancey argues this point, writing:

They [the minorities] perceive assimilation as a further extension of white superiority. This philosophy of culture pluralism mandates that cultures of minority groups are to be respected and maintained in as pure a form as possible . . . the development of black theology has supported the idea of maintaining distinct African American congregations and liberation theology has supported the value of maintaining the uniqueness of Latino American congregations. Such theologies regard preventing the loss of black and Latino cultures as a priority for minority Christians. (2003, 31)

The multiethnic church can address the argument of cultural pluralism by creating a culture of accommodation instead of a culture of assimilation. This means intentionally building a diverse teaching team with Black and other minority teaching pastors and allowing them to preach from theologies that not only speak into their lives but the lives of the minority members of the church. In *Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church*, Mark Deymaz and Harry Li, in the opening chapter, express concerns

with the ability of the church to continue to proclaim Jesus Christ from a segregated platform. “For in an increasingly diverse and cynical society, people will no longer find credible the message of God’s love for all people when it’s proclaimed from segregated churches” (Deymaz and Li 2010, 37). It is easy to see the point the writers are making for the multiethnic church movement. The Gospel message of Jesus Christ cannot be advanced in a diverse country by an intentionally divided and segregated church body. It would seem that any church operating in this manner would lose its ability to be a credible witness for the Kingdom of God.

Deymaz insists that such a movement has nothing to do with race at all. “The pursuit of ethnic blends must be firmly rooted in God’s Word. In other words, it’s not about racial reconciliation; it’s about reconciling men and women to God through faith in Jesus Christ, and about reconciling a local church to the principles and practices of New Testament congregations of faith, such as existed at Antioch and Ephesus” (Deymaz and Li 2010, 37). The purpose of the multiethnic church movement, according to Deymaz, is soul salvation and the pursuit of reflecting the New Testament church. Interestingly enough, what Deymaz describes here is the primary purpose of the Christian church, not the need to label a church or movement *multiethnic*, which only emerges from the history of the American church. Unfortunately, very few writings on the multiethnic church movement address the history of the segregated church in America. The segregated church is the opposite of the multiethnic church; it is on the other side of the spectrum. So the reason for the multiethnic church is actually to make amends for the segregated church.

God created diversity. He created humanity not only in his image but in a variety of appearances. Just as diverse as we are, we also have different cultural experiences in the world. As Christians, those experiences are connected to our expression of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If those diverse cultural expressions of the Gospel can come together properly in the multiethnic church, then it can have a more holistic picture of God and his Kingdom. An important observation to make about the multiethnic church is that the majority of these churches will reflect a White American cultural expression of the Christian faith. So, it is necessary to make corrections now in the

multiethnic church while it is still young. In the discipline of missiology, self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting are understood and accepted as the first three “selves” in the empowerment of local churches. Paul Hiebert, a missionary anthropologist, coined the term “self-theologizing,” as a “fourth-self.” In his article, “The Surprising Relevance of the Three-Self Formula,” Robert Reese (2007, 26) explains what Hiebert means by this notion of a fourth self, writing that “by this he meant the ability of an indigenous church to read and interpret Scripture within its local culture.” At a deeper level, Hiebert (1984, 295) states that, “true contextualization, whether of word, practice or institutional structure, requires a deep knowledge of the historico-culture contexts of both the Christian message and the culture into which it is to be planted. This must include a knowledge not only of the explicit meanings of cultural forms, but also the implicit theological assumptions upon which they rest.” Based on Hiebert’s theory, each of the “others” that make up the minority body in a multiethnic church will likely have their own cultural understanding and interpretation of Scripture separate from the majority culture, even if learned from White cultural understanding. Thus, if the only preaching of Scripture is done by White American pastors, then the “multiethnic” church is not receiving a multiethnic sermon. It is imperative that multiethnic churches create and maintain diverse teaching teams so that there is diversity in the expression and cultural translation of scripture. It should learn from the New Testament church, the original multiethnic church. The New Testament church had diverse leadership and were often sent out in diverse teams. “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1 ESV).

According to two historians of the Black Church, the struggles of the multiethnic church and the lack of strategies required for “building” a healthy one are all symptoms of the ailing relationship between White and Black Christians.<sup>1</sup> Henry H. Mitchell’s *Black Church Beginnings: The Long Hidden Realities of the First Years* and Dr. Carter G. Woodson’s *The History of the Negro Church* both paint a less familiar narrative

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that outside of sociologists (or sociological) and leading voices of the movement, most people will label a church with 80% White “predominately White” or “White,” not multiethnic.

of the relationship between Black and White Christians. Mitchell explains:

It must be understood that prior to the 1800s no (Black) church, North or South, evolved without some form of white denominational recognition, trusteeship of land title, and/or certification to the government by respected whites that the Blacks involved would cause the slave system no trouble. . . . Whether whites exited mixed congregations and formed their own, or whites invited the blacks to exit and form their own separate congregation, the black group was always thought of as the white church's mission, subordinate to the sponsoring church. This arrangement was inevitable because of the legal requirement for white sponsors and guarantors. Without such, the government prohibited blacks from gathering for mass worship at all. (2004, 48)

It is evident that, from the time of the establishment of Christianity in America, White people have had the controlling hand even in the setup of Black churches. Stories about the "Invisible Institution"—the secret outlawed gatherings of Black Christians—were not heard of or shared until after the Emancipation Proclamation. Albert J. Raboteau in his book, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, points out that secret religious gatherings of slaves were very common. They desired preaching from their own preachers, songs that uplifted them and gave them hope for something better, and reminders of their freedom in Jesus Christ (something they did not hear at their master's church) (Raboteau 1978, 218). Raboteau (1978, 219) shares that, "at the core of the slaves' religion was a private place, represented by the cabin room, the overturned pot, the prayin' ground, and the 'hush harbor.' This place the slave kept for his own. For no matter how religious the master might be the slave knew that the master's religion did not countenance prayers for his slaves' freedom in this world."

All of this is not to say that separation is necessary to maintain cultural diversity in the church, but that there must no longer be cultural assimilation but cultural accommodation. In our coming together all parties must be represented and have equal power and authority. The multiethnic church must strive to make a safe space especially for minority groups to express their faith along with the majority.

## Power

*Too often the price exacted by society for security and respectability is that the Christian movement in its formal expression must be on the side of the strong against the weak. This is a matter of tremendous significance, for it reveals to what extent a religion that was born of a people acquainted with persecution and suffering has become the cornerstone of a civilization and of nations whose very position in modern life has too often been secured by a ruthless use of power applied to weak and defenseless peoples.*

Howard Thurman (1976, 1)

Much of the dynamics and struggles for power and authority between Black and White Christians have to do with the social order established in the foundation of America. It is clear that the social hierarchy of America established itself inside the Christian church as well. Wilkerson explains:

The hierarchy of caste is not about feelings or morality. It is about power—which groups have it and which do not. It is about resources—which caste is seen as worthy of them and which are not, who gets to acquire and control them and who does not. It is about respect, authority, and assumptions of competence—who is accorded these and who is not . . . . In the American caste system, the signal of rank is what we call race, the division of humans on the basis of their appearance. In America, race is the primary toll and the visible decoy, the front man, for caste. (2020,17)

In America, White people are at the top of the racial caste system and Black people are at the bottom. The difference between the top and bottom is one of power and authority. Max Weber's definition of power is, "the ability to exercise one's will over others" (Griffiths and Keirns 2015). To exercise one's power it is necessary to have authority. Sociologists Griffiths and Keirns state, "authority is accepted power. It is power that people agree to follow. People listen to authority figures because they feel that these individuals are worthy of respect. Generally speaking, people perceive the objectives and demands of an authority figure as reasonable and beneficial, or true" (ibid.).

The complex dynamics of power structures is a topic that would require an in-depth study, beyond the

scope of this work. But we can gain insight into the relationship between Black and White Christians from the work of James C. Scott, author of *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. Scott has identified some specific characteristics between dominant groups and subordinate groups that involve what he calls *transcripts*. These transcripts exist in two spaces: the public and the hidden. Scott explains the dominant groups' public and hidden transcripts:

The public transcript is, to put it crudely, the self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen. Given the usual power of dominant elites to compel performances from others, the discourse of the public transcript is a decidedly lopsided discussion. While it is unlikely to be merely a skein of lies and misrepresentations, it is, on the other hand, a highly partisan and partial narrative. It is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule. (1990, 18)

On the other hand, the subordinate group also has its own public transcript that usually involves presenting one's self in a manner that is deemed "acceptable" to the dominant group (1990, 1). Scott further explains,

How do we study power relations when the powerless are often obliged to adopt a strategic pose in the presence of the powerful and when the powerful may have an interest in overdramatizing their reputation and mastery? Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a "hidden transcript" that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed. (1990, xii)

These nuances in the exercise of power provide insight into how the American racial caste system is perpetuated. So, in order to answer the question of whether or not there is a caste system in the multiethnic church, it will be necessary to explore the movement for signs of power dynamics such as these along with their accompanying public and hidden transcripts. If the system has established itself in the multiethnic church it will likely be seen in a rejection of Black authority and power.

## The History of the Black Church

To return to the history that has produced this caste system, including in the church, I've experienced my share of church history courses, with lectures and syllabi filled with references to "THE" American church. I was always puzzled as to why church history, specifically in America, hardly ever mentioned Black Americans or the Black Church. Even in studying the multiethnic church there is little to no mention of the Black church or how we came to the place of *now* needing to label a church multiethnic. A good portion of American history and the details of the colonization process are often left out of history text books in schools. Woodson explains the initial intentions of earlier colonizers and how the "negro" became part of those plans.

