Antiracist Discipleship: Practicing Freedom from the Deforming Forces of Whiteness, racism, and race

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ANTIRACIST DISCILESHP:  
PRACTICING FREEDOM FROM THE DEFORMING FORCES  
OF WHITENESS, RACISM, AND RACE

Written by

CLEVE MAY

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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ANTIRACIST DISCIPLESHIP: PRACTICING FREEDOM FROM THE DEFORMING FORCES OF WHITENESS, RACISM, AND RACE

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

CLEVE MAY
JULY 2017
ABSTRACT

**Antiracist Discipleship:**
Practicing Freedom from the Deforming Forces of Whiteness, Racism, and Race
Cleve May
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2017

This project addresses the ways whiteness, racism, and race operate in multiracial congregations and presents antiracist discipleship practices as the means toward freedom from their deforming force. Noting the racial hyper-segregation of congregations in the United States, the project avers that segregation is not the church’s actual problem; therefore, congregational integration is not an adequate solution. Rather, segregation is a symptom of a deeper sickness. Racism is identified as a deeper manifestation of the church’s ongoing race problem, but it, too, is named as a symptom of a yet deeper malady. The US church’s deep sickness is “whiteness,” a pernicious perversion of God’s gift of Ethnicity.

This project makes the case for the goodness of the powers and principalities, the ordering structures of God’s creation. The powers are herein presented as good, fallen, and to be redeemed. Ethnicity is named as one among the powers, which through a pattern of perversion by which all powers fall to Sin, becomes whiteness. Whiteness gives birth to racism, which in turn gives birth to race, all of which operate interrelatedly to destroy the US church’s witness to Jesus’ overcoming of dividing walls.

Employing anecdotes from the life of CityWell UMC in Durham, NC, the project reflects on the ways whiteness, racism, and race have worked in our midst, and so threatened our calling to become a people who receive the ways of Jesus as our way of life. The identification of the threats to our calling allows for the naming of specific antiracist discipleship practices and strengthens our resistance to and leads us to freedom from the ways that whiteness, racism, and race would deform our common life and witness. The project concludes with a hopeful anticipation of the way repentance can lead the church to the ultimate healing of our deep sickness.

Content Reader: Stan Wood, PhD

Words: 300
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INTRODUCTION

The hyper-segregation of the church in the United States stands as a direct affront to God’s intention to draw together a family of faith and worship from among all the nations of the earth.\(^1\) Where the church in the United States has always had a race problem, there have been concerted and growing efforts over the last seven decades to address this problem through the formation of multiracial congregations.\(^2\) This project questions whether or not the integration achieved by such congregations actually affects the root cause of the church’s race problem. Moreover, if not addressing the problem at the deepest levels, might it be that, in spite of all good intentions and against stated objectives, multiracial congregations are a “dubious enterprise”\(^3\) that makes the church’s race problem worse? This project contends that there yet remains a call for the church to give witness to the dividing-wall-destroying work of Jesus through the formation of

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\(^2\) The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples was founded in 1944 as the nation’s first intentionally multiracial congregation. According to data from the 2012 *National Congregations Study* directed by Mark A. Chaves, roughly 13 percent of US congregations are now multiracial, with no one race comprising more that 80 percent of the total congregation.

Where there are thoughtful reasons to use the terms multicultural or multiethnic in reference to diverse churches (see, for instance, Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 61.), this project will generally use the term multiracial to describe such congregations, as race has been and is the most salient category for the division of peoples in this nation, and for the distribution of “economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards” among people groups. See Michael O. Emerson & Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7-9.

multiracial congregations, but that this call can only be faithfully realized when such congregations submit to the rigorous discipline of antiracist discipleship practices.\(^4\)

CityWell United Methodist Church is one among the growing number of multiracial churches in the United States. Founded in 2011 in Durham, NC, CityWell explicitly sought to become a “multiethnic and economically diverse church,”\(^5\) in an effort to resist the racial segregation so overwhelmingly common in our nation’s congregations, and in order to bear faithful witness to the racial reconciliation\(^6\) made possible by Jesus. Over the course of our first six years, we have learned that segregation is merely a symptom of our actual malady, and that integration, if perceived to be the remedy, not only masks the deeper problem but paradoxically also makes it worse. If segregation is not the root problem, then integration is not the ultimate solution.

Not long into CityWell’s journey, it became painfully evident that underneath the symptom of segregation, deep-seated racism was perniciously present, though not in the forms most of us were accustomed to recognizing. The racism in our midst is more institutional than individual, more about systems than about symptoms, and operates

\(^4\) The practices identified throughout this project are among the Church’s historical corpus of spiritual disciplines and liturgical expressions. To name them herein as antiracist discipleship practices is to specify the focus of their application in the context of multiracial congregations that are explicitly seeking freedom from the deforming forces of whiteness, racism and race.

\(^5\) This language was adopted for CityWell’s original vision from DeYmaz, xxvi, 61.

\(^6\) Where this language was commonly used in CityWell’s early years, the reader will note that this project avoids constructive employment of the phrase racial reconciliation for two reasons: 1) I am writing from and primarily for the context of churches in the US, and in this country races have never been “conciled” to begin with, so re-conciliation is a historically sloppy wish (an idea powerfully articulated by Native American activist, Mark Charles. See http://wirelesshogan.blogspot.com/2015/11/myth-of-thanksgiving-and-racial-conciliation.html). 2) Where human reconciliation is a strong gospel theme, racial reconciliation is not a biblical concept, as modern notions of race did not exist prior to the 18\(^{th}\) century. Therefore, to make a direct biblical argument for racial reconciliation is, at best, anachronistic, and, at worst, is actually oppositional to God’s work in making all things new (an idea explored in depth in Chapter 3). Therefore, I will employ the terms and write in hopes of racial healing and racial redemption.
primarily at the level of the powers rather than simply through people. So, naming racism as personal feelings, speech, or actions arising from bigotry or bias is not only inadequate to the task of truthfully naming this evil but actually serves to mask its deepest machinations and thus perpetuate its virulent impact among us. Perhaps most challenging in this process of discovery has been the realization that racism, while deeper than segregation, is itself only a symptom of the actual sickness plaguing the church, our nation, and our world. The deep cancer is whiteness.\(^7\)

Whiteness, as reckoned with in this project, is precisely not a matter of skin color and is only in a secondary manner about those of us who have been raced-as-white.\(^8\) Rather, whiteness will be named as a perversion of God’s gift of Ethnicity,\(^9\) which is

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7 The project of naming whiteness requires a few humble concessions. First, a historical analysis of whiteness, like the one attempted in this project, is vulnerable, at points, to charges of anachronism. For instance, I identify the operations of whiteness in historical moments that precede the invention of the white race. The choice to do so is premised upon evidence that the structural force currently signified with the moniker, whiteness, was in operation (at least in seedling form) upon, in, and through societal systems, as well as through people who would eventually come to be raced-as-white, long before it was named. So, in this sense, naming the roots of whiteness is only possible as a retrospective endeavor that recognizes the tree within the seed. Second, due to the complexity of the subject of whiteness, and its spiritual root as a cosmic force of darkness, this project’s attempt to name whiteness is admittedly limited, but hopefully points in faithful directions that can inform ongoing iterations of this liberating work.

8 Throughout this project I will resist calling people white, as I am convinced that race itself is a cultural construct that has no biological or biblical basis, and therefore, unlike ethnicity, has no legitimacy as a proper identity marker. The phrase, raced-as-white, points toward the reality that race is a pseudo-identity imposed upon peoples precisely for the purpose of destroying God-honoring identities for the sake of power through oppression. In this line of argument, no one is white in an any essential way, but one is raced-as-white as one is formed by - and participates in - the structures of white supremacy that form the institutional foundations of this country and provide material, psychological, economic and political substance to this designation (see Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 11, 46.) However, the reader will quickly note this project’s frequent references to Asian, Latino and Black peoples. Such designations are capitalized to indicate them as proper and God-honoring identity markers, distinguished from the identity-diminishing category of race (which was the original intention in their creation) by the way I believe God to be redeeming the imposition of oppressive racial categories through the creation of new ethnic identities. Chapter 7 explores this argument at length.

9 When Ethnicity is capitalized in this project, it is so to designate a proper name for one of the powers God created for the right ordering of the world. Otherwise, ethnicity refers to an identity of people groups with reference to shared histories, cultures, languages, customs, religions and/or places of origin.
among the powers created through and for Jesus and held together in him (Col 1:16-17)\textsuperscript{10} for the right ordering of the world. Ultimately, then, whiteness is an expression of Sin,\textsuperscript{11} a weapon of Satan wielded in opposition to God and aimed at the destruction of creation. In the argument of this project, whiteness gives rise to racism, which in turn gives rise to modern conceptions of race.\textsuperscript{12}

The pages that follow present the biblical and theological foundation of the CityWell vision and offer a theological analysis of whiteness, racism, and race in order to render this triad of evil visible as direct threats to the integrity of CityWell’s communal life, to say nothing of the broader church’s witness to the gospel. Stories from CityWell’s journey illustrate the imperatives of a theological analysis of whiteness, racism, and race and of the adoption of antiracist discipleship practices, to the end that congregants see themselves more clearly, recognize better the spiritual forces arrayed against them, and so “stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph 6:11).

Chapter 1 introduces the story of CityWell, beginning with an account of our first Easter celebration, which proved to be a painful, communal turning point toward a determined and ongoing engagement with racism as a fundamental matter of Christian discipleship. The chapter recounts my call to plant this church, CityWell’s originating biblical and theological vision, and highlights from our early months of becoming a


\textsuperscript{11} In capitalizing Sin, I intend to designate a reality larger than, but encompassing, any and all particular sins.

\textsuperscript{12} Chapter 6 will argue that this derivative relationship mirrors that of Satan, Sin and Death, and that only though retrospective theological reckoning with the current workings of whiteness, racism, and race can one rightly name, see, and resist this triad of evil.
church family. Later sections of the chapter name many of my personal failings to reckon with the weight of being a pastoral leader raced-as-white in a multiracial congregation, and the ways these failings created growing tensions that culminated in the debacle of our first Easter. Chapter 1 concludes with a reflection on confession, the first of six essential antiracist discipleship practices for multiracial congregations.

Reckoning with national and denominational statistics, Chapter 2 begins with the observation that, in spite of significant shifts in biblical interpretation, theological conviction, and social imaginations around issues of race and racism, the US church remains mired in racially-defined segregation. The argument then moves toward evidence that the church’s failure to overcome segregation, even amid an infusion of tremendous energy and resources toward that end, stems from a failure to reckon with the deeper symptom of racism that operates systemically in our ecclesial institutions. Given the thoroughly racialized context of the United States and its churches, the chapter presents the discipline of contextualization as a second antiracist discipleship practice, necessary for naming racism rightly and so understanding and proclaiming the gospel.

Chapter 3 situates CityWell within the growing movement of multiracial congregations in the US, recognizing the common confluence within this movement of the explicit value of racial reconciliation, and, concurrently, the notable absence of attention given to understanding and addressing issues of whiteness, racism, and race. The chapter describes CityWell’s determined step away from this trend, the ways we have come to define race and racism, and a history of how these destructive ideas were

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13 Emerson & Smith, 5-19.
invented and deployed to advance the agendas of whiteness. The argument then turns to the imperative distinctions between race and ethnicity needed in order to read the bible in ways that honor God’s delight in ethnic diversity. The subsequent section narrates the long history of racism from colonialism to the present, naming both explicitly bigoted expressions of this evil, as well as subtle and insidious expressions cloaked in race-neutral institutional garb. Chapter 3 ends with a reflection on active memory, a third essential antiracist discipleship practice for the church’s journey toward desperately needed racial healing.

Chapter 4 reckons with the biblical category of the powers and principalities, beginning with an exegetical summary of the letter to the Ephesians. This summary argues that radical reconciliation and the multiethnic unity embodied in the Ephesian congregation provoke the spiritual warfare depicted in 6:10-17. The next section presents the powers as the good creation of God, that are fallen, to be sure, but intended for redemption rather than destruction. Focusing on Israel’s creation myth in Genesis 1-11, the chapter makes an argument for how the powers come to be perverted, with particular focus on the power of Ethnicity. The last major section of the chapter argues that supercessionism is the theological womb that birthed whiteness, a uniquely destructive perversion of the power of Ethnicity, from which racism and race eventually emerge. Chapter 4 closes with a call to the antiracist discipleship practice of naming-submission, through which the church can learn anew to receive the given name of God, receive our names from God, and only so learn to name others as God names them.

Chapter 5 focuses on whiteness. The chapter follows the work of Yale theologian, Willie James Jennings, arguing that in the first instance whiteness is a theological
imaginary, a deformed and deforming way of imagining the world and our place in it. The chapter contends that whiteness is an idolatry that attempts to wrest the basis of human identity from God and to place it in itself. This chapter reckons with white supremacy, white normativity, and white privilege as tools employed by whiteness in the project of usurping God as the center of human identity. The chapter presents the remembrance of baptism as an essential antiracist discipleship practice for liberating the church, and specifically Christians raced-as-white, from the manacles of whiteness.

Chapter 6 integrates the preceding analysis with the theological language of Sin, narrating an analogical relationship between whiteness/racism/race and Sin/Satan/Death. The chapter moves toward a description of what repenting of whiteness might look like as an expression of repentance of Sin, specifically in the kenotic ways of Jesus named in Philippians 2:5-11. Repentance is thus named as the sixth essential antiracist discipleship practice for multiracial churches.

Chapter 7 offers a hopeful exploration of the possibility of a redeemed White racial identity in light of Jesus’ refusal to allow Sin to define humanity. Reflecting on the fluidity of ethnicity and the actual transformation of black as a racial category into Black as a meaningful ethnic identity in the United States, this chapter imagines dying to whiteness as the gospel way for Christians raced-as-white to become a new ethnic

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15 Recall the purpose of capitalization in designating legitimate and God-honoring ethnic identities. The possibility explored here is that people raced-as-white may, through sustained practices of repentance (narrated as resistance to whiteness), be redeemed and so transformed into White people.
creation. The hope that undergirds this chapter is rooted in Jesus’ resurrection, the overcoming of all that would destroy God’s good creation.

Chapter 8 captures the substance of the project’s theological analysis of whiteness, racism, and race in a narrative outline for a two-day training that will become a regular component to CityWell’s discipleship ministry. The training is divided into eight sessions designed to lead the people of CityWell in a journey of narrating the forces of whiteness, racism, and race through a biblical theology, in order than we may see God, ourselves, and the world we live in more truthfully and so live more faithfully. The antiracist discipleship practices named in this project provide the structure and flow of the training, which is ultimately designed as a two-day liturgy of worship.

CityWell is a miracle of God that testifies to the power and promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This project is offered as a testament to the fruit of God’s work, the depth of God’s mercy, and the kindness of God to lead us to repentance. This work is also offered for the sake of CityWell’s future as a witnessing community and for the edification of other multiracial congregations, especially those led by pastors raced-as-white. This project is offered in thankful confidence that “[Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made us [all] one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility… that he might create in himself one new humanity…” (Eph 2:14-15). To him be the glory now and forever. Amen.
PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
CHAPTER 1

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Everything changed on Easter Sunday, 2012. It was CityWell’s first Easter celebration, a mere nine months after my family’s move to Durham. I am still amazed that the church survived that day and am convinced that we only did by a miracle of God. Apart from God having a determined and redemptive purpose for our life together, CityWell should not have lived through the trauma of that worship service, nor many other instances of comparable pain and fear that have marked our journey in the last six years. That Easter was the day I began to discover just how naïve we were in our vision for CityWell, and how fraught was the journey we endeavored to take as a multiracial congregation. That was the day I began to understand that I did not understand the significance of my white racial identity and the phenomenal liability that it was to the hope of our church’s calling. That was the day I first realized - in light of my naiveté and lack of self-awareness as a man raced-as-white - how deeply tenuous my leadership was. Easter 2012 was the day I realized that the life this congregation dreamt of together would cost more than I had dared to imagine, and would require of us profound commitments that I had not previously understood to be central to the work of the gospel.
Easter 2012 was the day CityWell took its first step, accidental though it was, onto the spiritual battlefield upon which Jesus beckons us to war against the agendas of whiteness, racism, and race that are antithetical to the Kingdom of God.