One of the causes of the discovery of America was the translation into action of the desire of European zealots to extend the Catholic religion into other parts. Columbus, we are told, was decidedly missionary in his efforts and felt that he could not make a more significant contribution to the church than to open new fields for Christian endeavor. His final success in securing the equipment adequate to the adventure upon the high seas was to some extent determined by the Christian motives impelling the sovereigns of Spain to finance the expedition for the reason that it might afford an opportunity for promoting the cause of Christ. (Woodson 1921, 1)

As a grade school child I remember learning that Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492, but we never received a back story, it was only about getting us to learn dates and names. I don't recall ever having a primary or secondary teacher reconcile this story with Christian motivations. The narrative was, Columbus was to explore the *New World*. We didn't learn about the desire to "explore" the world in the name of Christianity or the Catholic church. It is clear Christianity was not a separate cause of the exploration efforts of the European colonizers of America. But, unfortunately, these Christian colonizers had little to no regard for the Negro's salvation and found their salvation to be a threat to the development of the colonizer's wealth.

The first persons proselyted by the Spanish and French missionaries were Indians. There was not



any particular thought of the Negro . . . there were among the colonists thousands who had never considered the Negro as belonging to the pale of Christianity . . . Because of the unwritten law that a Christian could not be held a slave, the exploiting class opposed any such proselyting; for, should slaves be liberated upon being converted, their plans for development would fail for lack of a labor supply subject to their orders as bondmen. (Woodson 1921, 1)

The British were even less interested in converting Negroes to Christ.

Few, if any, of the pioneers from Great Britain had the missionary spirit of some of the Latins. As the English were primarily interested in founding new homes in America, they thought of the Negroes not as objects of Christian philanthropy but rather as tools with which they might reach that end. It is not surprising then that with the introduction of slavery as an economic factor in the development of English colonies little care was taken of their spiritual needs, and especially so when they were confronted with the unwritten law that a Christian could not be held a slave. (Woodson 1921, 2)

Early explorers and missionaries pictured African people as heathens, savages, godless, or faithless. In his work *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in Antebellum South*, Albert J. Raboteau explains that that idea is far from the truth.

Common to many African societies was belief in a High God, or Supreme Creator of the world and everything in it. It was also commonly believed that this High God, often associated with the sky, was somewhat removed from and uninvolved in the activities of men . . . Early travelers were quick to note that Africans believed in a High God who transcended ritual relationships with humans. Describing religion on the Slave Coast, William Bosman, a Dutch factor, remarked that the Africans had an "an idea of the True God and ascribe to him the Attributes of Almighty, and Omnipresent. It is certain . . . that they believe he created the Universe, and therefore vastly prefer him before their Idol-Gods. But yet they do not pray to him, or offer any sacrifices to him; for which they give the following reasons. God, they say, is too high exalted above us, and too great to condescend

so much as to trouble himself or think of mankind." (Raboteau 1978, 8)

African slaves arrived in America with preexisting religious beliefs, and the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did not land in a cultural context unfamiliar with the supremacy of an omnipresent, creator God.

Widely shared by diverse West African societies were several fundamental beliefs concerning the relationship of the divine to the human; belief in a transcendent, benevolent God, creator and ultimate source of providence; belief in a number of immanent gods, to whom people must sacrifice in order to make life propitious; belief in the power of spirits animating things in nature to affect the welfare of people; belief in priests and others who were expert in practical knowledge of the gods and spirits; belief in spirit possession, in which gods, through their devotee, spoke to me . . . Thus the religious background of the slaves was a complex system of belief, and in the life of an African community there was a close relationship between the natural and the supernatural, the secular and the sacred. (Raboteau 1978, 11)

One of the parallels that historians have found between the Christian faith and African traditional beliefs was the concept of *justice*. Even though slave owners who were willing to allow Christian conversion of their slaves censored the Gospel by only sharing parts of the Bible that they could bend to support the institution of slavery, still Christian slaves recognized the injustice they were experiencing.

African slaves would never have believed this justice doctrine if they had first heard it from a cruel master. Failure to recognize that slaves already had this early depth of spiritual and ethical insight is an insult to the great wisdom of our enslaved fore parents. And they voted with their feet when the white preacher or teacher strayed from what they knew was the real gospel truth. The deep conviction that masters were accountable to a just God for disrespecting the personhood of slaves was one reason they kept sane minds and weathered the cruelties. (Mitchell 2004, 16)

Slave conversion didn't happen because of the righteous example the slave masters exhibited but because "the providence of God was well established

in their world view and belief system long before they crossed the Atlantic, and it was not hard to accurately translate into biblical English” (Mitchell 2004, 18). The only concepts of Christianity that weren’t known to the African slaves were Jesus, hell, and the Bible (Mitchell 2004, 19).

Slavery in America was established and maintained from 1619, when the first African slaves arrived in Jamestown Virginia, to 1865 when the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment passed. As mentioned earlier, there were objections to slaves becoming Christians at all for fear that it meant their freedom from slavery. So laws began to be put in place to prevent such freedom even in Christian conversion. For example, in the Virginia Assembly in 1667 bishops from the Church of England wrote a resolution stating, “the freeing of the souls in Christ did not alter the bondage of the body in any way” (Mitchell 2004, 24). However, prior to the “allowing” of slave conversion to Christ, slaves were gathering together in worship.

As soon as enough Africans were imported and settled in a single location, they readily recalled and shared the commonalities of their African religious traditions and engaged once again in an adaptation of their already similar worship practices. Records of their being forbidden to gather clearly established the fact that, regardless of the variety of tribal backgrounds on any given plantation, they did gather and devoutly engage in an African style of common worship . . . this and numberless other religious gatherings of slaves occurred as early as 1660s, long before there was, if ever, any serious or widespread thought of winning the enslaved to the Christian faith, or of recording anything about their spiritual welfare. (Mitchell 2004, 24)

Even with laws like the resolution enacted at the Virginia Assembly many slave owners didn’t want to run the risk of slaves feeling equal to their masters and therefore opted not to allow their slaves to become Christian (Mitchell 2004, 25). It wasn’t really until the First Great Awakening of 1730 that the conversion of African slaves and freedmen was widely accepted (Mitchell 2004, 46). Prior to that, slaves either worshiped in secret or under the supervision of the slave master. Raboteau explains the Invisible Institution:

At first glance it seems strange to refer to the religion of the slaves as an invisible institution, for

independent black churches with slave members did exist in the South before emancipation. In racially mixed churches it was not uncommon for slaves to outnumber masters in attendance at Sunday service. But the religious experience of the slaves was by no means fully contained in the visible structures of the institutional church. From the abundant testimony of fugitive and freed slaves it is clear that the slave community had an extensive religious life of its own, hidden from the eyes of the master. In the secrecy of the quarters or the seclusion of the brush arbors (“hush harbors”) the slaves made Christianity truly their own. The religion of the slaves was both institutional and non-institutional, visible and invisible, formally organized and spontaneously adapted. Regular Sunday worship in the local church was paralleled by illicit, or at least informal, prayer meetings on weeknights in the slave cabins. Preachers licensed by the church and hired by the master were supplemented by slave preachers licensed only by the spirit. (Raboteau 1978, 212)

One of the central themes found in the Invisible Institution was the Gospel message of hope and freedom delivered by the Chief Sufferer, Jesus. Many of the slave masters that permitted their slaves to become Christian were strategic about what they learned. They hired Black preachers and instructed them to preach messages of obedience to the master and warnings for stealing, not the Gospel message. Raboteu documented the story from a slave named Charlie Van Dyke. “Church was what they called it but all that preacher talked about was for us slaves to obey our masters and not to lie and steal. Nothing about Jesus, was ever said and the overseer stood there to see the preacher talked as he wanted him to talk” (Raboteau 1978, 213).

The secrecy of the Invisible Institution was necessary not only to protect the slaves from possible flogging or even death (gatherings outside of what the masters approved were forbidden), but to uphold, as they believed it to be, the message of hope and deliverance found in Jesus Christ. Their message was a message of hope and a future freedom (Raboteu 1978, 218). Slaves came up with secret symbols to share with each other where these prayer meetings would be. They ranged from overturned pots left on the front porch to songs with hidden messages for the time and place of the prayer meeting (Raboteu 1978, 219). They overcame obstacles of not being able to

preach the liberating message of Christ. One slave preacher from Texas said,

“I been preachin’ the Gospel and farmin’ since slavery time . . . When I start preachin’ I couldn’t read or write and had to preach what massa told me an he say tell them niggers iffen they obeys the massa they goes to Heaven but I knowed there’s something better for them, but daren’t tell them ‘cept on the sly. That I done lots. I tell ‘em iffen they keep prayin’ the Lord will set em’ free.” (Raboteau 1978, 232)

Slave preachers that preached the “real” Gospel, a Gospel of equality, even risked serving prison time. Rev. R. S. Sorrick from Washington County, Maryland went to prison for three months and eight days for, as he stated, “preaching the gospel to my colored brethren” (Raboteu 1978, 233). As the biblical Gospel began to spread more and more among the slave community a distrust for White people, specifically White Christians, became more apparent. “Slaves were distrustful of white folks’ interpretation of the Scriptures and wanted to be able to search them for themselves” (Raboteu 1978, 239). They “distinguished the hypocritical religion of their masters from true Christianity and rejected the slaveholder’s gospel of obedience to master and mistress” (Raboteu 1978, 294). Slaves exhibited a relentless pursuit of Jesus that not only drove the vitality of the Invisible Institution but that would eventually birth the independent Black church movement.

The Black church grew into not just a place of worship but a place of safety and community for Black Americans. Since the Black man (let alone the Black woman) was not allowed in politics the church also became a means for the Black community to collectively fight together for social uplift of the people. Additionally, the Black church met the needs of the community as a sort of welfare agency (Woodson 1921, 102).