Completely unaware of my careless dancing in the minefield of US racism, I preached an Easter sermon about how Jesus’ resurrection gives us a future hope that informs our present living. To illustrate this gospel point, I offered an analogy from my marriage:

“I put a lot of hope in the promises Amy and I made to each other in our wedding vows, that 50 years from now we’ll be able to look back and see a marriage marked by love and faithfulness, and this hope determines and empowers the way we live together. Because of this hope, we care for one another, forgive one another, and continue to get to know one another’s hearts. Because of this hope, we endure and work through a lot of pain from one another. This hope drives us past our natural inclinations toward selfishness or promiscuity or independence, and drives us toward one another, because we know we can count on this hope, and that life lived toward this hope is more beautiful than life without it. Hope in a future promise determines our present lives, and this is nowhere more true than with the promise of resurrection.”

At this point in the sermon I went off script with an off-the-cuff illustration of how the opposite reality is true: a lack of future hope also informs our present living. I proceeded to use Black men as my illustration, quoting a statistic about a third of Black men in the US being incarcerated,1 along with an anonymous quote from one of the Black mothers in our church: “The white boys I know are raised to go to college and have families. The Black boys I know are raised to go to jail and to die.” After waxing eloquent for a few moments about the woes of Black men in America and my perception

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1 I was clumsy and inaccurate in my quote, as one-third of Black men in the US have some contact with the criminal justice system in their lifetimes and find themselves under correctional control of some kind, be it incarceration, probation, parole, or bearing the stigma of a criminal record. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012), 9, 180.
about a lack of hope forming their present lives, I noticed a hand raised high in the air. I stopped what I was saying and recognized the person raising her hand; unbeknownst to everyone but me, it was the woman I had just quoted. “How dare you say that in front of my son? I’ve spent my whole life trying to get him to believe that what you just said will not be his reality, and he has to hear this in church?” I wasn’t sure how to respond, other than to say, “I’m sorry, Tammie. Please forgive me for offending you. That was certainly not my intention.” I then restated the point I was initially trying to make, as if, perhaps, she had merely misunderstood the purpose of my statistics and quotation.

After getting back on track and moving into the final point of the sermon, I became frighteningly aware of two things: 1) something huge had happened, and 2) I had no idea what it was. As I looked around the room, my preaching turned into determined reading, and no one was listening. I had never been in a room so pregnant with tension before. Some of the minority people around me were crying; others were visibly angry; and the expressions of white folk in the room ranged from discomfort to terror.

Having reached the conclusion of my sermon-turned-stalling-tactic, I felt God calling me to stop the service and to walk into the tension, the fear, and the pain. “Something has happened here,” I said, “and I don’t understand exactly what it is, but we need to talk about it.” For forty-five minutes my prophetic and grace-filled brothers and sisters gave voice to what had happened: I had extracted a singular fact about incarceration from a complex matrix of facts without any regard for the realities that produce the problems of mass incarceration; I had carelessly wielded my illustrations

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2 Unless given explicit permission to use actual names, names in CityWell anecdotes have been changed to honor the privacy and/or wishes of actual participants in the events described.
without regard for the lived experience and pain of so many people in the room; I had clumsily employed generalizations that perpetuate racialized stigmas and stereotypes, and had made an unintentional but nonetheless racist comparison of an image of white hope to an image of Black hopelessness. The responses offered were piercing and revealed a depth of insight I did not possess and an experience of pain I could not imagine.

To each person who spoke up I offered the same heart-felt and foolish response: “I am so sorry I offended you. Please forgive me and know that was not my heart.” I had no idea at the time that in responding with these words I was deflecting responsibility away from myself by intimating that the problem lay with the thin-skinned, race-card-pulling people of color in the room who had simply misinterpreted my motives and were too easily “offended.” With each earnest apology, I deepened a fear among those raced-as-white in the room that addressing issues of race could only result in accidentally saying something offensive and being viewed as ignorant, or worse, as racist. My apology fell flat among people of color because I never acknowledged that I actually did damage with my careless words, while repeatedly insisting on the goodness of my own heart (as if positive intentions justify negative impact). It would take two weeks of personal conversations with each of the people of color in the room for me to recognize the impact of both my reckless illustrations and my misguided apologies.

As the time of congregational sharing came to a close, I attempted to wrap the whole experience with a pretty Easter bow, saying, “The fact that we can have this difficult conversation is a sign that Jesus is risen and is with us.” Immediately another hand shot into the air. “Yes, Sarah?” “Don’t call this a conversation, Cleve. This is a reaction to your carelessness. A conversation allows for us all to come to the table
prepared to engage each other thoughtfully. If you want to have a conversation about race, you need to take that seriously.” She was exactly right. So I responded, “You’re right, Sarah, and you have my word that from now on CityWell will have a sustained and thoughtful conversation about race.” And so for the last five years we have.

The Call

How on earth did we get here? Prior to that Easter, I could not have begun to imagine being the pastor that I am becoming at CityWell because I did not know how to ask the appropriate questions about the problem we felt called to address in our life together. I had no idea that racial segregation in the churches of this country was not actually the besetting problem. I did not know how to ask deep questions about racism and race, and certainly not about whiteness. Although these types of questions have now come to profoundly determine our common life, they were simply not where we began.

In the summer of 2011 my family and I moved to downtown Durham, NC. Having grown up in Durham, my wife, Amy, was forbidden as a teenager from going downtown, as it was associated with high rates of poverty and crime. However, in the years between Amy’s youth and our family’s move to this formerly forbidden place, downtown Durham changed a lot, becoming a seedbed for innovation, the arts, political activism, small business entrepreneurship, and big-money commercial development. Downtown Durham became cool.

Durham’s cool was not why we landed here, although our move certainly contributed to the racial and economic forces working beneath that veneer of cool. We came because we were sent. I am a United Methodist pastor, and in the summer of 2010 I
received a call from the Conference Director of New Faith Communities, letting me know that the bishop and cabinet were praying about a church plant in downtown Durham. They asked me to pray about being the planting pastor. Little did the bishop and cabinet know that four years earlier Amy and I had begun to dream about planting a church precisely in Durham’s urban center. The wind of God’s Spirit was blowing.

**The Biblical Vision**

Knowing we had a year to prepare for our move and to dream about the church God would birth through us, Amy and I began to pray for two things: 1) that the Lord would give us a vision for a church that we would never mistake as having come from us, and 2) that the vision would be so bold and unlikely to succeed that if it came to fruition people would only give credit to God. We asked God for a vision that would drive us to radical dependence upon divine power and provision and infuse this new church with passion, Kingdom motivation, and trustworthy direction that would orient all of the church’s life around a central, driving purpose:³ “to become a people who receive the ways of Jesus as our way of life, for the sake of his glory, and for the sake of the world.”⁴

In that year of prayer and dreaming, God beckoned us to imagine radical new expressions of our core convictions about the purpose of the church. We came to sense the Lord calling us to form a faith community committed to making discipleship, i.e., the intentional and communal formation of people in the ways of Jesus, the very center of its

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⁴ This is CityWell’s vision statement, which was developed in communal conversations with the CityWell family in our first six months of life together. See www.citywell.org.
life. The first implication of this commitment was that CityWell must be a multi-ethnic and economically diverse church that reflects the Kingdom of God in the midst of a culturally, ethnically, racially, and socio-economically diverse city.\(^5\) This was the vision for which we had prayed.

While I now believe that our early understanding of the CityWell vision was dangerously naïve, the vision itself was rooted in the earth-shattering declaration that God has reconciled the world to Himself in Christ (2 Cor 5:18-19) and thus torn down the dividing walls both between God and humanity and between all peoples (Eph 2:14-16). This vision sought to mirror that of the seer, John, who envisioned “a great multitude… from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9). Later in chapter 21:24-26, John sees the kings and peoples of the earth entering the New Jerusalem, bringing the glory of the nations to God. We believed - and continue to believe - that this is the church’s sure future - a church of all peoples united in praise and worshipful celebration of the distinctiveness of the world’s ethnicities – and that we were to live into this promise now; we were to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called (Eph 4:1), as witnesses to God’s Kingdom coming on earth as in heaven (Matt 6:10). We were utterly compelled by this gospel vision and committed not to be content to pursue anything less.

Many of the New Testament churches were made up of Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female, slave and free.\(^6\) In these surprising congregations, all of these

\(^5\) DeYmaz, xxviii, 4, 63, 113. DeYmaz pointedly asks, “If the Kingdom in Heaven is not segregated, why on earth is the church?”

would-be cultural dividing lines became scandalous bonding seams, as in Christ, God created a new humanity, a third race.⁷ Insofar as our congregations today are ethnically and culturally homogenous, they are impoverished in the experience of this new humanity. More than that, to the degree congregations do not pursue a corporate life that reflects God’s dividing-wall-destroying desire and intention for the church, the church diminishes its witness to the truth of the gospel. Jesus prayed for the church’s unity in order that the world may believe that the Father sent Him (Jn 17:21). There is a significant correlation between our visible, multi-ethnic/cultural/racial unity and the effectiveness of our witness. This correlation only increases in salience as the United States marches toward a new demographic reality of becoming a majority-minority nation.⁸ The racial segregation perpetuated by mono-ethnic congregations becomes increasingly unpalatable to a world already skeptical of the church.⁹

Finally, CityWell was born with the conviction that diversity is a matter of the fullness of gospel life. In the midst of Jesus’ prayer for our unity, he said, “These things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves” (Jn 17:13). Racial unity manifested in shared worship, ministry, and life is part of the “life to the full” that Jesus came to give the world (Jn 10:10). My desire and prayer was that CityWell would yearn and strive for everything God has in store for us in Christ, that we might taste the

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⁹ David T. Olson, The American Church Crisis (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 152, 169-171.
fullness of gospel life and have the joy of Christ complete in us. As a nascent church, we believed these things; we desired these things; we prayed for these things; and we had no idea what these things would require of us.

The Theological Vision

The CityWell dream was conceived in the conjoining of a biblical vision and a theological conviction. Though compelled by the biblical portrait of a church that embodied God’s reconciliation through multi-ethnicity and economic diversity, I was further emboldened toward the dream by the theological conviction that the church exists for a mission emanating from the center of God’s own heart.\textsuperscript{10} The \textit{missio Dei} is the soil from which the church of Jesus Christ grows and the purpose the church must serve.

Mission is not a word that first describes the action of the church; mission is a word that first describes the being and action of God. Mission is an English translation of the Latin word \textit{missio}, which can mean “sending” or “mission.” Therefore, missionary is a word that describes the God who sends forth Israel into the world, sends prophets unto Israel, sends Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, sends the Holy Spirit to empower God’s people, and sends the church to bear witness to Jesus for the sake of all nations. The story of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament reveal a God who is known through the acts of God’s sending. Mission is what God does, and God is what God does, for one cannot and must not separate the being of God from the actions of God.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Bosch, 392.
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One can only rightly speak of the church’s mission in response to what one says about our missionary God because the church exists only as a servant to God’s mission.\(^{12}\) To this point, it has been provocatively said that the church does not have a mission; rather God’s mission has a church.\(^{13}\) Therefore, the church’s driving impulse is to bear faithful witness to all that God has done, is doing, and determines yet to do in the healing of creation, in the making all things new called salvation. So, in imagining CityWell’s mission we look to Scripture and we find God determined from before the foundations of the world to “to unite all things in [Christ]…” (Eph 1:4,10), determined that all of creation might “be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21), determined that all humanity might participate in the very nature of God (2 Pet 1:4) as ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20), every knee bowing and every tongue proclaiming that “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11), all so that the whole creation might rejoice in the freedom and redemption attending the revelation of God’s glorious Kingdom (Rom 8:19-22).

These expressions of Divine determination are to form our imaginations for what CityWell’s life is to be about as a witness to and participant in God’s mission.

Since its beginning and into the present, CityWell has been driven to discover how our life together can participate in and point toward God’s uniting of all things in Christ, God’s liberating and transforming power, and God’s healing and reconciling work in Jesus. We believe that CityWell’s witness to the Kingdom of God will be determined

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 195, 197.

\(^{13}\) Bosch, 390.
as much by the community that forms, and the ways this community expresses its life together, as by what this new church names as our beliefs. Indeed, every part of our life together is a matter of witness, as the character of our community determines both our posture toward the world and the context into which we invite the world. Therefore, CityWell’s communal life is “intrinsic to the good news being proclaimed and the invitation being offered.”\textsuperscript{14} In this sense, the life of the church is an essential part of the salvation Jesus won for us in his life, death and resurrection; the community of faith is an element of what Jesus saves us into.\textsuperscript{15}

Therefore, the pursuit of language and practices that most fully express this union of the missio Dei and missio ecclesiae constituted much of CityWell’s early life and work. We desired to adopt practices that would mold CityWell’s character to mirror the character of God. Our hope was to learn a way of being family together that would serve as a compelling interpretive story\textsuperscript{16} that rendered the gospel intelligible and credible to people for whom church had simply ceased to be interesting (if it ever had been). Apart from an embodied witness, our words, no matter how true, ring hollow. Only in a communal life formed in light of the missio Dei could CityWell receive and live into our vocational call to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of God’s Kingdom.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Bryan Stone, \textit{Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness} (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 257.


\textsuperscript{16} Brad J. Kallenberg, \textit{Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age} (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 42.

\textsuperscript{17} Bosch, 11, 374-376, 390.
The Beginning

Driven by the biblical vision of a church that includes people of all nations, tribes, and languages worshiping together (Rev 7:9-10), and a theological conviction that our purpose is to live as witnesses to the Kingdom of God, Amy and I set out in the summer of 2011 to start such a church in Durham’s urban center. Among our early commitments was that CityWell must begin, from its very first gathering, with a core group of people who embodied the diversity of which we dreamt, and that such a beginning would only arise from the mysterious mixture of miracle and intentionality. So, we began to pray and to intentionally form relationships with people of varying backgrounds, races, and cultures. Central to our prayer rhythm was a daily adaptation of the plea in Luke 10:2 for the Lord to raise up laborers for his harvest field; we prayed specifically that God would raise up leaders for CityWell who reflected the diversity of Durham and who would serve as gatekeepers to Durham’s many communities.

Continuing to find instruction and inspiration in Luke 10, Amy and I adopted a practice Jesus commended to his seventy-two missionaries: look for people of peace. In their book, Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide, Mike Breen and Alex Absalom described this practice as a mission strategy premised on a radical trust in God to open relational doors for the flourishing of the gospel. Jesus sent his followers into communities where they were strangers who had no credibility in their own right and thus

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18 Curtis Paul DeYoung et al., United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 140, 143. See also, Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 45-46.

no legitimacy to gather an audience, much less establish a new faith community.

However, Jesus assured the seventy-two that there will be “people of peace,” who will hear the message of the Kingdom, receive it as good news, welcome the missionaries into their homes, provide for their needs, and serve as gatekeepers to the community. Jesus’ instructions, therefore, granted the missionaries tremendous freedom from any perceived burden of having to make things work for the Kingdom. Just go, Jesus said, and speak of the Kingdom vision I have given you. That’s all. Speak the vision.

With hope that we would find Jesus’ way fruitful, we threw ourselves into the work of simply speaking the vision to any and all who would listen. True to his word, Jesus did provide people of peace, and God did raise up a beautifully diverse team who would become CityWell’s founding core. Just as Amy and I had prayed, when seeing the church family that was forming, we believed that God was is with us, and God was doing something very special. Within a month of our arrival in Durham we were hosting weekly gatherings in living rooms, at public parks, and in local watering holes. Relationships began forming, and the emerging core team began to embrace and develop what was initially Amy and Cleve’s vision as CityWell’s vision.

Exposure

The diversity of people God gathered together in the early days, and that has continued to gather into the CityWell family, is truly miraculous. Black, white, Asian, and Latino, from our very first official gathering, we looked like the multi-ethnic church

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21 See Appendix A for a demographic analysis of CityWell.
of which Amy and I had dreamed; and we celebrated. In correspondence with our
supporters outside of Durham and with our denominational supervisors, we rightly touted
our gatherings as evidence of God’s favor. However, in our enthusiasm we were
incredibly blind to the complexities and fragility of our newly forming relationships, as
well as to the difficulties that lay ahead when these relationships would grow beyond
skin-deep. Time would inevitably expose the shallow depths of my own and others’
understanding of the ways that whiteness, racism, and race operate in our world, as well
as the tremendous problems attending the simplistic theology of reconciliation and
misguided value of diversity that served as pillars of CityWell’s early vision.

Signs of trouble began to arise soon after the first CityWell gatherings, although I
had neither eyes to see nor wisdom to interpret them well in those early days. In one
instance, I wrote an email to the early CityWellers that I also blind carbon copied to our
supporters and supervisors. In that message, I genuinely but foolishly reported on one of
our first gatherings, writing:

“I was so pleased to see how naturally people engaged one another and how cool it
was to begin learning from one another about some of our cultural particularities.
Harold told some of us about the Korean celebration of Hudson’s first birthday...
Mike taught Amy about hair care for a black man, and Shelly shared the secrets of
bringing out the curl in white girl hair. I continued my education in the differences
between hip-hop, R&B and rap… Ismael shared some about his and Alma’s
hometown, San Luis Rio Colorado. It was really a delightful time, and once again
left the feeling that this is closer to a true Kingdom experience than most of our
church experiences.”

The next morning, I was met with questions and concerns from several of the people of
color who were mentioned in the email. They wondered who else was on the recipient
list, who I was trying to impress, why I was so excited about such superficial
conversations, and why I had tokenized these initial interactions. At that point in my
journey, if only one person had confronted me, I might have written off these questions as the irrational reaction of an overly sensitive minority person. However, I was leveled by the multiplicity of voices and the fact that they each read right through my BCC email list to know I was in fact trying to impress supporters and supervisors, in effect pimping these nascent relationships for the sake of personal accolade and perhaps a little more monetary support. The crucible of learning had begun, as had the exposure of my ignorance to matters that would prove crucial to leadership of a multiracial church.

In another stumbling a few months later, I consulted on and forwarded an email to the church from another white brother who was deeply concerned after two Black men from CityWell were incarcerated in the same week. He wrote, “100 percent of our African American male population at the CityWell is currently imprisoned. Personally I find this as no coincidence.” This message elicited an immediate response from many of people of color in CityWell because, in fact, only two out of five Black men in our church family were in jail. In addition, the statement that there is “no coincidence” to “100 percent of our African American male population” being incarcerated landed like a bomb, sounding like racist resignation to some perceived inevitability of incarceration for all Black men. One respondent to the email wrote: “I think perhaps this might be a good time to talk about that elephant in the room: race. Maybe not. I don't know. It's there, but we never talk about it directly--only when someone ‘messes up.’” This same person also noted that the Black men in our midst who were not incarcerated also happened to be middle class and educated and therefore were somehow missed as qualifying as “Black” in the eyes of the email’s author, and in my eyes as the email’s sender. The next day, I sent a follow-up email apologizing for the “oversight” and the “unfortunate mistake.” I
asked for forgiveness, and I moved on. However, I did not realize at the time that these were not mistakes that could be covered with simple apologies. There was deep hurt and growing skepticism among the CityWell people of color that being a multiracial church was worth the cost, or that I was trustworthy to lead without doing great harm.

The two illustrations above are unfortunately two of many, each blunder poking a hole in the façade of my cultural competence and building a case against my legitimacy as a leader of a multiracial church. By the time we came to our first Easter celebration, what I had hoped were minor, disconnected, and perhaps even inevitable missteps in a journey toward racial reconciliation, had proven rather to be a pattern of deeply hurtful failures to account for the potency of whiteness, my own white racial identity, and the multifarious ways racism was operating in and through me, despite my best intentions. I had not yet come to see that there can be no journey of racial reconciliation without a journey of reckoning with whiteness, racism, and race. Over the course of our first nine months my repeated failures wore thin the willingness among people of color in our church family to bear quietly with the harm I was creating, and we were primed for the explosion I set off with my careless sermon illustrations on our first Easter celebration. In my memory, that Easter has become the day when I was fully exposed in my lack of understanding, preparation, and credibility to lead a congregation like CityWell. And all I wanted that day was to crawl into Jesus’ empty tomb and hide.

**Leaning In**

Easter 2012 was a pivotal moment in the CityWell story. I was exposed in my inadequacy as a leader, and CityWell was exposed in its fragility and vulnerability. As I
now see it, we had two options; we could shrink back, or we could lean in. We chose the latter. From that point forward, whiteness, racism, and race have been central issues of our attention. Reckoning with this triad theologically and biblically through communal practices has become an essential discipleship commitment for us, an imperative matter of our living into and bearing witness to God’s mission of reconciling the world, of uniting all things in Christ, and of liberating all of creation.\

Though I could not have imagined it at the time, the choice to lean in would mean certain kinds of death for all of us. In the face of whiteness, racism, and race, receiving the ways of Jesus as our way of life requires the death of our desires for comfort, the death of our fictions that place the ugliness and power of this triad somewhere outside ourselves, the death of naiveté that would have us believe racism is either a thing of the past or something we will overcome with mere shifts in personal postures, the death of our fear of being exposed as complicit in the problem or inadequate to solve it, and the death of theologies that do not relentlessly thrust us into the midst of our world’s suffering, disparities, and injustices. We are learning to see our leaning into these things as a way of taking up our cross to follow Jesus, allowing our sins to be nailed to it, and dying to these sins that we might live for his sake (Lk 9:23-24). And like Jesus’ death, CityWell’s reckoning with whiteness, racism, and race is proving paradoxically redemptive; in our deaths we are finding life.

In spite of my sermon blunder and the harmful apologies that followed, that Easter the Lord began revealing that CityWell’s journey would be one of redemption, and

\[\text{\footnotesize 22 We have come over time to understand that reckoning with whiteness, racism, and race is not only a matter of justice or liberation for people of color, but also essentially for people raced-as-white.}\]
therefore one of death and resurrection. Much to my surprise, and further evincing God’s desire for us, no one left the church in the wake of the Easter debacle. In fact, many folks expressed a deeper commitment to the church as a result of that Sunday. Several of the people of color in the room shared that they had never experienced a man raced-as-white apologizing (albeit poorly) to and seeking forgiveness from people of color, and that act alone was enough to keep them at the table. We even closed that Easter together with songs of redemption and hope. But I did not feel hopeful; mostly, I felt afraid: afraid of failing, afraid of hurting people, and afraid of succumbing to fear.

The last several years have birthed a deep conversion of that fear in me, from a paralyzing power to which God has so often had to say, “Fear not,” to a holy fear and trembling with which I am receiving this journey as the working out of my own salvation (Phil 2:12). Throughout the six years of this journey, many people of CityWell have expressed their own fears evoked by the magnitude and gravity of our calling. While we are by no means at the top of the mountain, the congregation’s fears no longer bear the paralyzing power they once did either. We are on a communal road marked by a Christ-like confidence that this is the road the Father has placed before us and that, in spite of whatever death the trek may entail, we can trust the Father’s promise of resurrection. This is a journey in which CityWell is coming to more deeply know the heart of God, more precisely name the sins that hold us and our world captive, more clearly see the world through God’s eyes, and more hopefully press into the freedom and renewal that Jesus’ death and resurrection accomplished and make possible. Indeed, CityWell is beholding the glory of God and being transformed into the image of Jesus, from one degree of glory to another, as the Spirit of the Lord is accomplishing this among us (2 Cor 3:18).
This project will argue that the church in the United States desperately needs to lean in with regards to reckoning with whiteness, racism, and race, as our complicity in the ongoing racialization of our country\textsuperscript{23} wars against the witness the church is to bear as Christ’s body. CityWell’s journey need not be novel. Our path to this point is by no means exemplary, and it would be great folly to present or look to CityWell as a model to reproduce. However, ours has been a journey in which the kindness of God is leading us to repentance (Rom 2:4) and setting us free from bondage to the many ways whiteness, racism, and race have defined our lives individually and collectively in the United States, and, specifically, as Christians in this nation. This is a journey of death and resurrection; this is a journey of salvation for which we give thanks and praise to God. And we believe this is a journey that the racism-racked church in the United States must undertake. As CityWell is learning to receive the ways of Jesus as our way of life, the Lord is teaching us principles and practices that can be embraced and contextualized in the settings of other congregations, chief among them a rigorous theological engagement with the powers and principalities that wield whiteness, racism, and race as subtle and often invisible weapons against, and in the hands of, Jesus’ church.\textsuperscript{24} I offer these accounts of CityWell’s life with the prayer that they will be received as the story of what God is doing in our church and can do in other churches, as well as with the conviction that reckoning with the anti-trinity of whiteness, racism, and race is an essential matter of Christian discipleship for the church in this nation.

\textsuperscript{23} This assertion will be explored in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{24} Chapter 4 presents extensive reflection on the New Testament language of the “powers and principalities” and addresses whiteness, race and racism through this theological lens.
Antiracist Discipleship Practice #1: Confession

Discipleship is an active receiving of the ways of Jesus as our way of life through concrete, and most commonly communal, practices. This chapter narrated some of the ways one such practice, confession, has formed my journey of leadership in a multiracial congregation. I believe confession will take different forms in different contexts, but this practice is essential to antiracist discipleship in the multiracial church. Apart from confession, the church simply will not be able to follow Jesus in tearing down the dividing walls of hostility (Eph 2:14) in our nation and in our churches, or in proclaiming release for the captives and the recovery of sight for the blind (Lk 4:18).

Confession is a participation in the liberation that God established for us through Jesus and that God is actualizing in our midst through the power of the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we do not confess our sins so that we will be forgiven; we confess freely because we have been forgiven. We confess as a way of declaring the power of God over sin, of naming the truth that sin has no rightful claim upon us and no rightful place in our midst. Confession is declaration of the love and lordship of Jesus that defines our lives, for we have been reconciled to God and presented in Christ as holy and blameless and without reproach (Col 1:22). Confession refuses the manacles of fear, for we are perfectly loved and the love of God casts out fear (1 Jn 4:8). Confession subverts the schemes of the evil one who would paralyze us with accusation, for we are in Christ and in Christ there is no condemnation (Rom 8:1). Confession, therefore, dismantles the defensiveness that too often impedes people raced-as-white from reckoning rigorously with our complicity in and bondage to whiteness, racism, and race. In all these ways, confession is
essential to our formation as people who can experience Jesus’ liberation and so learn to resist the forces of whiteness, racism, and race that impede our witness to the Kingdom.

For people raced-as-white, confession must include regular naming of the reality that our imaginations and ways of being in the world have been profoundly formed by whiteness, racism, and race. Such naming is not reserved for a moment of prayer in worship on Sundays. I have found it necessary, appropriate, and freeing to practice this mode of confession in everyday conversations, in meetings with administrators at my children’s school, in church leadership team meetings, and in gatherings of pastors. For example, in a conversation with a friend of color, I once said, “I know that as a white man there are things I have been deeply formed to assume, and things I have been formed not to see. Would you mind helping me think through a question I am wrestling with, so I might recognize some of my racial blinders?” Frequently in meetings with the Equity Team at my kids’ school, I preface comments similarly and explicitly name ways that I have failed to resist my racist formation as a leader and as a father. Such moments of confession have several effects: 1) I experience heightened attentiveness to my racialized defaults and am better able to love the neighbors with whom I am engaging because I am walking in an awareness of the freight my racial identity bears. 2) My confessions contribute to the disarming of defensiveness for other people raced-as-white in the room, and creates a braver space for them to practice confession as a truthful and thus liberating

25 I will not presume to name the ways people of color need to practice confession with regard to the forces of whiteness, racism, and race. However, I have frequently witnessed such moments, during which, confession has centered around two primary themes: 1) the ways that the confessing ones had chosen to believe or internalize the lies of racism, either in their self-judgment or their judgments of other people of color, or 2) the ways that the confessing ones had capitulated to fear or apathy in failing to stand up and speak out against racist expressions from people raced-as-white.
act (Jn 8:32). 3) Confession increases trust between people of color and myself, and therefore creates greater possibility for relational depth and transformation.

Confession, as a public naming of moments of failure, has become a primary means of resisting the forces of whiteness, racism, and race at CityWell.\textsuperscript{26} I have found it to be a matter of inevitability that I will sometimes act out of my racialized defaults and cause harm to my brothers and sisters of color; I believe this is true for all people raced-as-white. What is not inevitable, but what alone can mitigate the harm done and keep open the possibility of continued relationship, is the willingness of those of us raced-as-white to practice confession, to own the harm we create without qualifier, and to ask for forgiveness. Such acts of confession not only honor the brothers or sisters we have harmed, but they serve to deepen our own awareness of the ways whiteness, racism, and race operate upon, in, and through us. Directly engaging those we hurt with confession, learning from them how our particular transgression participates in and compounds centuries of racist assaults upon their humanity, and experiencing (as I most often have) the power of grace and forgiveness – these things serve as a powerful counter-formation to ways whiteness, racism, and race seek to deform us. In these and many other ways, confession strengthens us for faithful resistance to this anti-trinity of forces that constantly threatens to destroy the fragile witness multiracial churches can bear to the reconciling power of Jesus and to the redemptive promise of the Kingdom of God.

\textsuperscript{26} See Appendix B for an example of a communal expression of confession, a prayer CityWell offered the Sunday after a noose was found hanging on Duke’s campus in the spring of 2015.
CHAPTER 2
SAY TO SEE; SEE TO LIVE

The church on the North American continent has always had a race problem. Despite huge shifts in biblical interpretation, theological commitments, and social imaginations over time, the problem persists. In the face of multitudinous denominational initiatives to get past our past, US evangelical and mainline churches have by and large proven inept to name, see, and resist adequately the ways racism continues to mal-form the social performance of our faith and thus the content of our witness to the lordship of Jesus and the power of his gospel. Indeed, Faulkner’s haunting assertion names the church’s wrestling with race and racism precisely: “The past is never dead; it’s not even past.”¹ Armed with biblical visions and theological proclamations denouncing racism and calling for racial reconciliation, the church continues to falter on the field of battle, falling victim to unwitting perpetuation of the very racism it intends to overcome. This stubborn reality reveals a truth that too few churches are actively embracing: where segregation

and racism are profound problems, they are mere symptoms of a deeper, far more pernicious and elusive problem, the cancer of whiteness.²

**Racial Segregation in US Churches**

Evidence points persistently and emphatically to the US church’s problem with what Du Bois called the “problem of the color-line.”³ Duke University’s 2012 National Congregations Study finds that only 13 percent of US congregations are multiracial, that is, with no one racial demographic comprising more than 80 percent of the membership.⁴ Where this number is a marked increase from the findings in the first wave of the NCS data collection in 1998, which indicated less than 7 percent of US congregations to be multiracial, the landscape of US churches remains remarkably defined by racial segregation. The church has a race problem.