During this same time in history the White church, thought of as “the” church in America, became divided over positions on slavery, whether for or against. For example, the Baptist convention split in 1845, and the Southern Baptist Convention was formed in support of slavery. But, unfortunately, from Jim Crow to the Civil Rights movement (and even after Civil Rights through the 21st century) the history of the dominant American church, has largely been one of silence,

complacency, and even participation with the oppression and murder of human beings.

### **Black Authority in the Multiethnic Church**

The Multiethnic church is a very young concept which gained notability and popularity during the earlier part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many leaders of this movement express the need for a multiethnic church so that the American church reflects that of the Bible, a reconciled body of believers. However, there is another social aspect that is certainly at the top of the list for reasons why the multiethnic church movement began. That reason is the growing racial and ethnic demographic change of the American landscape. Derwin Gray, a Black pastor of a multiethnic church in North Carolina, mentions this change:

America is starting to look and feel a whole lot different. For the first time in the country’s history, ethnic and racial minorities “are projected to make up the majority of students attending American public schools this fall” . . . In 1960, the population of the United States was 85% white; by 2060, it will be only 43%. The face of America is no longer just black and white . . . Since 1965, forty million immigrants have arrived in the United States, “about half of them Hispanic and nearly three-in-ten Asians.” In addition, “Intermarriage is playing a big role in changing some of our views of ethnicity.” (Gray 2015, 2)

Arguably, the leaders of the multiethnic church movement knew that in order for the American church to remain viable and impactful for the next generation a new church had to come forth. It had to be a church that would be intentional about the inclusion of all groups of people, and a church that would attempt to unite Black and White Christians. And while progress has been made within the multiethnic church, it has not happened without hiccups and moments of reflection. These are the years of reflection. As the national poet laureate, Amanda Gorman, mentioned in her reflection on America during the inauguration of the 46<sup>th</sup> president, “it’s the past we step into and how we repair it.” For the multiethnic church to be The American Church of the next generation it must take this time to reflect on the past and figure out how to repair what is broken.

The journey God has taken me on through my faith walk has been unique to say the least. I began at a

predominately White Catholic church, then went to a predominately Black Catholic church, then back to the predominately White Catholic church, then to the predominately Black charismatic Church of God in Christ, and now to a predominately White Southern Baptist church. I've had my share of cultural experiences in the American church setting. With my rare collection of experiences and interest in people and cultures, I became intrigued with how the American church would reach such a diverse country in the future.

Understanding the multiethnic church and the issues that surfaced with Black authority required some research and observation. I wanted to find two "truly" multiethnic churches. Previous research conducted on the multiethnic church identified churches based on the 80/20 rule, with no more than 80% of one ethnic group (Emerson et al. 2003, 217). However, based on my experience in predominately White churches, the experience of Black Christians would be better evaluated in settings where White people represent half of the membership and minority groups combined make up the remaining half. This would hopefully reduce the expectation of assimilation. Given that multiethnic churches are still very unique organizations in today's context, I felt that observing two as my focus would help to compare and contrast results. Additionally, it would help determine which results could be categorized as general for the multiethnic church as a whole and which were specific to an individual church.

I was particularly interested in Black leaders' ability to exercise authority in a multiethnic context. Here is one participant's account (let's call him Mike) of an experience where his authority was called into question:

*Me:* "How would you describe the culture of this church?"

*Mike:* "It's very loving and caring."

*Me:* "Did you every feel like your authority or power was not accepted?"

*Mike:* "Yes, as the first Black staff person I've had people go around me on decisions I made."

*Me:* "As a leader have you ever been assumed to not be a leader because you are Black? For example, Barack Obama told a story about attending a gala one time as a state senator. He goes on to say that one of the attenders assumed that he was one of the wait staff instead of a senator, and asked him to get

him a drink. I call this the 'Mistaken Leadership Identity.' Has that ever happened to you?"

*Mike:* "Yes. There was a time when I had taken a team to serve at the homeless shelter downtown. For the day we were all dressed in relaxed clothes. You know, regular clothes people volunteer in, blue jeans and a shirt. Some of my team was in the back kitchen area working and I was heading back there to check on them and one of the shelter workers stopped me. She said, "uh you can't go back there." I asked her what she meant. She thought that I was one of the homeless individuals that had come for the day. I had to explain to her that I was one of the pastors with the church group volunteering for the day."

As part of my research, I interviewed 16 Black people about their experiences in a multi-ethnic church. After reviewing all of the participants' responses to the interview questions, I was able to compose a summary of each of my questions based on the information shared.

#### **Did you grow up in church?**

100% of the participants grew up going to church.

#### **What church denomination did you grow up in?**

62% of the participants grew up in a version of the Baptist denomination (Southern Baptist, Baptist, Missionary Baptist). 31% of the participants grew up in a charismatic denomination (Pentecostal, Church of God in Christ). The remainder 7% were another denomination or non-denominational.

#### **Have you been part of a predominantly Black church?**

100% of the participants have been members of predominantly Black churches.

#### **Are you in a leadership role? If so, what role?**

The majority of the participants are leaders in their respective churches. An estimated 18% were not in leadership roles. Leadership roles included small group leaders, kids' ministry directors, associate pastor of worship, missions pastor, small groups pastor, young adults married leader, project manager, Celebrate Recovery leader, care and counseling pastor, procurement manager, and audio director.

**Have you at any point felt you were not welcomed here?**

While all participants mentioned never feeling unwelcomed, there was mention of having heard that others (not in leadership) have felt unwelcomed. Additionally, one participant mentioned that even though they felt welcomed, they felt devalued.

**Are you part of any small groups? Describe your experience and the makeup of your small group.**

75% of the participants are part of a small group at their respective churches. Based on the research it appears that small groups that are focused on women or recovery (like Celebrate Recovery) are diverse groups. However, groups that are not topic or gender related, and are only focused on the day of the week or location, tend to be racially homogeneous. Additionally, small groups covering topics on racial reconciliation report being predominately minority groups (Black, Hispanic, etc.).

**Do you feel your authority or power is not accepted because you are Black?**

Of the leaders interviewed, 69% said they do not feel that their authority is rejected because they are Black. Many participants celebrated their senior pastors for affirming their authority to others. This appears to be the main reason most of the participants have not experienced rejection of their authority. One participant mentioned that though they have not experienced rejection of authority, they have noticed frontline leaders are Black, but the higher up you go in leadership the more White leaders you find. They describe it as, "higher up leaders are White." Also, 50% of the men interviewed that are in "pastoral" roles report feelings of rejected authority. One participant who is a frontline/lay leader describes noticing that during small group fairs, if the leader was Black the majority of the people that signed up to attend that group were minority people. Additionally, it was mentioned that during Bible study breakouts Black leaders who received White members as part of their breakout group report that the White members would not return back to their group the next week.

There is evidence here that the American racial caste system is still at work behind the scenes. Isabelle Wilkerson explains how it works:

What people look like, or, rather the race they have been assigned or perceived to belong to, is the visible cue to their caste. It is the historic flash card to the public of how they are to be treated, where they are expected to live, what kinds of positions they are expected to hold, whether they belong in this section of town or that seat in a boardroom, whether they should be expected to speak with authority on this or that subject . . . We know that the letters of the alphabet are neutral and meaningless until they are combined to make a word which itself has no significance until it is inserted into a sentence and interpreted by those who speak it. In the same way that black and white were applied to people who were literally neither, but rather graduations of brown and beige and ivory, the caste system sets people at poles from one another and attaches meaning to the extremes, and to the graduations in between, and then reinforces those meanings, replicates them in the roles each caste has and is assigned and permitted or required to perform. (Wilkerson 2020, 18)

Wilkerson identifies eight pillars that uphold the structure of the system: (1) Divine Will and the Laws of Nature, (2) Heritability, (3) Endogamy and the Control of Marriage and Mating, (4) Purity versus Pollution, (5) Occupational Hierarchy, (6) Dehumanization and Stigma, (7) Terror as Enforcement, Cruelty as a Means of Control, (8) Inherent Superiority versus Inherent Inferiority (Wilkerson 2020). Characteristically, the American caste system is a structure in which boundaries are in place through years of foundational ground work. It is imbedded in the way we think, act, treat one another, and perceive our individual positions in it. "It lives in our hearts and habits, institutions and infrastructures" (Wilkerson 2020, 75).

The fallacy upon which we live as Americans and Christians is that the end of slavery and the Civil Rights Act somehow completely removed the customary and socially acceptable behaviors that developed under American chattel slavery. The laws that gave Black people rights to be considered humans did not come with a new code of conduct. America didn't issue "classroom rules" for behavior across the race lines, like: Be respectful of others, listen when others are

talking, be nice to others, provide a helping hand, etc. It is not only laws that need to change but the dismantling and reconstruction of worldviews and belief systems. The way Black people have been treated historically in America has generally been considered a normal part of American culture and traditions. Clifford explains, “tradition is ways in which we pass on the life of cultures, issues of authority, as well as invention, practice as well as interpretation” (Clifford 2004, 152). He goes on to say, “People are more ready to organize in defense of customary rights and local traditions than they are on behalf of more universal class solidarities or human rights” (Clifford 2004, 158).

From my research and experience, as well as those of other researchers like Yancey and Emerson, it does not appear that the multiethnic church lacks a “welcoming” nature. All participants express feeling welcomed at their respective churches. There was never a point during my visits that I felt unwelcomed at either church. Historically in the church in America, prior to Jim Crow, there was not an issue with Black Americans being in the same churches with White Christians so long as they kept their lower positions and White Christians were able to still exercise authority over Black Christians. Thus, now, in certain instances, there appears to be a bit of rigidity when Black Christians are placed in leadership roles that allow for authority to be exercised over White Christians.