Within the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, where CityWell was birthed, the numbers are far more shocking. Of 814 congregations in 2013, only one, CityWell, was listed as multiracial.⁵ CityWell thus represents the .1 percent of congregations in this Conference who bear witness to a Kingdom where tribes, nations,

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² The remainder of this project will wrestle with and offer definitions of what “whiteness” is and how it operates. At this point, the use of this term is intended in no way to signify skin color, and only in a secondary sense points toward those of us who have been raced-as-white. Whiteness, as this project proposes, is the spiritual source of both racism and race, and operates at the level of the powers and principalities, a thesis that will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.


⁴ Figures obtained from the 2012 National Congregations Study directed by Mark A. Chaves.

⁵ Data obtained from a 2013 North Carolina Annual Conference Statistics Review presented by Rev Giovanni Arroyo of the General Commission on Race and Religion. These data may be slightly inaccurate, as I suspect that there may be a few other congregations in the NCCUMC that meet the NCS 80/20 designation of being multiracial.
races, and languages come together before the throne (Rev 7:9). The United Methodist Church has a race problem.

At best, the 2012 NCS identifies 87 percent of US congregations as racially homogenous. However, this estimation is likely low. Sociologist Michael O. Emerson argues that many of these multiracial congregations are simply transitioning from one racially homogenous constitution to another, and many more are too fragile to survive the minefields that racial diversity presents in voluntary associations like churches. Such findings should counter a naïve optimism in congregations like CityWell and turn us to a more realistic posture of prayer that “the one who began a good work among [us] will bring it to completion…” (Phil 1:6).

As jarring as the numbers are, the church’s race problem is much deeper than a lack of racial diversity at the congregational level. In fact, pervasive congregational homogeneity is merely a symptom pointing to a deeper symptom racking the US church, the roots of which extend deeply below and destructively throughout the very foundation of the church in this nation. The deeper symptom underlying the NCS statistics on the racial composition of US congregations is far less visible than racial segregation and far

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6 Michael O. Emerson, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 36-37. As a pastor of a multiracial congregation, I feel the fragility of CityWell’s diversity and have observed a demographic slide toward becoming a white congregation; see Appendix A. I think it imperative for CityWell’s leadership to reckon with the possibility of CityWell being among the number Emerson projects will not become stable as multiracial congregations.

7 Angst over racial separation in US churches is likely far more prevalent among Christians raced-as-white than among Christians of color, as the reconciliation movement has come to be dominated by historically white denominations and leaders raced-as-white. In these spaces, aspirations to develop multiracial congregations are too often expressed as desires to welcome people of color into our white church spaces. For more on this, see Harvey, 67ff.
more likely to evoke outrage, defensiveness, and denial if named; the church’s deeper symptom is racism.

The church’s deeper symptom of racism has chameleon qualities that make it very difficult to see, which makes it possible and common to misinterpret as good news the report that 13 percent of congregations in the US are multiracial. After all, 13 percent represents a near doubling of the same study’s findings in 2006-2007, in which less than 7 percent of US churches were reported to meet the 80/20 criteria to be designated as multiracial. However, a superficial reading of the data that celebrates the increase in diversity of US churches likely exacerbates the deeper symptom by further masking it behind a smokescreen of apparent progress. Such happy clouding of our deeper problem often leads to a misdiagnosis of the church’s malady as being racial segregation and an errant prescription of the remedy as being congregational integration, which many justice-seeking Christians name as racial reconciliation. The relative futility of this pursued remedy has been well documented, with nearly sixty years of denominational efforts toward integration producing the paltry results revealed in the NCS and the NCCUMC data. What are less clear are the reasons that the few seemingly successful congregational integration efforts have failed to bring about actual reconciliation. A

8 This is particularly true among those of us raced-as-white. Where one can acknowledge racial segregation in the church without much discomfort, often chalking it up to mere differences in worship style preference, the suggestion that racial segregation arises from and evinces ongoing racism in the church is a far less palatable possibility.

9 Harvey, 2-3, 32, 41.

10 Ibid. 43.

11 Ibid., 20. This is also a central argument for sociologist, Korie Edwards, who names interracial churches as a “dubious enterprise” because of the potential of interracial churches to inadvertently perpetuate racism under the guise of diversity. See Edwards, 3.
more rigorous and probing naming of our ecclesial sickness is needed, so that a more effective treatment might be discovered.¹² Because the church’s deep problem is not racial segregation, the remedy is not congregational diversity.¹³ Segregation is merely a symptom of racism, and, though it is rarely noted, racism is itself also just a symptom. Until the church gains fluency in naming these symptoms, it will fail to name, see, and so live in healing resistance to the root problem, the cancer of whiteness.

**Racism at CityWell**

Late in the fall of 2013, CityWell’s Leadership Team came to a pivotal conclusion: We could not become the church God was calling us to be as long as I, as a white male, was the only pastor. We needed a co-pastor of color. We were resolute in this decision and very clear that a second pastor could in no way be my subordinate. We were not looking for an associate pastor of color; we needed a co-pastor, a full partner who would share decision-making power, equal voting influence on the Leadership Team, equal time in the pulpit and presiding at the Table, and equal compensation with me. While this was a decision I could not have anticipated when we started the church, I was in full agreement with the Leadership Team. This was the path the Lord had for us.

A year and a half into our determined journey of reckoning with racism in the ways of Jesus, we were learning much about the manifold, subtle, and sinister ways that

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¹² Harvey argues compellingly that “the [church’s] racial problem… is not separateness itself. And togetherness is certainly no solution. Separateness is merely a symptom. The real problem is what our differences represent, how they came to be historically, and what they mean materially and structurally still… Racial separateness reveals that our differences are the very manifestation of ongoing forms of racial injustice and white supremacy.” Harvey, 60-61.

¹³ Ibid., 18-19
racism was at work in and around us, quite apart from our best intentions to resist and overcome it. We were a remarkably diverse church family of nearly one hundred people representing nearly the full racial and economic spectrum of Durham residents. On the surface, we appeared to be winning the battle against segregation, and we were unified in a firm commitment to embrace a discipleship call to tear down the dividing walls of racism and class difference. We poured an inordinate amount of our meager financial resources into that pursuit, bringing in facilitators for race conversations and sending many of our people through a series of intensive racial equity trainings.\textsuperscript{14} We read books and watched documentaries together, frequently gathering for difficult and often painful conversations about the realities of race and racism and their impact in our lives, communities, and in our church. We were deliberate and proactive in wrestling with these particular cosmic powers of darkness and spiritual forces of wickedness (Eph 6:12). Yet, we found ourselves stuck in patterns of pain.

Amid all our effort and intention, it had become discouragingly clear that the racial and economic unity and healing we desired remained elusive, as our brothers and sisters of color shared a consistent sense of bearing a disproportionate burden in the becoming of CityWell. Namely, those of us raced-as-white were often asking our brothers and sisters of color to be our teachers in helping us to see and resist racism.\textsuperscript{15} In

\textsuperscript{14} The Racial Equity Institute, based in Greensboro, NC, and specifically the leadership of Deena Hayes-Greene, Suzanne Plhick, Bayard Love, and Matthew Bell, has significantly impacted CityWell through their Phase 1 and Phase 2 trainings. For more information on REI, visit http://rei.racialequityinstitute.org/.

\textsuperscript{15} We have learned that for people raced-as-white to make such a request can be deeply trauma-triggering, perhaps like it might be to ask a rape victim to teach about what it is like to be raped, though with the added complexity that people raced-as-white are part of the collective that actually caused the trauma about which we are learning.
addition, hard lessons were too often being learned as the result of unintentional, but nonetheless hurtful, blunders on the part of people raced-as-white, and the cost of these lessons was, therefore, disproportionately levied upon our brothers and sisters of color. Simply put, our witness to the reconciling power of Jesus was costing people of color more than it did the people raced-as-white among us. More than this, the inequity of burden and its attending fatigue was impeding deep reconciliation.

Along with the experience of disproportionate burden, there was a growing concern that CityWell was steadily becoming more white, both in demographics and in culture, and we were. Eventually we realized that in our leadership structure at the time, with the vast majority of daily decision-making falling to me, power was distributed in such a way that we could not adequately resist the force of racialization in our midst. Depending upon one’s race, people experienced life in the CityWell family very differently because we were perfectly structured to perpetuate racism at its deepest levels, where it exists invisibly in organizational culture and in historically freighted and

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16 There will be specific examples of this dynamic later in this chapter.

17 Professor and psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum studies racial identity development in the US, and offers an explanation of why our brothers and sisters of color at CityWell felt so taxed by our life together: “Whether one succumbs to the devaluing pressures of the dominant culture or successfully resists them, the fact is that dealing with oppressive systems from the underside, regardless of the strategy, is physically and psychologically taxing.” Beverly Daniel Tatum, Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997), 26.

18 Curtis DeYoung writes: “systems of injustice in society and in the church exact a heavy cost on those outside the centers of power and effectively block reconciliation.” Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Coming Together: The Bible’s Message in an Age of Diversity (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 13.

19 Racialization is the process by which the concept of race is employed in a society to allocate different economic, political, social and even psychological privileges to groups along racial lines. A racialized society is one in which “race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities and social relationships.” Emerson & Smith, 7-9.
unquestioned assumptions, in what has been called “white normativity.” Where CityWell was generally free of overt expressions of bigotry and conscious acts of discrimination, it became clear to all of us around the Leadership Team table that the cultural gravity of our church pulled hard toward white norms and expressions, all but ensuring that 1) we would not practice reconciliation in the deep ways we hoped for, 2) the unintended harm inevitable in the process of congregational integration would far more frequently fall upon people of color than upon people raced-as-white, and 3) we would simply perpetuate many of the disparities that marked the broader US culture, in the midst of which we hoped to demonstrate an alternative way of being in the world. So, the decision to seek a co-pastor was not a referendum on my leadership. Rather, it was a referendum on racism, on white cultural hegemony, and ultimately on whiteness, the last being reinforced and perpetuated at CityWell by the first two.

So, in the early months of 2014 the CityWell Leadership Team formally began to seek a co-pastor of color to lead alongside of me. Within six months we experienced another instance of God’s abundant provision and received Gloria Winston-Harris as pastor at CityWell, my new partner. Gloria has now served faithfully for three years in this role and has greatly helped CityWell to move closer toward the vision to which we believe the Lord to have called us.

20 Edwards, 10-11.

21 White hegemony is a form of cultural dominance in which white status and control are based upon the consent (coerced or not) of people of color. In multiracial churches, hegemony is not established through explicitly racist structures, but rather through apparently race-neutral means that explicitly abandon and rebuke the explicit racism of former epochs of history without addressing or undoing the structures of power and control that these former epochs constructed. See Edwards, 121-123.
Language, Lenses, and Life

If only racism was as easy to see as a Klan rally… and if only more church people raced-as-white realized that it is not. Much of the US church’s failure to overcome our racist past must be attributed to our inability to see the ways racism actually operates in the present. Resisting an enemy one cannot see is a frustrating and futile endeavor that overtime inevitably whittles away the will to press on. Such is the threat facing the few churches in this country who are awakening and attempting to respond meaningfully to the crisis signified by the hyper-segregation of our congregations.

The segregation of US congregations is no more our crisis than a cough is the crisis facing a person with lung cancer. However, segregation is a visible symptom that many church leaders see and misidentify as being the problem itself. Efforts to address the perceived crisis with the formation of multiracial faith communities often betray a failure to see beyond the cough and to diagnose accurately the cancer beneath the presenting symptoms. I believe that US church leaders often fall into this failure because we have a language problem; we know how to talk about segregation, but we do not often enough know how to talk about racism; and, if we cannot talk about racism, we will not be able to name, see, or live in resistance to whiteness which underlies racism.

This judgment certainly describes me as a church planter in 2011. I was profoundly compelled by the incongruence between the segregation in the US churches and the vision in Revelation 7, where God brings together multitudes from every nation, tribe, people, and language in shared worship before the throne. I was convinced that Jesus’ prayer in John 17 revealed his deep desire for the unity of his followers and the essentiality of that unity to the church’s witness to Jesus having been sent by the Father. I
was driven by a theological vision of Ephesians 2, that Jesus has already torn down the dividing walls between all people and that our call is to live into that reality as a church bearing witness to the Kingdom of God on earth as in Heaven. These biblical moments are often the landmark passages for pastors seeking to form multiracial churches, and they are most directly employed to say that the segregation of the church does not reflect the will of God, so churches should be integrated. Although I believe that statement to be largely true, if it stands alone its truth can actually keep us from discovering the deeper truths toward which the church’s segregation points. When we planted CityWell, I had no idea that segregation was merely a symptom, and I had no language to speak deeply and theologically about the deeper symptom of racism, much less the cancer of whiteness.

Precise naming of racism has proven an elusive task in our nation and in our churches. When I speak of naming, I mean more than a simple acknowledgment of its existence. Naming, robustly practiced, is an ongoing action of seeing, understanding, and unveiling that renders the thing named exposed and vulnerable to judgment and transformation. Short of such a rigorous and intentional process, surface familiarity with racism - which amounts to false naming - often leads to a dangerous presumption of understanding that leads to great harm.

Imagine a person who has only a superficial familiarity with fire. They know it can burn things and that it therefore only belongs in contained and safe places; this person has also only seen a fire put out in the form of candles at birthday parties. With such a superficial familiarity that comes from incomplete naming, this person does not

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22 DeYmaz, 4-11, 37-29, 63, 113.
understand how fire breaths. Now imagine this person coming across fire in a place where it does not belong, burning in a church sanctuary. Knowing enough to recognize that this is not a safe place for fire, our imaginary person frantically looks for something to put the fire out. They find a box fan and think it will operate like a person blowing out birthday candles, only with far more power. The wind from the fan fuels the blaze and sends embers flying to other parts of the sanctuary, and the church burns to the ground. This imaginary person knew just enough about fire to make the situation at the church far worse. Such is often the case with Christians, particularly those raced-as-white, who find the fire of racism burning in their congregations but only know to call it segregation. Apart from proper naming, our best-intended efforts will make things worse.

Precise naming is essential to truthfulness, and so to the liberated life God intends for all creation (Jn 8:32). According to John’s Gospel, the origin of an abundant and liberated life is essentially linked to truthful speech, to utterance, to the Word that was God, in whom was life and the light of all humanity (Jn 1:1, 4). In this gospel vision, language and life are bound together in God’s creation, and one must embrace this convergence in order to address the deep sickness plaguing the US church.

Theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas powerfully articulates the connection of language and life in his oft-repeated dictum: you can only live in a world you can see, and you can only see what you can say.23 Language determines the limits of what one can see. What one sees determines how one lives and acts in this world. For instance, if a child is only given derogatory and objectifying words to name women, such language

23 Stanley Hauerwas, Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 22.
will likely have a devastating impact on the way this child sees and lives in relationship to women. Naming determines what one sees and how one lives.

Only in learning to name our deep sickness will the church come to see the way the gospel empowers us to resist its power, and so receive the ability to repent and walk in newness of life. Only by way of relentless naming can racism and whiteness be exposed in our midst and made vulnerable to the judgment of God; and only God’s judgment, the divine Word spoken and embodied, bears the power of new creation and the light needed to cast out the darkness of whiteness and its racist symptoms (Gen 1:3, Jn 1:5, 14). Only as Jesus comes among us with his sword-sharp word will the evil wrought by the forces with which the church contends be vanquished (Rev 19:15, Heb 4:12, Eph 6:12). Only by Jesus’ incarnate, contextualized presence will the church move toward healing from the deep sickness of whiteness.

**Humble Contextualization**

CityWell’s first years are now part of the checkered past that is church history, and those years revealed to us that, like so many of our forbearers, we were not immune from the potential of doing great harm in the name of biblical vision and theological conviction. Looking back, I believe that much of the bloodshed in CityWell’s story can be attributed to my failure to understand the context into which I was called and the subsequent inability to discern the gospel I was called to proclaim. Gospel and context

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24 A context entails a complex matrix of variables that inevitably form the people inhabiting that context: history and memory, language and symbols, politics and economies, power dynamics and personalities. Therefore, contexts socialize people and construct the conceptual frameworks through which one interprets the meaning of events and messages, and so how one lives their life. See Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 17.
cannot be separated, and insofar as one fails to hold them together, one inevitably does great violence to both. Therefore, contextualization is essential to discipleship, to receiving the ways of Jesus as our way of life in this place, at this moment in time, and with these people. Contextualization is essential to loving rather than harming our neighbors. In the US, and especially in multiracial churches, contextualization requires Christians raced-as-white and, most importantly, Christian leaders raced-as-white, to reckon directly with the realities of whiteness, racism, and race in order to discern God’s voice and so understand and embody the gospel in our context. CityWell is learning to walk in the reality that all discipleship must be contextualized; that our context is racialized; and so our discipleship must reckon directly with race, racism and whiteness.

25. In Christian contexts, contextualization names an imperative process for the faithful and fruitful proclamation of the gospel in new places and among new peoples. Unfortunately, this word has sometimes been employed with a unilateral focus, from missionary to mission field: How does the missionary get the target population to understand the gospel, which implicitly means the missionary’s interpretation of the gospel and the attending theological constructions derived from that interpretation. Missiologist David Bosch critiques this unilateral impulse and promotes a bilateral understanding of contextualization, arguing that the context of all theological utterance and reflection creates a field of becoming in which “our entire context comes into play when we interpret a biblical text” and “the text becomes as we engage it.” See Bosch, 423. In an approach like this, the gospel is discovered anew in every new place. Also advancing a mutualistic approach, Native American theologian, Richard Twiss, calls contextualization, “the relational process of theological and cultural reflection within a community.” See Richard Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel From the Cowboys; A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 15. Hiebert promotes an approach to contextualization that he calls “missional theology,” in which the call of God into a particular context inevitably impacts one’s theological understandings because of the inevitable impact new relationships have upon how one sees the world and understands particular circumstances. Hiebert, 44, 48.

26. It is precisely the absence of contextualization understood in terms of mutuality that too often marks white movements into multiracial spaces. An absence of relational dynamics of reflection and learning leads to further, albeit unintentional, attempts of people raced-as-white to colonize people of color, to attempt bringing our ways and understandings to them. Such colonization is an expression of racism and can take the form of wanting people of color to join our multiracial congregations in order to help us achieve our vision of what we believe the church ought to be. Non-malicious colonization is difficult for people raced-as-white to see because of the distance between good intention and harmful impact, and because people raced-as-white have been socialized to identity racism only with overt acts of bigotry and so exempt ourselves from accusation in the presumption of our own innocence. See Drew G. I. Hart, Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2016), 53-55, and Harvey, 79. See also Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me (New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 33.
So organically bound are context and gospel that one cannot adequately discern one without the other. Unfortunately, in some Christian paradigms, like the one that formed me for most of my life, the gospel is often named in the language of universal truth and timeless propositions, construed in such a way as to produce harmful assumptions. First, this view of universal truth often gives rise to the assumption that one can simply speak the gospel into any context and it will be true to that context. A second assumption is that the gospel can be understood without attention to one’s contextual location. However, when one does not attend well to the history, language, and experiences of the people in the context into which this gospel is spoken, the gospel may actually operate as bad news and with violent force.

**Violent Gospel Words**

Unfortunately, the history of the racial reconciliation movement in the US and of the multiracial churches it has produced often bear witness to the possibility of violent gospel words. When Christians raced-as-white enter a multiracial context proclaiming the gospel word of reconciliation without reckoning deeply with the history of race and racism in our nation, in our churches, and in ourselves, our good news can create harm. When Christians raced-as-white reach across “the color-line” without submitting to the

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28 This again is a matter of saying truthful things in truthful ways. So, where Christians in every context will proclaim, “Jesus is Lord,” it is only a faithful social performance of that proclamation that makes it true in a particular context. In the context of slavery in the US, the proclamation of Jesus’ lordship means very different things on the lips of a slave master than it does on the lips of a slave or of an abolitionist. All may speak a gospel word, but only the latter two can understand the gospel, and so are able to speak that word truthfully and therefore as good news. The church’s necessary work of contextualization is precisely the discernment of what gospel proclamations mean and how they are embodied truthfully in this moment, in this place, with these people. See Kallenberg, 50.
tutelage of communities of color, who experience the ongoing effects of historical and present expressions of racial oppression and violence, our message can oppress. When such Christians presume to be agents of racial reconciliation without learning a language that can truthfully name our complicity in the past and present realities of racism, our words of reconciliation will come forth as a hollow and evasive gesture at best, and as an imperial and colonizing weapon at worst.

Such failures to contextualize gospel words do violence to people of color in multiple ways. In many instances, people of color, and particularly those with a high sense of racial identity, perceive the vacuity and potential harm of the ways Christians raced-as-white often use the term reconciliation,29 and so refuse acquiescence to the simultaneously empty and loaded word. This refusal can often be construed as a failure on the part of people of color to obey biblical commands to exercise grace or forgiveness, or to be committed to a biblical vision of reconciliation. In some such instances, people of color are actually blamed for continuing divisions in the church, when in fact the uncontextualized gospel word arises out of and perpetuates a failure of people raced-as-white to obey the biblical commands to listen, to speak truthfully, and to repent. A lack of deep contextualization insulates people raced-as-white from grappling rigorously with past and present racialized realities, which in turn can foster simplistic expectations of what multiracial congregational life should look like. At best, such expectations easily lead to frustration, hurt, and disillusionment with the vision for a multiracial church. At

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29 This project will rarely employ the term ‘reconciliation’ because of the facility and recklessness with which this term is commonly used to envision multiracial congregations that require little to no transformation on the part people-raced-as-white, but require violent assimilation to white cultural norms on the part of people of color. Harvey, 62-64.
worst, such misguided expectations lead to unfair negative judgments about high-identity people of color who refuse to play superficial reconciliation games.

There have been several such moments in CityWell’s life. In a Leadership Team meeting in the fall of 2013, we watched a documentary about racism, *Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity*. During the conversation following the film, a woman raced-as-white, Shirley, made a comparison of her personal experience to that of a Black woman featured in the film. This comparison, while a genuine expression of empathy, did not account for the tremendous historical, communal, and emotional freight of the Black woman’s testimony in light of her lived experience of racism, and so the comparison inadvertently trivialized the vulnerable expression of the Black woman’s pain. As Shirley spoke, I could see her racial blinders and realized the harm of the comparison, but I remained silent, unsure of exactly what to say and not wanting to hurt Shirley’s feelings. After a few moments of silence, one of the Black women in the room, Rebekah, named the inappropriateness of the comparison and the fact that the suggestion of equivalence was simultaneously dismissive of Black experience and pain, and revealing of Shirley’s blindness to the significance of race and racism. Again, silence. A Black man, Anthony, spoke up and offered an analogy suggesting that Shirley’s comment was like his saying he understood a woman’s pain in childbirth because he had experienced the pain of stubbing his toe.

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30 In my experience and observation, the instinct to protect the feelings of people raced-as-white, or to insure their comfort, is one of the most common ways people of color are dismissed, dishonored, or silenced as racism operates through leaders raced-as-white in multiracial spaces.

31 Shirley’s comments were sincere and offered with the best of intentions; and they were damaging to the people of color in the room. This kind of unintentional harm is inevitable in multiracial
At that point I found my voice and stepped in as the pastoral leader: “This is the hard work of reconciliation. It is inevitable that we will hurt each other along this journey, and bearing witness to God’s kingdom on earth as in heaven will require white folks to practice the humility required to hear hard things when we mess up; and this work will require people of color to endure the pain of our mistakes.” Up to that point, the tone in the room had been generally level, but my comments were grenades, and I had no idea why. Immediately and with unapologetic anger, Rebekah named the racist manipulation of my suggestion that it was her spiritual obligation to endure wounding from people raced-as-white. She tied my comments directly to the preachers raced-as-white who told enslaved Africans that it was their spiritual obligation to obey their slave masters. Rebekah was right: my naming of reconciliation was dangerous and harmful because it was not well tutored by the work of contextualization.

spaces to the degree that people raced-as-white neglect the ongoing work of contextualization that leads to deepening understanding of the history and present expressions of racism, and our complicity in them.

32 Where several New Testament passages explicitly teach that the endurance of suffering is intrinsic to the life of discipleship (i.e. Matt 5:10-12, Phil 2:5-8, 1 Pet 2:18-23), it is important to note that the source of suffering and persecution in these passages lies primarily outside the family of faith. This observation does not negate the clear call of Scripture for followers of Jesus to live with one another in patience, forbearance, and forgiveness (i.e. Eph 4:1-3, Col 3:12-13). However, when wounding occurs between brothers and sisters within the church, Jesus commands us to approach directly the offending party and name the wounds, that there might be repentance (Matt 18:15-17). So, the call upon the wounded to forbear and to forgive stands alongside the call upon the offender to listen and repent. In my observation, people raced-as-white seem all too eager to expect patience and forgiveness from their brothers and sisters of color and are much less eager to listen to the naming of grievances and to repent. In addition, I have also been struck by the way calls for forgiveness from people raced-as-white tend to minimize or miss altogether the long history and present manifestations of Christ-like suffering with forbearance and forgiveness embodied by communities of color (and particularly Christians of color) in this nation and in our congregations. In this particular instance of wounding, the presence of people of color around the table was already an exhibition of grace; their commitment to stay at the table amid deep offense was forbearance; and, as with many other similar instances, they offered forgiveness. The pressing question remained: will we, as people raced-as-white, listen, receive rebuke, and walk in repentance?
Rebekah’s language gave me the ability to see what I had done, and I asked for forgiveness. The conversation continued, as we had become accustomed to leaning into intense engagements, and we wrestled openly with questions of profound implication for our life together and about our ability to continue down the road of being a multiracial church. It was a difficult meeting, but in my eyes it revealed the character of the people in the room who chose to stay at the table in the midst of pain and discomfort.

Following the meeting, some of the people on the team who are raced-as-white approached me with critical comments about the posture and tone of some of the people of color during the meeting, suggesting over-reaction and an un-Christ-likeness that was damaging to the team’s, and potentially the church’s, unity. While all Christians, regardless of racial identity, must be held accountable to our call to receive and embody the fruit of the Spirit in relationship with one another, this conversation was indicative of many others in which people raced-as-white perceive an absence of Christian virtues such as grace, forgiveness, gentleness, etc. on the part of people of color and place upon them the bulk of the burden of the multiracial church’s unity. In moments like these, attention directed toward people of color can easily divert attention away from the need of people raced-as-white to reckon more deeply with, and so repent of, our complicity in racism.

For those of us raced-as-white, failure to repent of racism likely does not arise from belligerence or malice, but rather from an absence of rigorous contextualization that gives us the ability to name and to see the ways race and racism operate around, upon, in, and through us. Inadequate contextualization thus produces an inability to discern God’s present and active kindness in revealing our sin and God’s gracious invitation to repent
and live anew. To the degree that Christians do not deeply contextualize the gospel word, we will be unable to let God’s living and active word contextualize us.

**Resisting White Hegemony in Multiracial Churches**

In multiracial churches where the work of contextualization is thin, calls to reconciliation often amount to a call for people of color to bury cultural expressions of worship integral to ethnic minority churches in the US. Such invitations protect white hegemony in multiracial spaces and destabilize ethnic identities that are affirmed and reinforced in ethnic minority congregations. Too often, calls for reconciliation from Christians raced-as-white amount to invitations to enter white spaces, to enter into relationships predicated upon the comfort of people raced-as-white, and to maintain white cultural and organizational norms. In such settings, “when we bring people together [in multiracial congregations] with different identities, collective memories, and histories, we

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33 Edwards, 36.

34 Harvey, 68-69. See also Edwards, 117.

35 Edwards, 35, 37, 42, 80-82. See also Harvey, 68. See also Joseph Barndt, *Becoming an Antiracist Church: Journeying Toward Wholeness* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 76-77. Regrettably, I have often participated in white hegemony by failing to hold people-raced-a-white accountable for their harmful words and actions because I desired to protect their feelings/comfort. For example, in one worship gathering, a person raced-as-white was facilitating our testimony time and offered a tearful expression of personal pain in being discriminated against in a job application process because of race. Where this person’s offering was a genuine expression of pain, it was entirely inappropriate to share in a context not designed for conversation, where people of color who experience far more frequent and devastating forms of discrimination, and whose communities have been profoundly wounded by a long history of racism, have to sit and listen to a white, middle class expression of pain that presumes to equate to theirs. I wish I had spoken up in the moment to say something like, “I am so sorry you are hurting. I can’t imagine what it must be like to be a person of color in this country and have to live with this kind of experience all the time.” Instead I was silent. I did address the person directly later, but only after protecting their comfort at the expense of people of color in the room.
put [people of color] at risk for losing their identities and their faith...”36 In short, in absence of humble contextualization, calls for reconciliation from people raced-as-white will perpetuate the very racism such calls intend to overcome.37

However, if efforts toward racial healing entail substantive attention to the work of contextualization, there is much for which to hope. For those of us raced-as-white, such efforts will mean an immersion in a new language, a new accounting of the racialized social, economic, and institutional realities in the US. Proficiency in this new tongue will require us to submit to voices of people of color in an on-going process of learning, as the histories of our nation and of our churches tragically reveal the near total failure on the part of people raced-as-white to discern and resist our complicity in the evils of racism in any given era.38 In the successive moments of slavery, the Black Codes, lynching, Jim Crow segregation, urban ghettoization, the War on Drugs, and now mass incarceration, a shameful minority of Christians raced-as-white have recognized our complicity in these atrocities, much less actively resisted them.39 Evidence abounds that white intuitions about the racial realities of our world are deeply skewed by our place as members, beneficiaries, and propagators of white culture – the culture that created these

36 DeYoung et al., United by Faith, 114.

37 Harvey, 40.

38 This is not at all a denial of the fact that in every epoch of the history of this nation, there have been people raced-as-white who have faithfully opposed and actively resisted racism in all its expressions, often at great personal risk. Unfortunately, in each era such faithfulness has represented a minority effort among people raced-as-white. For a history of white resistance to racism, see Barndt, 7, 51-65, 149.