As I conducted this research and spent time worshipping at these two sites, I found that the multiethnic church has yet to shed its secular caste system. It is evident in the structures of upper leadership roles and the experience of many of the Black leaders. For example, neither of the two churches I studied have Black representation in its upper leadership rungs. In the first church, while they have more Black pastors on staff than many other multiethnic churches, they do not have Black elders, which is their top tier. (Interestingly enough, they had White, Hispanic, and Asian representation. Everyone except Black people.) In the second church, their top leader is the senior pastor, and he is White. The next rung from the pastor is the executive team. Unfortunately, there were no Black leaders on that team. Additionally, the history of the multiethnic church has shown little to no Black senior pastor representation. Also, while Black Christians have found themselves willing to set aside worship style preferences and join predominately White churches in an

effort to bring diversity, White Christians have yet to do the same and join predominately Black churches. I can only conclude that either White Christians are not willing to set aside worship style preferences to join predominately Black churches or White Christians unconsciously operate within the parameters of the American caste system and are unwilling to come under Black authority and leadership. Based on my research I believe the latter possibility should be taken under serious consideration.

The multiethnic church, though it has work to do in shedding racial caste system boundaries, has progressed significantly beyond churches with 80% or more White membership. The two churches I studied have a significant number of Black Christians in mid-level leadership roles. Often churches in America can only be found with Black representation in the “pews” and not in the decision making, vision casting spaces. Still, as Wilkerson mentioned, the racial caste system shapes how we all, both the dominant and lower castes, respond to those “expected to speak with authority on this or that subject” (Wilkerson 2020, 18). Therefore, it is no surprise that 50% of the participants in pastoral roles have had their authority questioned.

I believe that by the power of the Holy Spirit the multiethnic church in America can overcome this secular imprisonment of the body of Christ. It has the opportunity, now, to reflect on the last several years and address “American” cultural behaviors that have crept into the standard operating procedures of ministry. A healthy, Holy Spirit led, multiethnic church has the power to help *all* Christians develop healthy biblical worldviews that are free from the corroding acid of the American racial caste system. The multiethnic church is a Kingdom Embassy and it is here to represent the Kingdom of God on Earth. It should not operate within the confines of the American culture and caste system, but operate under the guidelines of God’s Kingdom and with the authority of Christ Jesus.

The great poet, Maya Angelou, instructed, “You can’t really know where you are going until you know where you have been” (Edmund 2018). One of the biggest errors of the multiethnic church movement is that there has been a failure to evaluate the past. Many of the unhealed wounds and unreconciled sins from the past have crept into the multiethnic church. Those wounds and sins affect how Christians treat each other. They determine who is worthy of compassion and love instead of extending it to all. The multiethnic church tried to build on a faulty foundation, likely

unconsciously. This uneven and cracked foundation has allowed roots of racism and the American caste system to creep in unnoticed, destroying the integrity of the foundation.

The pioneers of the movement ventured out to build this new church having hopes of bringing together a new body of Christians, a multiethnic body. Unfortunately, the toxic roots of a racialized caste system have made their way into the structure of the multiethnic church. They have prohibited Black Christians' authority from being fully accepted. Black Christians have been allowed into mid-level leadership positions with mid-level authority and decision making. Yet, often, even this mid-level authority does not come without question or the need to have White affirmation of Black authority. While Black Christians have made it to mid-level leadership, only a few, a handful, have made it into upper-level leadership with the ability to exercise upper-level authority.

The multiethnic church can be repaired. The foundation of the multiethnic church will need some major remediation work. But a healthy multiethnic church can be built on a healthy foundation using these three principles:

**1. *Christ Must Preside.*** The ruling power of Christ should be the governing power of the church.

He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way. (Ephesians 1:20-23).

**2. *We Must Walk in the Spirit.*** To walk in the Spirit means we no longer see the world or people through a worldly perspective but a biblical one.

I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)

**3. *Live as Ambassadors for Christ.*** Kingdom ambassadors are officials sent on assignment by the King of Kings. They do not operate under the guidelines or authority of the flesh. The church, the Kingdom embassy, does not belong to America but to the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:20)

At this pivotal point in history the multiethnic church can elevate the Black voice, the Black life and be the leader in the advancement of Black authority. It can dismantle the racial caste system that is governing the Body by using the principles I have outlined above to establish a new, solid and healthy foundation. I would encourage White pastors and leaders to share or even give their platforms to Black pastors and leaders. I challenge White Christians to be willing to be under the authority of Black pastors and leaders, and expand their reading list and discipleship voices to include Black pastors, theologians and leaders. I encourage multiethnic churches to offer regular Bible studies that incorporate looking at *all* of the history of the American church. If the American church, and by proxy the multiethnic church, can truly understand its history, then confession and reconciliation for participation in America's sin, racism, can be carried out. If *all* Christians know where they've been then they *all* can work on building the future together as the New Multiethnic Church.

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## NEWS & OPINIONS

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# Creating Christian Cultures of Transformation and Empowerment

Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe

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### A Transformative Movement

Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the larger Movement for Black Lives (M.BL) of which it is a part, seek Black liberation by transforming traditional cultures and deconstructing frameworks that perpetuate oppression. Emphasizing the diverse social locations within the Black community, they struggle on many fronts, organizing intersectionally, from the bottom up, and connecting local, national, and international issues, to produce holistic and broadly inclusive strategies and solutions (Black Lives Matter 2021a). Using this transformative approach, they challenge any structures of power and privilege that perpetuate conditions of injustice by targeting existing beliefs, structures, and policies for critique and change (Shields 2010). Although it has played important roles in the struggle for Black liberation in the past, the Black Church is not excluded from the M.BL critique.

At the heart of this issue of *On Knowing Humanity*, in articles by Vongvirath, Scott and Burroughs, is an essential and enduring dilemma confronting not only White and multiethnic churches, but also and especially the Black Church. According to C. Eric Lincoln, Black Christians and their churches have always considered “whether to struggle at all with the powers and principalities of this world,” particularly regarding race, in the context of Christian faith (Lincoln 1974). In their research and discourses about how Christians should respond to the Black Lives Matter Movement, one thread that runs through Burroughs’, Scott’s, and Vongvirath’s articles connects racism, church, and power. Black radical Christians and the Black Prophetic Church have historically engaged earthly and spiritual power on behalf of the least, those suffering and often invisible. They and contemporary Christians who continue to engage the M.BL as well as other just causes adapt a culture of

sustained transformation based on a commitment to seek freedom as their calling.

However, as Gayraud Wilmore explained in *Black Religion and Black Radicals* (1983), Black Christian responses to oppression typically fit within a continuum from survivalism to radicalism. Survivalist Black Christians focused on providing leadership and strategies for the Black masses to survive the violence and trauma of racism in the U.S. by securing the skills and acumen established as standards acceptable to White society. This approach was intended to facilitate assimilation and ward off violent attacks by White mobs and the state. Radical Black Christians, in contrast, sought holistic change. They endeavored to establish means of independent thinking and livelihoods to thrive within the full range of blackness, whether in the U.S. or beyond, often in conflict with White society. Neither of these was definitively distinct, as all were prone to practice both, yet among most, at least one tendency was dominant.

Wilmore also notes that since the 1970’s, Black radicals and Black Christians have increasingly disengaged. Black radicals have become progressively more secular, while Black Christians have become increasingly more conservative. In contrast, when Black radicals and Black Christians were organically engaged, Christianity and radicalism reinforced one another. On one hand, during emancipation, civil rights, and Black power struggles, the Black church was a foundational organization for planning, mobilizing, and sustaining political action, and Black faith was an intentional inspiration for radical change. On the other hand, radicalism challenged Black Christians to plumb the depths of biblical understanding, from their own experiences and understanding, to answer critical questions about our condition, identity, and ethics. Ultimately, radicalism challenged the Black Church to a continually relevant theology.

## **The MBL and Black Church Survivalism**

Today, Black churches and their leaders continue to contend with whether to engage the MBL. Some argue as Dr. Harold A. Carter Jr., Pastor of New Shiloh Baptist Church of Baltimore stated,

There are some significant things that have impacted the Black Church. The movements that made the church great in the culture of who I am and who African Americans are had a God . . . [as in] the Civil Rights Movement [for instance]. The Black Lives Matter Movement has no God. That's a major deficit. (Soul of a Nation 2020)

Most criticisms from MBL focus on these kinds of Christian views, highlighting the classism, sexism, and gender discrimination prevalent in past Black liberation movements.

### ***Black Lives and the Acceptability Politics Critique***

As Burroughs identifies complicity with established power as an important reason for White Evangelical/Southern churches' support of racially divisive politics and opposition to the Black Lives Matter Movement, the MBL also offers scathing critiques of Black leaders, including church leaders, who are neither relevant nor responsive to the Black community. MBL critiques of "acceptability politics" confront the survivalist tendency among Black Christians. They view the Black Church as so committed to self-preservation, it becomes neglectful and lacks courage to defend and care for its own. A clergy member participating in protests in Ferguson, MI reflected upon this:

What young people are feeling is we're out here and we have to fight all of these adults and the church ought to be the people who are fighting the adults with us or for us, and they're not. Instead, we're getting harassed and mistreated and shot and killed by the police and the church turns to us and says, 'Well, you need to pull up your pants,' or, 'You need to be more respectable and that will change things,' rather than go to the police and say, 'Hey, stop messing with our kids.' And so, I'm just waiting for somebody to come out and say to the police, 'Stop messing with our kids.' (Francis 2015, 97)

Moreover, MBL activists criticize Black leaders, secular and Christian, whose first response to Black anger is to pacify, and even condemn, protesters rather than to represent their concerns. This critique is grounded in the realization of the stark class division emerging among Blacks in the U.S. Noting that this era has produced numerous Black elected officials, Black millionaires, and desegregated police forces, yet persistent "impoverishment, suffering and vilification" (Ransby 2018) of a large Black underclass, MBL activists consider it their role to hold Black leaders accountable.