39 Hart, 79-87.
racial realities for the sake of its own preservation. Theologian and activist, Drew G.I. Hart ably names the necessity of people raced-as-white to submit to voices of color:

> Given our history, do we really believe that a people group that benefited from the racial system—socially, economically, politically, or merely psychologically—and whose institutions were repeatedly wrong for the first 350 years has now suddenly, 400 years in, gained an advantage interpreting these moments over those who have been historically oppressed?\(^{40}\)

The challenge and necessity for Christians raced-as-white is to take a Jesus-like step into solidarity with people of color who have been consistently oppressed and marginalized in our nation and, as an act of solidarity, to submit to minority narratives of racial realities. People raced-as-white have been powerfully socialized not to see the ways whiteness, racism, and race operate upon, in and through us, so we must learn to “trust the intuition of oppressed people… [and] allow the eyes of the violated of the land to guide [us].”\(^{41}\) So may we refuse to be conformed to the patterns of this world, to the patterns of white racial dominance, and be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom 12:2).

In CityWell’s six years, deepening contextualization and the concomitant reception of a new language is offering us a means of more truthfully naming the realities of our context’s racialized history and the ways that racialization continues to operate today. Such naming is opening the eyes of those of us raced-as-white to see racism at work in and around us, as well as to see our complicity in and benefit from the structures of white supremacy that are the foundation of racial constructions in the US. We are more clearly naming and seeing the way subtle expressions of racism manifest in our

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 84.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 87
congregation to protect white organizational culture and the comfort of people raced-as-white. More truthful naming and seeing of racism is empowering us to live into God’s invitation to a transformed social performance of our faith in which deeper expressions of repentance are making more authentic moments of racial healing possible. The fruit of humble contextualization is nourishing CityWell as we grow in our life together.

The Two Seasons of CityWell Speech

CityWell’s six years can be seen as two seasons discernible by two different ways of naming. The first season began with the 2010 call from the Conference to envision and plant a new congregation, and ended on Easter Sunday of 2012. This period consisted of a year of dreaming, praying, and planning to start a new church, and then nearly a year of ministry as the CityWell dream began to take on flesh. Season 1 was marked by a naming that made our explicit goal the overcoming of church segregation by the formation of an integrated congregation, “a multiethnic and economically diverse family of faith,” as I often voiced the dream. This season was driven by the dream of racial reconciliation. This chapter of CityWell’s story died on our first resurrection Sunday.

The second season is marked by another mode of naming, in which the explicit goals of CityWell’s leadership are for our congregation to grow in understanding our context and the realities of whiteness, racism, and race, to learn continually to see these

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42 As will be explored more in Chapter 6, robust, material expressions of repentance among people raced-a-white are absolutely essential for reconciliation to be possible. Harvey makes the keen observation that “in few to no situations of harm and violence do we expect a victimized party to move to trust until there is evidence that the victimizer will unequivocally cease to victimize and thoroughly repent…” Multiracial churches must not have such expectations, and as Harvey continues, “…we should not accept the insinuation that trust can be cultivated merely by talking to those who continue to be complicit with domination.” Real racial healing will require that all talk be accompanied by deep, ongoing, material repentance on the part of people raced-as-white. See Harvey, 73.
realities at work within and around us, and to live in active resistance to their
dehumanizing influence. In this naming, seeing, and living, we hope CityWell will be a
prophetic witness to an alternative way of being both human and church. CityWell’s
second season will last as long as this congregation exists, as whiteness has long proven
adept to employ racism and race in persistent and perennially morphing expressions
throughout the history of our nation and in all its institutions, including the church.\(^\text{43}\)
While we do not anticipate an end to our wrestling against whiteness and racism, we are
empowered by hope and encouraged by a deepening experience of freedom that comes
from truthful naming; for, indeed, “salvation is nearer to us now…” (Rom 13:11).

**Antiracist Discipleship Practice #2: Contextualization**

This chapter presents contextualization as a practice essential to the antiracist
discipleship needed in the context of US churches, especially those that are multiracial.
This practice requires two inter-related commitments: 1) learning the history and present
manifestations of whiteness, racism, and race, and 2) submitting to the voices of people
of color in order to do so well. The Greek noun for ‘disciple’ (*mathete*) derives from the
verb ‘to learn’ (*manthano*), so it should be no surprise that the call to contextualization is
a call to ongoing learning. A disciple of Jesus is literally a learner.

In order to understand the particular moment and place in which, and the people
with whom, a church is called, leaders – especially those who are raced-as-white – must
become devoted students of history, but not of the popularized histories written to

\(^{43}\) Barndt, 116-117, 185-186.
propagate nationalistic myths of American exceptionalism. In my study of the history of whiteness, racism, and race, I am finding that the profound deceptions of popular histories are most often discovered not so much in the stories they tell as much as in the ones they do not. Contextualization as a practice of antiracist discipleship necessitates learning the stories not told in our country’s sanitized narratives. When these stories become part of our consciousness, consistent patterns of power and domination emerge as the agendas of white supremacy become visible.

Essential to re-learning our history is the commitment of people raced-as-white to submit to the tutelage of people of color. However, as noted in Chapter 1, asking people of color to be our teachers can sometimes be a harmful and taxing request. In order to avoid this dynamic whenever possible, I have assumed and commend a commitment to reading authors of color. Until I made this explicit decision, I never realized that the overwhelming majority of authors on my bookshelves were men race-as-white. Over the last six years that has begun to change significantly, and my understandings of history and theology are increasingly being formed by men and women of color.

Contextualization through relearning history, and especially from voices of color, is a powerful discipleship practice that can form us to better discern the ways the gospel

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of the living Lord speaks specific words of judgment, encouragement, hope, liberation and beckoning into our particular moment in this particular place and among our particular neighbors. Resultantly, as people who are profoundly deformed by whiteness, racism, and race, contextualization equips us to love rather than harm our neighbors, to recognize and resist the ways popular histories promote unhealthy assumptions about and expectations of our brothers and sisters of color, and to see the ways those of us who are raced-as-white are complicit in the violence of whiteness, racism, and race. Contextualization therefore makes deep repentance possible, and without repentance there can be no racial healing.
SECTION TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 3
SYMPTOMS OF THE DEEP SICKNESS: NAMING RACE AND RACISM

The significance of CityWell’s turn to a second season of speech has much to do with our location within the broader movement of ecclesial initiatives toward racial reconciliation in the US. Where broad-based movements toward improving US race relations appeared as early as the 1920s,\(^1\) initial efforts toward the integration of US congregations began in 1944 with Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman and Rev. Alfred Fisk, who started the nation’s first intentionally multiracial congregation called the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, CA.\(^2\) In the 1970’s the ripples caused by the few, like Thurman and Fisk, became a wave pushed by Black evangelical leaders such as John Perkins, Tom Skinner, and Samuel Hines.\(^3\) Following a short period of seeming

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\(^1\) The 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of an interracial movement among church members (but not arising directly from church institutions) in the form of what came to be known as the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. The work of the commission aimed to improve race relations, more positively portray African Americans, improve facilities afforded to the Black community (such as schools), and advocate against lynching. As significant as this work was for its time, the Commission’s vision could not see past and did not question the institution of segregation. See Emerson & Smith 42-43.


\(^3\) Perkins, Skinner and Hines have been called the “founding fathers of an evangelical movement called reconciliation.” See Emerson & Smith, 53.
dissolution in the early 1980’s, the evangelical reconciliation movement resurfaced with tremendous energy and a much larger, and multiracial, cadre of leaders. However, the increasingly popular message of reconciliation during this period focused on a call for individuals to cross the color-line to form personal relationships. This message truncated progress towards the vision of the preceding wave of leaders, who called for addressing unjust systems and reparations as elemental to true reconciliation.4

A third wave, out of which CityWell began, has been led largely by evangelicals like Mark DeYmaz, who is broadly recognized as having laid the foundation for the development of multiethnic churches in the twenty-first century.5 DeYmaz’s Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church is the seminal text for the third wave of multiethnic church efforts, and much like the message of the second wave, it pays scant attention to structural expressions of racism, instead emphasizing personal behaviors and calling for the integration of the church for the sake of faithful witness to the gospel.6

CityWell began in my heart and mind as a dream informed largely by the superficial naming of racism typified by DeYmaz’s seminal work.7 This was the

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6 DeYmaz rarely mentions institutional racism throughout the book, and at one point equates institutional racism with congregational segregation. Integrated worship is thus offered as a way to resist racism’s systemic work. There are no mentions of whiteness, white supremacy, or white privilege anywhere in the text. This book is an example of a superficial naming that acknowledges the presence of institutional racism but fails to name it robustly, therefore allowing the possibility of its unnoticed flourishing within the very congregations DeYmaz envisions as tearing down the walls of racism. See DeYmaz, Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church, xxii, 63, 96, 183, 191. For a substantive critique of this approach see Harvey, 20.

7 It is also important to note CityWell is deeply indebted to DeYmaz’s exegesis of the New Testament vision of the multiethnic church, which profoundly influenced our original and current vision.
language that produced our vision and so determined much of our life during CityWell’s first season. The failing to name race and racism rigorously has borne the fruit of great relational damage and tremendous pain within our church family.

Given the context and influences out of which the CityWell vision for multiethnicity and reconciliation arose, the turn to a second season of speech was uncommon and unlikely. Appropriate to its occasion on Easter, our sudden move into this second season of speech meant recognizing that there was much in our (and in my) life that needed to be left in a grave. In this second season, as a congregation (and especially the pastors and congregational leaders), we are receiving a new language, a new way of naming race and racism, and these vernacular shifts are effecting significant changes in our midst. Our new ways of saying are producing new ways of seeing that make better ways of living possible. All of this can rightly be called repentance. Our minds are being radically changed, we are turning around, and we are walking in new directions. The path ahead of us is marked by a determination to say and see race and racism clearly, so that any racial healing we experience may grow out of deep roots of repentance.

**Naming Race & Racism: Definitions**

One of the greatest challenges to constructive conversation about race and racism in US society and within the church is the absence of shared language. In instances when such conversations are attempted, parties often experience tremendous frustration at the inability of their counterpart(s) to understand their point of view. In my experience, this is inevitably the case when people use the same terms, race and racism, but mean very different things by them. Therefore, defining and agreeing to terms is essential work
toward the church’s (as well as our nation’s) ability to name, see, and live more effectively in resistance to racism’s perverting power.⁸

In CityWell’s second season the pastors and Leadership Team have found it important to employ a definition of race that names the artificiality of racial constructs as well as the historical origin and motivation of the race project. To that end, we define race in the following way:

Race is a social myth, a human invention, created to justify the greed of European colonization that included the horrific violence of Native American genocide and the enslavement of kidnapped Africans in the construction of the United States. Race accomplishes its justifying work by imagining, asserting, protecting, and perpetuating the power and supremacy of people-raced-as-white over all other raced peoples. Modern categories of race have no legitimate biological or biblical basis. Race is not essentially real. However, race is politically, economically, socially, and psychologically very real.⁹

Following the lead of antiracist trainers and activists,¹⁰ CityWell’s leadership has come to understand racism as being first and foremost a matter of institutional power that establishes and serves the interests of people raced-as-white in this nation. Hence, we define racism in the following way:

Racism is the origin and employment of the myth of race to build devastating dividing walls of hostility that ultimately serve the interests of people-raced-as-white. Racism operates primarily and most destructively within the institutions

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⁸ See Appendix C for a brief survey of representative voices in a spectrum of competing definitions of race and racism.

⁹ From the CityWell Pastors’ Position on Race and Racism. This definition stands in line with critical race theorists who aver varying forms of “race realism,” a view that “although race is ontologically empty and epistemologically bankrupt and does not refer to anything “real” in the physical world, race is, nevertheless, a socially constructed category that has real and profound socio-ontological, existential, political, and psychological implications for those who are categorized as white and nonwhite.” George Yancy, Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do? (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 12. To this point, New Testament scholar, Love Secrest, notes that: “… race is real, even if it is imagined.” Love Secrest, A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2009), 25.

¹⁰ Most notably, The Racial Equity Institute of Greensboro, NC, and author Joseph Barndt.
and systems that make up our society, and also within all of us as individuals. Racism is very real.\(^{11}\)

Racism thrives in the absence of an analysis of how institutional racism works through distributions of power. This absence exists within US society and western Christianity broadly,\(^{12}\) but also often within intentionally multiracial churches.\(^{13}\) In settings like CityWell, a clear definition that centers conversation about racism on questions of institutional power is essential to the congregation’s calling to receive the dividing-wall-destroying ways of Jesus as our way of life. Definitions that focus on individual behavior and attitudes, or that only address structural issues that overtly employ racist logic (i.e. Jim Crow segregation), cannot equip Christians for the deep work of naming, seeing, and resisting racism in its most invisible and insidious forms. In addition, failure to understand racism at institutional levels will inevitably allow racial diversity to serve as a smokescreen for the church’s ongoing practices of racialized oppression.\(^{14}\)

In CityWell’s new season of naming we now declare in pastoral communications, in preaching, and in formal dialogs about discipleship and racism, that race is not essentially real. Quite to the contrary, race is a social myth with no biological basis.\(^ {15}\)

\(^{11}\) From the CityWell Pastors’ Position on Race and Racism.

\(^{12}\) Emerson & Smith, 74, 76,78, 89.

\(^{13}\) Edwards, 52-53.

\(^{14}\) Barndt, 77-78, 128-129, 142.

\(^{15}\) Soong-Chan Rah, The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 65ff. Jennifer Harvey acknowledges the fictitious foundations of race but nuances this language, arguing that “race becomes real--it is built, or constructed--as physical attributes are given meaning… the legal, political, religious, and economic processes that make reference to bodies (in the activity of constructing race) do so in order to organize power relations or distribute social resources differently.” Harvey, 46.

The myth of race was employed to numb the European conscience and conquer the imaginations of colonized peoples, so as to make fathomable the violence of kidnapping, raping, enslaving, exterminating, and exploiting black and brown flesh for personal, economic, and nationalistic acquisition.\footnote{19}{Jennings, 17-18, 26, 58.} Race is a widely exported European ideation premised upon self-aggrandizement, pseudo-science,\footnote{20}{Where the colonization of non-European lands and exploitation of the inhabitants of those lands began in the late fifteenth century, the logics of oppression prior to the nineteenth century were not explicitly racist; these logics were articulated in the language of civilizing or Christianizing the heathens. The polarity that preceded racism’s black/white binary logic was that of civilization and barbarism. The development of pseudo-scientific endeavors to explain (and actually establish) human difference (ethnology, anthropology, craniometry, anthropometry and phrenology) provided an alternative language, rooting the essence of difference in physicality and “nature,” rather than belief or progress along a scale of civilization. The impact of the new sciences was to establish a permanent and unalterable basis for the} and determined self-
deception mixed potently to self-medicate an entire continent of people, along with its colonialist ambassadors throughout the world, while impairing resistance among the peoples of other continents. The viciousness of racism’s execution among the indigenous peoples of lands deemed discovered required people raced-as-white to name themselves falsely as supremely human, and other people as less than human. They could only act in a world they could see, and they could only see what they could say.

The US church must learn to name the arbitrariness, absurdity, and baselessness of race and become fluent in speaking precisely about the historical motivations and irrevocable devastations of its invention. Such linguistic facility is imperative for a right understanding of its role in the history of this nation, its responsibility in the violence waged against humanity through the employment of race logics, and the repentance required for receiving God’s work of redemption. Naming race well is essential to the liberation of the church of Jesus Christ.

**Conflating Race and Ethnicity**

The myth of race promotes a common perception among people raced-as-white that race and ethnicity are synonymous, such that ethnic identity (i.e Irish-American) is effectively viewed as equivalent to racial identity (i.e. African-American). Such false equivalencies make it difficult to see that racial identity marks the loss of ethnic identity. For instance, according to modern race logics, where one once may have been Zulu or

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oppression of non-white peoples, as well as the correlative basis for the “created” and “natural,” and thus permanent, supremacy of white people. See Jacobson, 32-33, 35-36.