### ***Black Lives and the Hetero-Patriarchy Critique***

In multiethnic churches, Scott connects unresolved racism rooted in White Christians' sense of entitlement to power, to their resistance to share in support of Black leadership and lukewarm response to the Black Lives Matter Movement. Similarly, the MBL distinguishes this movement from past movements that typically centered heterosexual men, omitting women, queer, and transgender people from leadership, and ignoring their concerns without consideration and sustained redress. Instead, BLM highlights ways in which Black women, and especially Black trans women, are violated, and the differently abled are made invisible (Black Lives Matter 2021a). To ensure a movement that brings all Black people to the forefront, BLM centers those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements in the past. The BLM challenges any efforts to systematically target Black lives for demise, affirms Black humanity, and highlights Black contributions to society, encouraging Black resilience in the face of deadly oppression (Black Lives Matter 2021b).

For example, Pastors and activists from BLM delivered a critique of Black Christian leadership, during "Black Lives and the Fullness Thereof? A Town Hall Conversation on Spirituality, Sexual Politics and Social Justice," on Monday, September 28, 2015, at Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, PA. The Reverend Dr. Leslie Callahan (2015) described how during one BLM Sunday, citywide gathering, those leading the service were all men and invited only men to come forward for prayer. This very intervention, to raise consciousness of how Black life is devalued in larger society, showed just how much the same kind of intervention is needed in the Black Church where the lives of Black women and the LGBTQAI are

continuously devalued. Black churches were characterized as cities of refuge for only some, but for others, centers of bigotry, homophobia, and dogma. Participants shared their own stories of discrimination based upon gender and one speaker told of their queer parents being asked to leave a congregation. Dr. Imani Perry declared that she is “Opposed to everything church stands for on gender and sexuality” (2015) and others challenged Black churches to consistently advance theologies of freedom and liberation in Jesus among all who are oppressed and marginalized, including those persecuted because of queerness in the Black Church (Pitts 2015).

### **The MBL and Black Churches in the Prophetic Tradition**

Other Black church leaders find themselves called to support BLM like Rev. Dr. Leah Gunning Francis, author of *Ferguson & Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community*, who wrote the following:

So, I marched, prayed, organized, held vigil, lectured, protested, and passed out supplies—all in an attempt to bear witness to this tragedy and work toward social change. And I was not alone . . . As a woman of faith, I did not separate my actions in pursuit of justice for Michael Brown from my faith. Instead, I understood them as an expression of my faith. My faith, or my belief and trust in God, motivated me to join the efforts to seek justice and provide care. My faith was integral to my works, and, together, enabled me to embody my ideas of faithfulness in this time of communal distress (2015).

Historically, researchers characterized Black Christians and churches that acted in this vein as “Black political churches,” those actively attempting to influence government to address the problems of the Black community. They were powerful and capable in mobilizing the Black community to political activism (Harris 1999; Tate 1991). The effectiveness of “Black political churches,” scholars conclude, was based upon their shared experiences in Black traditions: church leaders were trained in Black denominations, by Black organizations that emphasized the priorities of Blacks (Morris 1984; Paris 1991); ecumenically and organizationally, worship and religious activities preserved a distinct Black culture (Dawson 1994; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Reese and Brown 1995); and, large,

civil rights churches, located in Black communities of major urban centers, played a leading political role, employing their considerable economic and political resources to effectively solve social problems in the surrounding community (Billingsley 1999; McDaniel 2001; Morris 1984).

During the 20th century, it would further become apparent that not only were some Black churches political, but also Black politics were Christian. The politics of equal treatment in education, workplaces, and social institutions, reflected a Black Church theology that imbricated Black theology and Black ideology borne of the black experience. Black Prophetic Christians challenged Black Christians to uncover in scriptures means of physical survival, psychic stability, and ultimately political liberation.

Black Prophetic theology presented God as the God of justice who put down the mighty and exalted the low, liberated Hebrews from Egypt and gathered them back after they were scattered and oppressed to rebuild lives of safe refuge because they were committed to God’s work. Jesus, in performing miracles, casting out demons, continuously struggling against Satan, and ultimately sacrificing himself, modeled and empowered his followers to do the same. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the biblical and Black masses were afforded means of personal freedom and self-determination, but moreover, the Holy Spirit represented the coming judgment and vengeance of God for the mortal sins of white oppressors, by concealed and illusory methods, already breaking into this world (Wilmore 1983).

Reading the Bible “from below” (Hendricks Jr. 2011), in this manner, coupled organically with new Black political ideologies and independent Black political parties, opposing capitalism, colonialism and apartheid (Cone 1970; Gramby-Sobukwe 2005; Hopkins 1989). From this perspective, Christianity throughout biblical history was borne of and established by a radical social movement. Drawing from the lived experiences of people of African descent, from independent societies and cultures, through enslavement, colonialism and imperialism, Bible history is viewed as the story of the masses breaking from the status quo of their oppressive feudal domination. The biblical movement comprises the masses, developing in faith and emerging in power; visionary leaders guide the masses collectively, prophets sacrifice themselves to politically educate and organize the masses; and the Messiah, Jesus, through his life, death and resurrection collapses emerging

western epistemological conceptions of materialism and idealism. From this vantage point, the Bible is a radical manifesto, producing progressive politics and economics.

### **Transforming Church Cultures: Learning from the Black Prophetic Tradition**

As Vongvirath considers whether and how Christians do and should engage in the Black Lives Matter Movement, ultimately challenging Christians to responsibly contest earthly power with their spiritual power by supporting movements for justice, prophetic churches address political concerns of their community-at-large as a matter of principle. As a model, the Black Prophetic Church is politically activist. As Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) note, first, Black Prophetic churches prioritize “involvement in political concerns and activities in the wider community” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, 12). These prophetic functions, second, are targeted to serve not only the body of Christian believers, but society at large. The Black Prophetic church considers it a Christian responsibility to transform society both by uplifting the weak and by “pronouncing a radical word of God’s judgment” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, 12) for those active and complicit in oppression (Paris 1985). Therefore, third, Black Prophetic churches are typically politically progressive. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) describe them as “networks of liberation” (12). Michael and Julia Corbett, Corbett and Wilson (2014) as well as Robert Wuthnow (1988) associate the “prophetic function” with a version of U.S. civil religion that prioritizes religion’s responsibility to question and challenge the status quo to spur progress in addressing complex political issues. Essentially, Black Prophetic churches promote political change, ranging from legal reform to radically dismantling oppressing systems and reimagining and recreating new structures and processes (Wilmore 1983).

From this perspective, God *is* in Black Lives Matter. As the Movement for Black Life is wholistically committed to the liberation and transformation of Black and oppressed people, so too are prophetic Christians and churches living out their faith in ways that transform church cultures to continually exorcise internal and external exploitation. These combined efforts promote radically reimagining what it means to be church, by establishing, as a priority, a commitment to hear from, speak to, and affirm the oppressed; to resist domination and promote

flourishing; and, to perpetuate traditions of justice, such as providing sanctuary, hope, and response to suffering and impoverishment. To reconceive of church in this manner is an act of faith, assuredly reconceptualizing, as well, worship, songs, prayers, liturgies, and theologies to continually seek liberation as a matter of our soul salvation (Carvalhaes 2020, 5).

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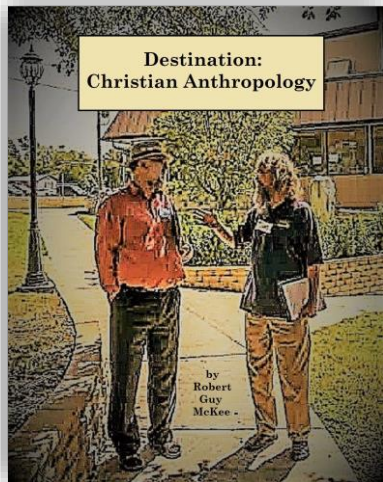


## BOOK REVIEW

# Destination: Christian Anthropology

By Robert Guy McKee

Reviewed by Daniel Baker



Leanpub:  
<http://leanpub.com/destinationchristiananthropology>  
2021

In Robert Guy McKee's book, *Destination: Christian Anthropology*, the reader is invited to join an exciting development in the anthropological endeavor. As a Christian anthropologist, McKee attempts to lay out his thinking for a theory of knowledge based on the Genesis prologue myth. Such a theory of knowledge is founded on the semiotic acts of naming and eating as representations of an order of dominion presented through the myths found in the first eleven chapters of the Christian Bible.

Throughout the book, McKee recounts his journey of growth as a Christian anthropologist. Beginning by describing some of the initial frustrations that McKee encountered in the secular representation of human origin, he then utilizes a number of papers prepared for various anthropological conferences to help the reader understand the growth and development of a defensible Christian theory of knowledge founded on

Genesis which also allows for rational science and rational morality.

McKee's handling of the term "myth" is particularly important for understanding the author's intention. Although McKee does not see the early Genesis account's purpose to be primarily historical, he does claim that it has truth value nonetheless. The Genesis prologue as myth is understood in its anthropological terminology to mean a social charter. It makes no judgement on the historicity of events, rather the focus is on the ontological nature of the narrative for its intended audience.

McKee believes that a Christian anthropology will be founded in the Genesis prologue myth. From it, we find the basis for establishing a theory of Judeo-Christian epistemology and knowledge. It teaches us about the origins of all creation, that God the creator has ultimate dominion as the giver of life, and that humanity has received a limited-dominion as beings created in his image. God gave life and formed humanity, but he also released humanity to tend the garden and take dominion over the land. This limited dominion is the basis for understanding humanity's rightful capacity for creativity, both in culture and in all other aspects of human experience. However, the prologue myth also establishes the dependence of humanity on God the creator; it is only within him that we find the source of life. The fall of humankind, then, is seen as an ontological transgression; the disobedience of Adam and Eve was a coup attempt over the rightful order of dominion in the universe.