Maasai, they are now simply black.\textsuperscript{22} The conflation of race and ethnicity thus submerges, and blinds people raced-as-white to, the realities of social hierarchy, power distribution, and the pervasive disparities in life experience, economic stability, and social capital attached to racial designations in the US.\textsuperscript{23}

However, commonly among people of color in the US, the disparities attending racial designations are clear, and the equivalence of race and ethnicity is absurd. Racial minorities in the US are far more likely than people raced-as-white to see, understand, and feel the important distinction between race and ethnicity, whether as Black Americans who cannot trace their ethnic identity because of the cultural obliteration effected by the transatlantic slave trade, or as an Asian-American whose self-concept is deeply informed by being Japanese or Korean, or as a Native American whose tribal history has significant purchase in their personal identity, or as Mexican-Americans whose shared experiences with other Latinos by no means negate their proud differences from Latinos of other nations. Indeed, “race and ethnicity are very different creatures.”\textsuperscript{24}

**Race in the Bible**

In addition to naming and seeing the scientific baselessness of race and the substantive distinction between race and ethnicity, modern categories of race also have

\textsuperscript{22} The racial stripping of ethnicity impacts all raced peoples, including people raced-as-white, though this stripping has very different social, political and economic significance depending on the racial category imposed. To this point, see Secrest, 33.

\textsuperscript{23} Emerson & Smith, 7.

\textsuperscript{24} Dalton in Rothenberg, 16.
no biblical basis,\textsuperscript{25} and therefore cannot be interpreted or defended as a divinely created aspect of the world. In the Bible there are many categories that demarcate peoples and nations ethnically (language, culture, religion, or land of origin),\textsuperscript{26} but nowhere in the Bible can one find a people group exclusively designated by physical characteristics, as is attempted with the dubious modern construct of race. Where the Bible celebrates ethnic diversity as part of God’s good creation\textsuperscript{27} and suggests the universality of ethnocentric conflict, the invention of race erases the integrity and beauty of discrete ethnicities by squashing them into clumsy categories such as black or white.\textsuperscript{28} In the moment of being raced, distinct histories, traditions, cultures, religions, identity-bearing ties to land, and ways of being in the world are flattened, reduced down to artificial designations that have nothing to do with the integrity of identities and much to do with distributions of power. Race thus denies the ethnic markers that constitute substantive differences between

\textsuperscript{25} Rah, 66. See also, Barndt, 93, and Gilkes in Yancy, 69. Secrest observes that: “in the pre-modern period and stretching into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ‘race,’ ‘nation,’ and ‘ethnic group’ were synonyms that referred to people-groups having a commonly held belief in a common origin and/or heritage.” Secrest, 32. However, such use of the language of race precisely did not signify the identity assignments of modern racial categories, and did signify the ethnic markers that modern logics of race supersede and eventually eclipse all together.

\textsuperscript{26} Hays, J. Daniel, From Every People and Nation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 29. See also, Curtiss Paul DeYoung, ed., Coming Together in the 21st Century: The Bible’s Message in an Age of Diversity (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), 14. See also Gilkes in Yancy, 68. Jennings notes the vulnerability of ethnicity as a concept easily co-opted by race logics in ways that imagine identities marked by a constellation of variables more integrous than race, but still divorced from inherent ties to land and space. When ethnicity is so employed as a category unmoored from place it invariably gives way to the projects of race logics. Jennings, 343, n. 18.


\textsuperscript{28} Barndt, 14-15, 100.
peoples, markers that can provide legitimate ground for either the celebration of ethnic
diversity or for ethnocentric conflict. In this way, race dehumanizes all of us.²⁹

The myth of race is especially perverse in light of the biblical picture of humanity
in which ethnic particularity is fundamentally a matter of Divine design. Erasure of ethnic
distinctions resulting from the invention of race thus stands in overt contradiction to the
arc of God’s story. Throughout both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, there
is a continuous theme of God’s creation of, intention for, delight in, and determination to
redeem and maintain human particularity. One finds the beginning of this narrative in
Israel’s creation poem, in which the woman is created with intentional distinction from
the man (Gen 1:27). Significantly, God creates both the man and the woman in God’s
image. As beings of particularity who are also “one flesh” (Gen 2:23-24), the man and
woman thus reveal and refer back to the God whom Christians have come to know as
Triune, whose very being is an expression of particularity within unity.³⁰

Genesis 11:1-9 tells the story of Babel, in which God saves humanity from our
own idolatry by bestowing upon us a gift of particularity that extends beyond gender
distinction. Specifically, God grants different languages to the gathered mass of
humanity, scattering them across the earth and creating the beauty of ethnic diversity in

²⁹ Where it is easier to name the historical devastation leveled upon peoples raced as other-than-white in the US, it is important to note that being raced-as-white also entails the destruction of ethnic particularity, though without the explicit denial of full humanity. To this point see Tim Wise, White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2011), 113, 179.

³⁰ The introduction of gender here serves only to contribute to the establishment of a pattern of God’s design of, delight in, and intention to redeem and maintain various modes of human particularity, of which ethnicity is one. The following paragraphs will elucidate the centrality of ethnicity in my reading of the metanarrative of Scripture.
the world. At Babel, God again confers upon humanity the divine purpose to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth (Gen 1:28).\footnote{Where humanity had failed to obey this primal command and concentrated only in one place, on the plain of Shinar, God’s judgment of human self-assertion at Babel effectively recommissions humanity in our assignment as image-bearing creatures to fill the earth with the iconic declaration that God’s reign extends over all the earth.}

Lest the Babel story be mistaken as only one of divine punishment, Christians must read the account of Pentecost in Acts 2 as act two of the same story, as God’s affirmation of the goodness of particularity given at Babel. In the disciples’ proclamation of the gospel to a crowd constituted by people of “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5), the miracle of God was precisely that the good news was uttered and heard in every language. Rather than this moment of the Spirit’s outpouring leading to the undoing of Babel, to an erasing of the ethnic distinctions signified in a multitude of languages, the particularity created at Babel is maintained (Acts 2:1-11), while the confusion created at Babel is redeemed toward the creation of a new, unified community, in which all the nations of the earth are bound together by the gospel in a way that maintains the particularity of each people.\footnote{Thank you to Richard Hays, who in a personal conversation pointed me to the redemption of Babel’s confusion in this text.} Surely, God’s righteous judgment of idolatry at Babel was a merciful and restorative judgment by which humanity is graciously recommissioned into God’s purposes for the world.

Having begun with creation, the arc of particularity ultimately reaches the new creation, in which the nations and the kings of the earth will parade their glory into the heavenly city (Rev 21:24-26) and where the trees of life will provide for their healing (Rev 22:2). This image parallels that found in Revelation 7:9 where “… a great
multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,” stands before heaven’s throne and worships God in symphonic doxology. God’s affirmation of ethnic particularity stands out at every point in the biblical narrative.

Christians who fail to distinguish appropriately between race and ethnicity are likely to speak of race, with their modern understandings of it, as a biblical category, a divinely created aspect of the world that reveals God’s love of variety and the beauty of diversity.33 In such a paradigm, one is prone to read biblical distinctions between ethnic groups as directly analogous to racial distinctions in our own context. This mistake can be found often in the literature of the evangelical reconciliation movement, where the Jew/Gentile division confronted by the early church is frequently drawn upon as an analog to the white/black division leaders in this reconciliation movement seek to confront today.34 It is common in these instances for ancient ethnic difference to be explicitly narrated as racial difference.35 While this is certainly a matter of sloppy

33 E.g. See David Anderson, Gracism (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 33-34, 37, 65, 139, 146. This book, written by the Black pastor of one of the nation’s largest multiracial churches, omits any consideration of structural and institutional expressions of racism and proposes only individual remedies to racial sins he describes as equally possible among all people regardless of their race. In my view, his analysis operates at the level of conflating the categories of race and ethnicity, as well as the issues of racism and segregation, and thereby risks a superficial naming that allows the deeper machinations of racism to operate unchecked.

34 While such analogies can certainly be employed constructively (e.g. See Richard Hays, The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996) 409, 438-441.), if not pursued with attentiveness to the significant differences between ethnicity and the modern construct of race, such analogies can dangerously neglect the realities of oppression inherent in modern racial constructs premised upon white supremacy, and so point toward a vision of reconciliation that does not account for the moral distance between white racial identity and all other racial identities. Considerations of ancient and modern ethnic distinctions do not require the moral reckoning that considerations of race demand.

35 Ibid., 33. In this moment of his text, as he does throughout, Anderson conflates biblical categories (Jew/Gentile) with modern race categories. Thankfully there are other strong voices within the evangelical reconciliation movement who are far more careful in their language and far more probing in their analysis of race and racism. Efrem Smith is perhaps the most thoughtful among these authors. See Smith, 77-83, for a nuanced evangelical account of race and its employment in racist structures.
anachronism given the recent invention of race, there are more significant implications of this errant analogy. First, a view of race as God’s creative expression of variety requires a vision of reconciliation in which peoples of all races bring their full, gloriously created, racial selves to the table in an act of appreciating and embracing difference.\(^{36}\) In such a vision, all racial designations are morally neutral, allowing for whiteness and white racial identity to evade judgment as sinful constructions premised upon the oppression and exploitation of all other races. Jennifer Harvey names this reality cogently:

> In the United States constructions of race have never been morally neutral. Racial construction processes have always meant and continue to mean today that persons with phenotypes marking them as "white" receive better treatment, greater social access, and more institutional benefits than those with phenotypes that marked them “of color.” In other words, the construction of race is deeply and directly linked to white supremacist social structures. In this way it becomes clear that “white” and “black,” for example, are not parallel differences... The realities of injustice embodied in these distinctions have moral implications that mean “white” and “black” cannot be seen, let alone celebrated and embraced in the same way.\(^{37}\)

The presumed moral neutrality of white racial identity in this paradigm allows for conclusions such as that of Civil Rights leader and reconciliation champion, John Perkins, who can declare, “God wants whites to be white,”\(^{38}\) a conclusion that is deeply problematic in light of the violent and oppressive substance that constitutes white racial identity in this nation. At the very least, if God desires people raced-as-white “to be

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\(^{36}\) Harvey, 45.

\(^{37}\) Harvey, 47. Harvey goes on to present a historical account of how the designation “white” came into use explicitly through systematic violence and oppression against Native peoples and enslaved Africans. Harvey, 49-52.

\(^{38}\) Shane Claiborne and John Perkins, *Follow Me to Freedom: Leading and Following as an Ordinary Radical* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 32, quoted in Harvey, 56.
white,” then God must intend a radical redefinition of white racial identity from its historical and current embodiment in the US.39

The anachronistic analogy between biblical ethnic divisions and modern racial divisions unintentionally creates a second destructive implication: the necessity either to affirm race or to deny ethnicity as a God-created, and therefore good, aspect of humanity. As discussed previously, modern conceptions of race require the diminishment and eventual erasure of ethnicity, making the simultaneous affirmation of both race and ethnicity impossible. Given the inevitable trajectory of race logics to supersede and obliterate ethnic identities, the affirmation of race as a God-created good forces an implicit denial of ethnicity as the same. This move, in turn, forces conclusions that are both theologically impossible andbiblically absurd: If God is the author of race, God is the enemy of ethnic particularity; in such a case God would be the enemy of God’s own kingdom, in which nations and tribes and peoples and languages are precisely not eradicated in history’s climatic gathering before the throne of the lamb (Rev 7:9). One cannot affirm race biblically without necessarily denying ethnicity and inverting the arc of particularity that runs throughout the Scriptures.

**The Reality of Racism**

Where precise naming of race requires the insistence that it is an illusory and fluid social construction and therefore not essentially real, one must be equally precise to insist that racism is very real. Racism is as real as the millions of Black people living in lands to which they came involuntarily and in which they labored mercilessly and have been

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39 Chapter 6 will explore possibilities of God redefining and so redeeming white racial identity.
systematically marginalized and oppressed for hundreds of years – human beings “turned to fuel for the American machine.” Coates, 70. Racism is as real as the millions more lost at sea, who were killed or chose death over enslavement during the middle passage. Scholars estimate that of the approximately 20 million people were taken from their homes throughout Africa, an unfathomable 11-12+ million were killed before making it to markets in the new world. The transatlantic slave trade is, therefore, one of history’s most devastating recorded genocides. See “The Middle Passage.” Public Broadcasting Service. http://www.pbs.org (accessed 8/29/16).

Racism is as real as the ships that entombed, the chains that shackled, the whips that flayed, the markets that sold, the white men who raped, and the plantations that exploited the flesh of kidnapped and enslaved Africans throughout the history of the American colonies and into the second century of United States’ history. Racism is as real as the systematic extermination of indigenous peoples in the American colonies and during the westward expansion of the United States. Racism is as real as the Declaration of Independence that maligned Native peoples as “merciless Indian savages” or the US Constitution that pronounced kidnapped Africans to be 3/5 human. Racism is as real as the phenomenal wealth accrued in the United States because free labor and stolen land dramatically decreased production overhead and increase profits. Racism is as real as the Black Codes,

40 Coates, 70.
41 Scholars estimate that of the approximately 20 million people were taken from their homes throughout Africa, an unfathomable 11-12+ million were killed before making it to markets in the new world. The transatlantic slave trade is, therefore, one of history’s most devastating recorded genocides. See “The Middle Passage.” Public Broadcasting Service. http://www.pbs.org (accessed 8/29/16).
43 The colonial enterprise and subsequent westward expansion of the US through lands claimed the lives of approximately 11 million, or 92 percent of the estimated native population that preceded Columbus’ so-called discovery of the new world. See Barndt, 39.
44 This language is found in the Declaration’s final charge of wrongdoing by King George III.
45 United States Constitution, Article 1, Section 2. Where the 3/5 language is coded as racially neutral, its implications and application were precisely directed toward enslaved Africans.
voluminous and vindictive laws crafted to maintain social control of emancipated African-Americans and to recreate a new caste system in the post-reconstruction South.\textsuperscript{46} Racism is as real as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that barred Chinese immigration and until 1943 refused naturalization to Chinese people already living in the US. Racism is as real as the more than 4,000 African-Americans lynched in the US between 1875 and 1952.\textsuperscript{47} Racism is as real as American exceptionalism that lauds the greatness and moral virtue of our nation but fails to remember that the construction of this country entailed two of the most horrific genocides in the history of the world. Racism is as real as Tuskegee Experiments that deceptively denied treatment to Black people who were purposefully infected with syphilis for decades.\textsuperscript{48} Racism is as real as the eugenics projects in North Carolina and thirty other states where thousands of primarily poor and female African-Americans were forcibly sterilized.\textsuperscript{49} Racism is as real as Jim Crow, Bull Connor, bombs killing little girls in a Birmingham church, and police dogs and fire hoses.

\textsuperscript{46} The Black Codes were employed to take advantage of the 13\textsuperscript{th} amendment exception clause that allowed for forced labor as a “punishment for a crime.” Because of these laws, convict leasing effected the re-enslavement of over 100,000 Black men until 1945. See Alexander, 28-32. See also Hart, 118.