I have very few critiques of the book overall. One point that may come up for readers is the repetitive nature of how the book's material is presented. An explanation for the repetition is found in the historical development of the book as a collection of papers on varying topics that are driven by the same primary thesis. However, I personally feel that the repetitive nature of certain themes was helpful in understanding the development arch of McKee's thinking. Due to its brevity, the book can easily be read in a day, but in this



concise space McKee has summarized and communicated clearly the thoughts that have driven his anthropological work for decades.

One additional critique is related to the relevance of the Genesis prologue myth to the rest of the Christian scriptures. Although McKee does well in applying theological support for much of what is claimed in the book, there still seems to be, from my personal perspective, some poorly supported exegetical claims. A number of binary themes are identified in the Genesis prologue, and then are tied to other accounts throughout the Christian scriptures. Although these themes are certainly intriguing, it seems difficult to establish a real claim that they are intentionally repeated or that they can be pointed to as examples of biblical inspiration. Could these binaries from the Genesis myths not just be examples of certain elements that are sure to present themselves in time due to their prominence in the created order?

I think that McKee's book is a wonderful addition to the development of Christian anthropology. It provides a compelling argument for an epistemological, ontological, and teleological approach that challenges the accepted claims of the secular academy. Too often, knowledge, origin, and purpose are thought of in absolutes that can be explained by the ingenuity of humanity and the scientific process alone. This is a point that McKee challenges potently. The Genesis prologue myth provides the basis for the understanding of a rightful order of dominion in the universe. With God at the center of all, as the source of life and creation, we are called to align ourselves first and foremost to his ordering for our lives. With such a perspective, we can proceed with an anthropology that identifies humanity as inherently purposeful.

I found that McKee's understanding of the Genesis prologue myth and its implications for dominion tie well to many other theological texts. One example is Alexander Schmemmann's, *For the Life of the World*. Schmemmann makes a similar argument about the need for an ontological reorientation. As humans, we were created with a divinely designed appetite, we are *eating* beings. Our sustenance is God himself who graciously feeds us and pours life into the world through loving reciprocal relationship with himself. Understanding this order, this delineation of divine and human dominion, we respond in worship to God as *home adorians*. This is just one element of Schmemmann's argument, but I found it to be an incredibly relevant theme with many parallels to McKee's arguments here in *Destination: Christian Anthropology*. These are

themes that I believe need much more attention, and the increasing interconnectivity and cooperation of the fields of anthropology and theology promise to yield much in this regard.



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## BOOK REVIEW

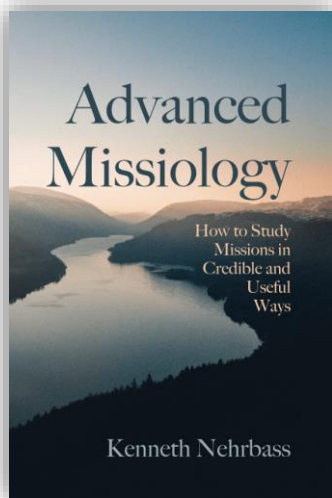
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# Advanced Missiology: How to Study Missions in Credible and Useful Ways

*By Kenneth Nehrbass*

Reviewed by Paul Houston Blankenship

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Eugene, OR: Cascade Books  
2021

With *Advanced Missiology: How to Study Missions in Credible and Useful Ways*, Kenneth Nehrbass makes an ambitious, impressive, and helpful contribution to missiology. The purpose of *Advanced Missiology*, which includes chapters from Julia Martinez, Rebecca Burnett, and Leanne Dzubinski as well, is to help readers develop interdisciplinary sophistication to better understand how Christianity spreads across cultures. In an evolving, complex field that can sometimes miss the forest for the trees and get lost in ungrounded theoretical abstraction, Nehrbass and his colleagues weave theory and practice with seeming seamlessness. Indeed, what is at stake in *Advanced Missiology* is a penetrating illumination of missiological theories that might inform the everyday practice of missions around the world and generate more fruitful theories in the future. While this book is, indeed, as its title declares, an advanced book for more experienced students of missions—and therefore not

the introductory text new pilgrims wandering into the field might need—readers at many levels and from many different fields will benefit from spending time in this generative terrain. Even the secular anthropologist of religion, for example, who may have no stake in (and be deeply troubled by) the kind of religious project that Nehrbass advances, will learn a tremendous amount about what Christian missiology is, what difference it makes (or wants to make) in the world, and why it really matters.

For Nehrbass, what really matters is bringing the church across cultural boundaries and making Christian disciples of all people. This controversial evangelical project is the *raison d'être* of missiology, Nehrbass proposes, which, building upon the work of Alan Tippett and James Scherer, he defines as “the utilization of multiple academic fields to develop strategies for making disciples across cultures” (14). A missiologist, then, according to Nehrbass, is “someone whose primary work is to study the way Christianity spreads across cultural boundaries” (ibid.). Readers will likely appreciate Nehrbass’s careful, studied lucidity on what missiology is, and what missiologists do, in addition to his creative rendering of how missiology is done. The traditional metaphor of a stool—which depicts and organizes missiology on the academic disciplines of anthropology, history, and theology—is not adequate, Nehrbass thinks. Better is the more dynamic, changing, converging metaphor of a river that moves purposefully by powerful greater forces (31).

*Advanced Missiology* is divided into two parts. Part I, entitled “The Tributaries of Missiology,” includes chapters on the nature of missiology (chapter 1); the relationship between theology and cross-cultural discipleship (chapter 2); the relationship between history and cross-cultural discipleship (chapter 3); the role of anthropology in cross-cultural discipleship (chapter 4); the role of intercultural studies in cross-

cultural discipleship (chapter 5); how development theory can be used to facilitate cross-cultural discipleship (chapter 6); and how education matters in cross-cultural discipleship (chapter 7). Part II, entitled “The Distributaries of Missiology,” defines cross-cultural discipleship (chapter 8); renders seminal theories of (chapter 9) and seminal models for (chapter 10) cross-cultural discipleship; and the final chapter of the book is an attempt to imagine and shepherd missiology’s future. Since *Advanced Missiology* is a highly complex book that is laden with theory and data, readers may (like me) find it helpful that each chapter has “chapter goals,” concise summaries, missionary profiles, and stimulating invitations to real action, further research, and additional questions. I was particularly delighted that each chapter encouraged “heart goals” alongside knowledge and action goals. This is a book that is meant to make a home in your mind *and your heart* as you move with God in the world.

There is, as I hope this short review has already shown, much to applaud about this book. Its posture of openness and curiosity toward other academic disciplines is to be commended; it is courageous in making universal, objective truth claims across cultural differences. Each chapter is like a world that readers with different interests are likely to find fascinating and useful. As a theological anthropologist, I was especially enlightened by Nehrbass’s discussion about the relationship between anthropology and cross-cultural discipleship, and how missiologists use anthropology (hopefully to mitigate against ethnocentrism, for example, and to make sense of local worlds without drowning individual persons in their local worlds and therefore eradicating ontological human difference). I also appreciated learning that holistic or “integral mission” aims to transcend the tired, anachronistic dichotomy between personal and material transformation. For Nehrbass, adequate cross-cultural discipleship must free people from any oppression that inhibits their flourishing (158).

It is my commitment to practice a hermeneutic of goodness, hospitality, and empowerment. Academe, as most of us know too intimately, can be a rather nasty, toxic, and wounding space. Christian anthropologists ought to query how we speak not just about “the others” that we study and collaborate with, but also the colleagues with whom we work. What does it mean to love and live the Great Commission in our thoughts and sentences, and in our departments and conferences and in our journals and publications? Do

we love one another with our work, even those with ideas that we find harmful and with whom we fervently disagree? And what does it mean to speak the truth to each other in love?

I found myself wrestling with these queries as I read the theology that undergirds *Advanced Missiology*. The theology—which, it seems to me, tells a story about a God whose love is ultimately contingent on obedience and who wishes to use the human species to eradicate (rather than befriend) other religious traditions so that all are brought “under the lordship of Christ” (275)—enraged my mind and broke my heart. Nehrbass claims that what really matters about cross-cultural Christian discipleship is love (200)—yet he doesn’t demonstrate how, while calling for missiologists to produce data to generate better theories (207), making everything and everyone “Christian” is actually loving. That simple approach won’t due. I think that a better one, which I am trying to develop as “a pneumatic ethnography,” is for lovers of Christ to query and explore and nurture what it means to love in a different cultural world situated within a global village, not impose a (even highly contextualized) theology that may be experienced as unloving.

For the past five years, I have been doing ethnographic research on the spiritual lives of people who live on the streets of Seattle. It may not surprise readers that, in this so-called “None Zone,” the majority of the people I spend time with reject Christianity. Some, interestingly, even practice a kind of “Luciferianism” that defines itself as a liberating force against Christianity. As a Quakerly Christian, it took me a while to work past my Christian fragility and see how, in this local world, love seemed to mean creating space for people to reject a religion that egregiously wounded them and their world—and find fullness in another tradition altogether. Christ, it seems to me, is the creative love mystery that freely calls our more-than-human world into love and flourishing, whatever tradition (or traditions) that might lead us into.



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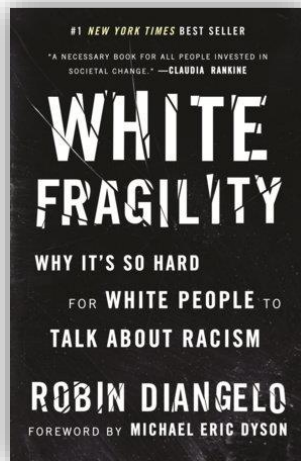
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## BOOK REVIEW

# White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism

*By Robin DiAngelo*

Reviewed by Dena Loder-Hurley



Boston: Beacon Press.  
2018

Robin DiAngelo pulls no punches in her book, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*. She identifies her intended audience, white progressives, and states her purpose, “to make visible how one aspect of white sensibility continues to hold racism in place: white fragility” (5). Formidable concepts infuse this purpose statement. DiAngelo’s premise assumes a “white sensibility,” itself a foreign concept to many white people, before introducing the new—and potentially insulting—concept of “white fragility.”

DiAngelo draws on her expertise as a professional educator from the beginning, arguing that it is a failure to fully understand the forces of socialization that cripples white people from the outset. The Enlightenment values of individualism and objectivity serve as an unquestioned aspect of culture and a key aspect of those forces. If individualism tells us all are “unique and stand apart from others, even those within our social groups,” then the suggestion of a collective,

group identity of white people is rendered irrelevant if not completely untenable (9). Furthermore, if objectivity deems it possible “to be free of all bias,” then to have a group identity, particularly a racial one, is to admit a biased perspective. She later identifies Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as the result of socialization, the process by which “thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions” are produced and reproduced by the interplay of individuals and the societal structures in which they live and develop (101). It is the unspoken and unquestioned parts of a culture that ultimately shape the lens through which all things are perceived and interpreted by the people within that culture.

DiAngelo takes aim at a simplistic understanding of a racist as “someone who holds conscious dislike of people because of race” (13) and dedicates chapter two to differentiating between prejudice, discrimination, and racism. Prejudice refers to people’s pre-judgments based on their own preferences and biases, which exist throughout humanity and are not inherently good or bad. Discrimination describes actions taken based on those prejudices. For example, I may be prejudiced that all responsible adults own a car; that prejudice becomes discrimination if I refuse to hire someone *because* they do not own a car. All people have prejudices, and everyone discriminates. Racism occurs when “a racial group’s collective prejudice is backed by the power of legal authority and institutional control” (20). It follows, then, that racism occurs separate from and without regard for the feelings, motivations, or intentions of any individual within the collective group. For many white people, this definition requires a complete paradigm shift. DiAngelo challenges two major pillars of Western culture within the span of twenty-one pages before seemingly redefining a term most people are both familiar with and have an opinion on.

One of the more common critiques of *White Fragility* is that any criticism affirms the author's premise and adds to her pile of evidence. DiAngelo lists examples of subtle yet insidious racism, including coded language and the rationalization of choices that perpetuate segregation in the name of a more noble goal, such as accessing "good schools." Many readers will protest that example, arguing that a competitive college admissions environment based mainly on test scores demands parents seek out a school that produces high test scores. While coded language and covert motivations are most certainly a reality, readers may stumble on a rigid either/or dichotomy and miss the larger point within the bigger picture, which is that understandable—and even "noble"—choices still perpetuate segregation. Which, unfortunately, reinforces DiAngelo's premise about white fragility.

Rather than focus attention on the form of the argument, readers will benefit most from giving serious consideration to the substance, the difficulties for white people to engage in hard conversations about ongoing racial disparities and inequities. DiAngelo makes her case in a mere 160 pages, a manageable volume for any reader given enough time. White readers may feel anger, shame, or any other range of emotions. Tolerating uncomfortable feelings and considering initially off-putting or offensive ideas and arguments can lead to new levels of understanding. After all, meaningful growth seldom occurs without significant discomfort.

While I believe DiAngelo's premise, argument, and conclusion deserve a fair hearing and serious consideration, I find her proposed solution problematic. DiAngelo argues that because the formation of whiteness as an identity draws heavily, if not exclusively, on white supremacy, it is, therefore, impossible to develop a positive white identity (149). She does not advocate for white people to deny their whiteness, but she does encourage them to be "less white" (150). But having or developing a personal sense of a cultural, racial identity is foundational to engaging meaningfully with racism and our participation in it. Expecting a person to hold on to part of their identity while simultaneously rejecting it seems to be asking someone to internalize shame as a hallmark of who they are. I believe that expectation is both unrealistic and untenable. Jesus himself said that he did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save it and to give his life as a ransom for many. The cross offers forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption,

and a way forward, and I believe ameliorating racism requires the same.

However, in a careful reading, Christian anthropologists will recognize a familiar, recurring theme in DiAngelo's work: a call for humility. DiAngelo repeatedly advocates for white people to cultivate racial humility. Rather than expecting people of color to assume the burden for educating whites, along with the responsibility to comfort whites in their grief, distress, or shame, she advocates for whites to have the humility to accept that responsibility as their own. When missteps occur, she calls for whites to have the humility to receive the feedback, to own the actions, intentional or unintentional, and then to repair the damage.

Perhaps a willingness to receive feedback is the greatest reason to fully engage with DiAngelo's book. The form of an argument may be critiqued, and the substance of an argument may be refuted. Winning an argument does not necessarily translate to being correct. Our goal, as the people of God, is not to win the argument. Our goal is to affirm the inherent dignity of all people, to understand the lines drawn to separate humanity from humanity, and to embody the cruciform gospel, valuing others above ourselves and looking to the interests of others. We may freely engage with DiAngelo's work from a place of humility, seeking first to understand, and asking the question, "What if she's right?"



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## BOOK REVIEW

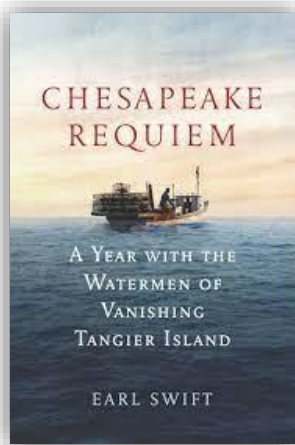
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# Chesapeake Requiem: A Year with the Watermen of Vanishing Tangier Island

*By Earl Swift*

Reviewed by Jeremy McNabb

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New York: Dey Street Books  
2018

The world is changing. In some places, this is more evident than others. Tangier Island, a small crabbing and fishing community at the turbulent south end of the Chesapeake Bay, is literally disappearing. Its culture, religious practices, economy, even its local accent are, in many ways, older than the United States itself. Earl Swift, the author of *Chesapeake Requiem*, spent a year living on the island, crabbing with the watermen, attending the island's two churches, and working with its people. In this homey ethnography, Swift attempts to record a unique community that may not be with us much longer, and also to listen in on the conversations about what, if anything, can be done to prevent the island's seemingly inevitable submergence in the Chesapeake Bay.

Swift begins the book with a geography lesson. Dozens of islands once dotted the Chesapeake Bay, many of them populated. One by one, they have changed from town, to deserted island, to marshland, to bay. A few of these communities exist only as a lingering beach with a few remaining, but abandoned

buildings. Sometimes, Swift hauntingly points out, when you are boating through the shallows of the Chesapeake, you are also boating through deeply and permanently flooded cemeteries.

The inhabitants of Tangier Island, mostly political conservatives, reject the idea of man-made climate change, but they know better than most that *something* is happening to their home. There is just not as much island as there used to be.

How does one get what one needs on an island so far removed from the mainland? Swift, and the town's mayor, Ooker Eskridge, talk through the obstacles to doing the things that most of us consider everyday life. There is no bridge to Tangier Island, and though ferry rides are common enough—twice a day in good weather—trips to the mainland are carefully planned. The handful of vehicles on the island are barely used, with most residents opting for bicycles and golf carts. But for such a humble place, the watermen of the island can boast a disproportionately significant contribution to the mainland economy, each waterman bringing in more than half a million crabs per year. If you have eaten blue crab on the East Coast, there is a chance it came through Tangier.

The island has shaped the religion of the Tangier residents, too. There are two churches, one United Methodist and the other non-denominational, where the people of Tangier get married and where the watermen who are lost in stormy waters are memorialized.

Tangier's religion is almost entirely Christian, but with an eschatological twist that is all their own. Christians on the island see their vanishing home as evidence of the End Times—that Jesus Christ's return is near. When the island finally goes under, some of them think, the Lord will come back.

In some ways, the town is a lingering theocracy—it is a dry (alcohol-free) island and some of the laws go back to Revolutionary days. A cross painted on the



water tower—government property—has been protested by visitors and the occasional resident, but it is well-known that if the town is forced to paint over it, it will reappear before just a few sunrises. This close tie between community and religion, in a country where such symbiosis is often discouraged, is one of the more fascinating aspects of the book. A whole chapter is devoted to the topic, and I would have enjoyed even more.

One of the other problems facing the island, if one wanted to call it a problem, is the selflessness of the aging community. Many of them, sensing that the island won't be around much longer, do not push too hard for their children to stay to carry on the family businesses. Whether crabbing or running a restaurant or inn, the parents of Tangier Island's increasingly small graduating classes often urge their children to go elsewhere—first to college, then to find a home on the mainland.

If the residents of Tangier Island are given hope that their island can be saved, those promises often only lead to frustration. The elders of the town can tick off the rescue proposals that have been brought to their town by non-profits, state, and federal authorities. Each one begins with a lengthy study of the island, its economy, its wildlife, and the effect it has on the rest of the Chesapeake Bay. Each time, these studies result in a need for more studies, until the cost of saving the island eventually overtakes the money allotted for the project. It is impossible not to feel their frustration.

Ethnographies often lack the heart-pounding excitement and mournful losses that memoirs and thrillers have, but Swift finds a way to make us care about this community of people whose lives seem, in many ways, very different from our own. From church infighting to search parties desperately hunting the Bay for missing friends, their losses can be earnestly felt. Their frustrations may draw you into an anger of your own.

Tangier Island is an incomparable place, more than just another green dot on a field of blue. Our nation's history is threaded through this tiny community, and if its shores are allowed to disappear, part of us will go away with it.



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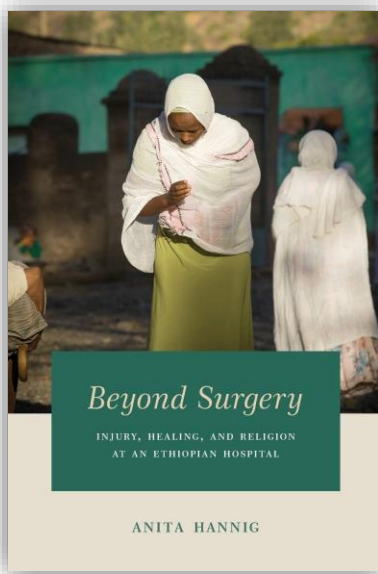
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## BOOK REVIEW

# Beyond Surgery: Injury, Healing, and Religion at An Ethiopian Hospital

*By Anita Hannig*

Reviewed by Harold Wanton



Chicago: University of Chicago Press  
2017

In *Beyond Surgery: Injury, Healing, and Religion at An Ethiopian Hospital*, Anita Hannig deeply investigates maternal childbirth injuries in Ethiopia. Women in Ethiopia suffer from obstetric fistula, a childbirth injury caused by a tear in and around a woman's genital tract and urinary tract and/or rectum. This is caused by prolonged and obstructed labor while giving birth without access to emergency medical support, such as c-sections, and often is experienced by very young mothers. In many cases, multiple surgical procedures are necessary to successfully cure or alleviate obstetric fistula. While journalists, non-government organizations, physicians, and celebrities have created a pseudo-narrative which has attributed this torturous childbirth injury to "backward" cultural practices (e.g., child marriage and genital mutilation), the more accurate causes of obstetric fistula, according

to Hannig, are attributable to geographical location and medical accessibility. Hannig's ethnography explores the support given to Amhara women in two medical facilities (Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa) and to Desta Mender in Ethiopia, a rehabilitation center for women with permanent obstetric fistula complications. Hannig's ethnography offers readers' an in-depth experience of the religious and communal culture that surrounds patients in Ethiopia.

In this three-part book, Anita Hannig demystifies the common narrative that women who have developed obstetric fistula are ones who have been rejected and isolated from their families and communities to suffer alone. Her work, in fact, speaks to the great extent that these women have a culture of care within their respective communities. Hannig examines the social, religious and bodily practices that are present in the local responses to fistula prior to surgery, the historical and institutional relevance of fistula repair, and the multifaceted responses to fistula repair and/or therapy. This ethnography describes the authentic and true role of kinship, religion, and culture in the extension of care to women who are incontinent. Hannig adds, "against this background [pseudo-narrative] it becomes evident that the contingencies of a woman's experience with fistula—though exhausting and complicated—nearly always leave room for her [the fistula sufferer] to assert herself as a member of some kind of a collective."

One strength of this ethnography is that it is beautifully written and offers a genuine conviction reminiscent of Nancy Scheper-Hughes with her work in a Brazilian shantytown (1993). Hannig relates the Protestant history of the first fistula hospitals and their ideological notions of uncleanness and ungodliness. These notions were applied to the idea of fistula surgery, not only as a surgical procedure, but as a form of salvation for obstetric fistula sufferers.

Another strength of this body of work is the powerful case that Hannig makes that the problem lies in helper' biases while the critical issues of poverty and lack health care accessibility go unaddressed. One weakness, which Hannig alludes to in her introduction, Is that her ethnography is limited by having only studied in the confinements of the hospitals due to the lack of communication technology and inaccessibility of patients' homes.

A Christian anthropologist's perspective would engage Ethiopian culture, Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, and the biomedical crisis that many Ethiopian women face with the heightened understanding of a Christian theological perspective and the ethnographic data of an anthropologist's view of the unique variations within Ethiopian culture. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahedo Church plays an important role in the whole of Ethiopian culture. With the constant tension between cultural traditions and pseudo-narratives by outsiders, it is imperative to have an outside voice that is relatively impartial and stands above the fray of the debate, potentially a voice that is led by the call of God and motivated by a Christian concern for both healing and truth.

*Beyond Surgery* is a powerful and intimate ethnographic study of one of the oldest Christian cultures and of the biomedical health issues that trouble it. This text is particularly suitable for scholars, and it explores the complexities of Ethiopian culture, Christian Orthodox tradition, and biomedical anthropology. Professional scholars, anthropologists, biomedicine professionals, and global philanthropy organizations will benefit from this body of work, as it provides readers with a considerable understanding of the nature of relations between culture and health.

## Reference

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1993. *Death Without Weeping*. Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press.



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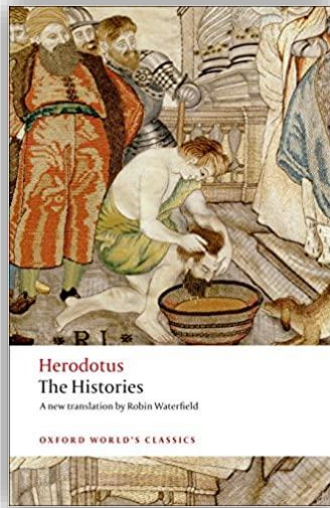
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## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Histories*

By Herodotus

Reviewed by Jacob Winn



Oxford: Oxford University Press  
2008

*The Histories*, by Herodotus, is one of our earliest sources of anthropological information. Written in the 5th century BCE, the writing was not primarily a work of anthropology, and indeed to see it as an explicitly anthropological work would be highly anachronistic. Nevertheless, while *The Histories* is indeed a work of history first and foremost, Herodotus is fascinating in his inclusion of various types of information that one can look back on and fairly classify as geographic, naturalistic, and certainly anthropological in nature. His all-encompassing work has left us many treasures to sort through.

The narrative of the nine books which make up *The Histories* focuses primarily on the Greco-Persian Wars and some of the characters involved. Most relevant to our interests here, however, is a repeating habit of Herodotus when introducing a culture to the narrative: he digresses for a time, exploring the culture in question, sharing a number of the customs and

traditions therein. It is within these digressions that the vast majority of the anthropological information is presented to the reader. While much of Herodotus's information is certainly secondhand, and thus his reports are undoubtedly filled with hearsay and some amount of spurious information (which Herodotus himself readily alludes to throughout the writing), his insights are nonetheless some of the very few shreds of written information we have about the practices of some ancient cultures such as the Thracians, various Scythian groups, and several others.

His examination of those various Scythians, in Book Four, serves as a good example of Herodotus's approach to the cultures he writes about. He covers a wide range of elements from Scythian culture, particularly Scythian religious practices, from their sacrificial practices (254), to their divination practices (256-257), to the highly ceremonial way in which they buried their kings (258-259). We can learn a fair amount about the sacred practices of cultures of the distant past from the valuable texts of the time that we have preserved for us still today, texts such as *The Histories*.

At times, Herodotus offers the reader glimpses of specific religious movements, these accounts occasionally serving as our main source for movements long made obsolete by the passage of time, such as the insight he offers into the ancient religion of Salmoxis (who is also known as "Gebeleizis" or "Zalmoxis"), a Thracian who promised his followers immortality before descending underground and emerging three years later, and whose beliefs were carried on by his followers long after his time (266-267). At certain points such as this, Herodotus's relative brevity is quite tantalizing. The reader is left asking a number of questions, the answers to which are not made explicit in the text. In this instance, we may find ourselves asking questions such as these: Who really was this Salmoxis, the figure behind the legend? How did he gain a religious following? Apart from the aforementioned promises of immortality, what were his

teachings? While Herodotus paints vivid pictures of a variety of things, sometimes instead he offers us merely a glimpse.

While the religious elements of Herodotus's anthropological reports are of the highest interest to me, and often seem to be of the highest interest to Herodotus, he covers a wide range of cultural elements. One can find a treasure-trove of various practices in *The Histories*, including cultural elements such as Babylonian marriage practices (p. 86), Egyptian crocodile-hunting (p. 122-123), the spread of the alphabet from Phoenicia to Greece (p. 324-325) and much more. In short, *The Histories* contains an eclectic collection of information on various ancient cultures. Much of this is indeed religious in nature, but one must remember that Herodotus wrote in a time in which the religious pervaded every aspect of life.

Most of the people that Herodotus wrote about existed in his own time, while today they exist to us primarily in memory. But even that memory would be robbed of us, its embers snuffed out in primordial silence beyond our collective recollection, if not for the work Herodotus has left to posterity. Though we can no longer go and visit them in the way that a contemporary of Herodotus would have been able to do, we can at least view them through the small window in time and space that is fashioned for us by *The Histories*.

The role of history in anthropological discourse is one which should not be underplayed or undervalued. We exist within a continuum of time which moves ever-forward, and what we explore today will be consigned to history tomorrow. What is now "yesterday" was once "today," and on and on it goes. Those who went before us were no less alive in their day than we are in ours, and their practices were no less valid or relevant or worthy of discussion and examination.

Finally, there are portions of *The Histories* that serve as some of our best examples of proto-anthropology. While Herodotus certainly did not set out to write an anthropological work, as anthropology as a well-defined field of study was still a long way away, he did a notable amount of anthropological work nonetheless.

It is important that we cherish these writings as some of our only links to humankind of the past. As a believer in Christ, I think it is important for us to honor all of God's creation, and all of humankind created in God's image, in the past, present, and future. Just as we can see God's handiwork upon the diverse array of

human cultures in the world today, we can also admire God's imprint upon those cultures of the past, the way they lived, their modes of being, and their approaches to the divine. All of human life is but a vapor, so perhaps we are not as far removed from the ancient cultures of our past as we may think! In any case, Herodotus has left a wonderful gift to posterity with his magnum opus, *The Histories*.



**Jacob Winn** is a graduate student in Eastern University's Theological and Cultural Anthropology Program. He is also a ministry worker, having spent the past six years involved in ministries of various kinds. He enjoys reading history, philosophy, and theology, and hopes to write extensively in the future. He also has his sights set on a future in academia, in addition to his ongoing ministry work.

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