\textsuperscript{48} From 1932-1972, the US Public Health Service and the Tuskegee Institute conducted the “Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male” in which hundreds of Black men were uniformly uninformed about the treatments (and their potential consequences) they were receiving to treat syphilis. When penicillin was discovered as a cure for the disease in 1947, the life-saving drug was withheld from all the study’s subjects. See “About the USPHS Syphilis Study.” Tuskegee University. http://www.tuskegee.edu/about_us/centers_of_excellence/bioethics_center/about_the_usphs_syphilis_study.aspx (accessed 8/29/16).

turned against men, women and children.\textsuperscript{50} Racism is as real as Dylan Roof’s hate-fueled massacre at Mother Emmanuel AME Church.\textsuperscript{51} Racism is as real as the surgically precise 2013 voter suppression laws in North Carolina.\textsuperscript{52} Racism is as real as the state sanctioned murders of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Freddy Gray Jr., Tamir Rice, and countless others who have been gunned down while unarmed and had their deputized killers exonerated, if even charged, in our nation’s courts of law.\textsuperscript{53} Racism is very real.

The examples above stand out as easy to see and retrospectively name as inherently, and in most cases explicitly, racist.\textsuperscript{54} However, there are many modes of racism’s historical and present operations that are far less visible, even in retrospect. These too must be named if any community is to grow in its ability to see and live in

\textsuperscript{50} Wallis, 111-117.


\textsuperscript{53} See an extended list and enumeration of the circumstances of unarmed Black men and women who have been killed by police in recent years in Hart, 16-19, where he concludes: “This cycle is not new. It happens like clockwork.”

\textsuperscript{54} It is important to note that very few people see themselves as acting in racist ways in any given moment of history. For instance, slave holders did not view as immoral the actions now commonly viewed horrifically racist. White families who gleefully attended the lynching of Black people in the mid twentieth century did not understand their chosen mode of recreation to be immoral. General consensus about the racist character of historical moments, eras, policies, etc. tends only to come retrospectively. The last two examples in the litany above, the NC voter suppression laws and the police killings of unarmed Black men, are current events and therefore still contested as to whether they bear racist implications. However, I believe that a future retrospective view will bear a general consensus that these events are unequivocally examples of racism’s many manifestations in our national history.
resistance to racism. Embedded in and operating through our nation’s systems and institutions, these less visible modes of racism are almost never simply expressions of individual bigotry, are almost always cloaked in policies written in race-neutral language, and often do not require an ounce of malice from anyone in their deployment. Because popular conceptions of racism are bound up with images of individual bigotry or unambiguous historical symbols like white hoods, swastikas, or Confederate flags, it is important to use language that effectively differentiates between such popular associations and the subtler and more sinister forms of racism that operate under the cover of colorblind assumptions and employ us all, without need for consent, in their diabolical dealings. These subtler expressions of discrimination in terms of systemic, structural, or institutional racism must be named in order to see present manifestations of racism beyond explicit bigotry and beyond historical eras.

Where racism is as real as the staggering disparities in healthcare access and outcomes for people of color, in the educational resources and outcomes for children of color, and in the inequities Black and Latino people face in our nation’s criminal justice system, racism in our financial institutions draws these and other inequities together into a tornado of oppression, an apparent natural disaster, in which there may be no racists to blame but where racism is rampant. In US financial institutions, racism is as

\[^{55}\text{For an account of racial disparities in health outcomes see John Hoberman, }\text{Black & Blue: The Origins and Consequences of Medical Racism (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).}\]

\[^{56}\text{For an account of racial disparities in educational outcomes see Pedro A. Noguera, }\text{The Trouble with Black Boys: and Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008).}\]

\[^{57}\text{For an extensive account of racial disparities in criminal justice outcomes see Alexander, }\text{The New Jim Crow.}\]
real as the disparities in our nation’s housing practices, in which people raced-as-white historically and presently receive preferential treatment and access to more valuable properties at lower interest rates than do people of color,\(^{58}\) who have been systematically excluded from housing and thus from the generational wealth home-ownership creates. Ongoing, subtle discrimination perpetuates and compounds the historical impact of former and more overtly racist housing practices that included racially restrictive covenants to prevent people of color from purchasing homes in desirable neighborhoods and home owners’ associations colluding with real estate boards and banks to restrict loan availability to people of color. These overt efforts to maintain housing segregation were powerfully augmented by the federal government’s institutionalization of ghettoization through the proliferation of government housing projects and of redlining, a lending process adopted by local banks and the Federal Housing Administration to determine loan availability and interest rates according to explicitly racial metrics in favor of people raced-as-white.\(^{59}\) These policies entrenched an overwhelming advantage for white communities in home values, wealth generation, quality of public amenities (most notably, education), and the maintenance of well-connected and resourced personal networks.\(^{60}\)

\(^{58}\) Housing discrimination research consistently shows that Latino and Black buyers receive less information about housing options, are shown fewer units, are steered to areas of town where housing is far less frequently shown to people raced-as-white, and receive less financing at higher interest rates than their white counterparts. See Margery Austin Turner et al., *Discrimination in Metropolitan Housing Markets: National Results from Phase I HDS 2000*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 3-1 – 3-19, 2002. https://www.huduser.gov/Publications/pdf/Phase1_Report.pdf (accessed September 6, 2016).


Disparities in access to resources and employment through social networks bears directly upon persisting income inequities between people raced-as-white and people of color. In 2013, the Public Religion Research Institute published its American Values Survey, reporting that people raced-as-white have social networks that are 91 percent white, and that 75 percent of people raced-as-white have entirely white social networks. These data have huge significance beyond the de facto segregation in which a majority of people raced-as-white in the US live. Social networks are directly related to employment, as “86% of available jobs do not appear in classified ads and… personal connections prove the most important factor in securing employment…” in our economy. Personal networks cultivated within codified segregation and maintained through de facto segregation create feedback loops that perpetuate either advantage or disadvantage in employment, depending upon one’s race, and employment bears directly upon income. These are pressing realities in a context in which the income gap between people raced-as-white and people of color closed by only three cents per dollar between 1968 and 2005, a rate of change that, when accounting for inflation, will take nearly 540 years to reach parity.

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62 Lipsitz in Rothenberg, 83.

63 Roithmayr, 6.

64 Harvey, 196.
In cases when people of color have been able to achieve incomes that allow for the transition into home ownership, discriminatory and predatory lending has remained an oppressive reality to the present day and is well documented as a significant contributing factor to the 2007 housing crisis in which unstable, sub-prime mortgages were overwhelmingly distributed to buyers of color.\(^{65}\) The result of this expression of institutional racism was a staggering disproportionality of home and wealth loss among homeowners of color in comparison to their white counterparts.\(^{66}\) This would be bad enough if these losses stood alone. But when considered in the context of disparities in overall home ownership,\(^ {67}\) along with the enormous pre-existing wealth disparities between people raced-as-white and people of color,\(^ {68}\) the disproportionate impact of the housing crisis on people of color was devastating.

Foreclosure entails more than the temporary loss of a home and equity. Studies reveal that families facing foreclosure are significantly more vulnerable to depression, marital dissolution, and negative academic performance among affected children. The financial impact of foreclosure depresses entrepreneurship (as loans become less


\(^{67}\) In 2013 ~74 percent of white households owned homes as compared to ~47 percent of minority households. See Wallis, 44.

\(^{68}\) In 2013, the median net worth of white households was $141,900, compared to $13,700 for Latino and $11,000 for Black households. The average white household is thirteen times wealthier than the average Black household and eleven times wealthier than the median Latino household. See Wallis, 43.
accessible), decreases the ability to pay for higher education, and destabilizes retirement plans. Foreclosures, especially when geographically concentrated, negatively affect the property values and, thus wealth, of whole communities for generations to come. All of this compounds already profound problems attending a context of extreme pre-existing wealth disparity illustrated by the fact that Black people owned only 1 percent of the nation’s total wealth in 1990. Gains in wealth for people of color between 1990 and 2007 underwent reversal in the wake of the 2007 housing crisis, and the wealth gap is now widening rather than closing between people raced-as-white and people of color. Repercussions resulting from the Great Recession collided within communities of color that were already bearing the brunt of historically rooted disparities in wealth, education, employment, health, and income, and contributed to the further destabilization of family units, the deeper entrenchment of underground economies (with their attending violence), and the perpetuation of a raced underclass in the United States.

These devastating realities continue to swirl around, intersect with, and loop back upon each other to create deepening cycles of oppression that exacerbate racial disparities across the full spectrum of quality of life indicators. This happens through the mechanisms of US institutions that do not explicitly name race in their policies. However, the race-neutrality of institutional language is betrayed by the race-brutality of institutional outcomes. And yet, narratives of personal responsibility abound, blaming the victims of institutional racism for the outcomes it produces: Where are the fathers? Why

69 Gruenstein-Bocian, Li & Ernst, 4.
70 Harvey, 196.
71 Burd-Sharps & Rasch, 3.
do they choose to sell drugs rather than get jobs? What about black-on-black crime? All of these questions, and the simple remedies they assume, evince a profound forgetfulness among people raced-as-white, and tragically also among some people of color. Author Ta-Nehisi Coates names the construction of institutional disparities and the expressions of our amnesia poignantly:

...ghettos... [are] as planned as any subdivision. They are an elegant act of racism, killing fields authored by federal policies, where we are, all again, plundered of our dignity, of our families, of our wealth, and of our lives... a legacy of plunder, a network of laws and traditions, a heritage, a Dream... “Black-on-black crime” is jargon, violence to language, which vanishes the men who engineered the covenants, who fixed the loans, who planned the projects, who built the streets and sold red ink by the barrel... To yell “black-on-black crime” is to shoot a man and then shame him for bleeding.72

The complex of variables that combine with crushing force within communities of color must be named: this is all institutional racism.

**Antiracist Discipleship Practice #3: Active Memory**

The litanies of lethality named above as instances of historical and institutional racism represent a tiny sampling of racism’s endlessly variable machinations in the history of this country, and the church must become intimately familiar with this history as a practice of discipleship. Repeatedly in Jesus’ ministry he calls his hearers to remember the sins of their past in order that they might understand what God is doing presently and so live into the Divine purpose for their lives;73 Jesus likewise beckons us.

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72 Coates, 110-111.

73 For instance, in Luke 11:45-51, Jesus pushes his interlocutors to recall their history of rejecting and killing the prophets of old in order that they might not do the same with Jesus, and so miss the dignity of their calling in God’s redeeming work. Additionally, in John 8:7 Jesus calls the oppressors of a vulnerable woman to remember their own sins that they might presently see their would-be-victim as their equal, and so live justly toward her.
To the degree that one will not name one’s past, one cannot see the present nor live faithfully into a God-honoring future. Practicing an active memory of our racist history is essential because “where common memory is lacking… there can be no real community.” Without common memory the church fails to be the church.

The failure of Christians raced-as-white to actively remember a shared common history of racism ensures ongoing racial fracture in the vast majority of US congregations. More tragically, even when multiracial churches bandage the break, white amnesia to the historical realities and white blindness to present manifestations of racism abound. Such amnesia and blindness inevitably produce either a passive dismissal or an active denial of the real and ongoing pain and oppression of their brothers and sisters of color. Dismissal and denial are implicit forms of refusing the dignity of people of color and therefore refusing the possibility of communion. Dismissal and denial make it impossible for Christians raced-as-white to obey Jesus’ call to love our neighbors fully. Ironically, dismissal and denial of the real and ongoing impact of racism render Christians raced-as-white incapable of receiving the fullness of our own dignity as people called by God into Kingdom work of justice and shalom, which necessarily entail resistance to the evils dismissed and denied.

Failure among Christians raced-as-white to cultivate memory of our common racism breeds in us both self-deception and contempt. Insofar as we fail to remember the racist violence upon which this nation established itself as the wealthiest empire in the

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history of the world, we will deceive ourselves into thinking our individual and collective flourishing is a matter of meritocracy or, blasphemously, of divine blessing. Surely the only way Christians raced-as-white can narrate the phenomenal economic prosperity of the US as God’s blessing is by collectively forgetting the genocide of Native Americans for the sake of free land and brutalization of kidnapped and enslaved Africans for the sake of free labor. Only self-deception borne of practiced amnesia can explain our ability to baptize fortunes amassed on the backs and immersed in the blood of image-bearers raced-as-less-than-human. Such profound self-deception deeply perverts our perception of God, of ourselves, and of others, especially those raced as other-than-white.

The self-deception born of collective amnesia cannot exist long in white hearts without releasing its fraternal-twin affliction of contempt. In view of the ubiquitous disparities experienced by people of color in this nation, people raced-as-white are presented with a logical dilemma. Either these disparities are produced by a historical and systemic root (institutional racism), or they are the fruit of the innate racial inferiority of people of color. When Christians raced-as-white cling to the self-deception inherent in historical amnesia, they are unable to reckon with the first option, leaving them only with the second option. White contempt for people of color thus becomes inevitable, even among the best-intended and most charitably-minded Christians.

The affliction of white contempt has been observable many times in CityWell’s five years. In too many instances, people raced-as-white have come alongside people of color in our church family and from our larger community, who are struggling against the tornado of outcomes produced by centuries of institutional racism. With the best of intentions and often at significant personal cost, we have tried to help, to love, to support,
to solve. When our bandages do not heal the wound, when what we deem as bad choices are made time and again, and when an individual is impotent to change in the face of overwhelming institutional realities, folks raced-as-white invariably discover the limits of our charity and patience. We fall victim to the lie that all choices are created equal and resort to the default narratives of personal responsibility that have saturated a worldview constructed upon the myth of meritocracy. The cost of contempt is crushing, with shame and anger on all sides, threatening to unravel relationships and reveal the fragility of the best of multiracial aspirations. I have personally borne and imposed that cost too many times.

The discipleship practice of actively remembering our collective racist history is a gift that promises a way forward toward personal and communal healing. The practice of naming a shared racist history is a subversive mode of story-telling that can reveal the lies that pervert perceptions of God, of one’s corporate and individual self, and of one another. Such naming is an act of resistance to the ongoing deformation of identity and the relational fractures produced by racism’s subtle and insidious lies. The cultivation of common memory is a matter of proper naming. Until history is well-named, there is no hope of a reconciled future.
CHAPTER 4

THE POWERS AND PATTERNS OF PERVERSION

I will never forget June 18, 2015. That morning I opened my computer and a headline flashing on the browser main page stopped me in my tracks: “9 Dead in Shooting at Black Church in Charleston, SC.” The worship plans Gloria and I had prepared for the following Sunday had to change. Tearing down the dividing wall of racism had become inherent to CityWell’s receiving the ways of Jesus as our way of life, and this work has everything to do with worship. Since the Sunday morning in July of 2012 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman, Trayvon Martin’s killer, CityWell had committed to engaging major events like these in the context of worship. So, the Sunday following the Charleston Massacre had to be a space to worship God through lament over the racism all around us and in the church.

Worship is one of the primary ways that CityWell reckons with the brokenness of the world, both to find strength and hope in the midst of it, but also to name and lament the perversion of the powers1 that break it. Lament is a means of expressing trust in

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1 The New Testament speaks of the ordering principles of the cosmos using a variety of terms that will be referred to in this project with the shorthand, the powers. Some of these terms are: “thrones and dominions” (Col 1:16), “elemental spirits” (Gal 4:3, 9, Col 2:8, 20), “rulers and authorities” (Eph 1:21, 3:10, Col 2:15, Tit 3:1, 1 Pet 3:21-22), and “spiritual forces of evil” (Eph 6:12). Robert Ewusie Moses,
God’s promise to make all things new by crying out for God to act again, when hashtag marks the violent and unjust deaths of men and women of color. Worship is an invitation to confront the forces that seem hell-bent to destroy the world, and also a reminder that the battle belongs to the Lord. Worship, in these times, is doxological resistance: to despair, to numbness, to indifference, to ignorance, to whiteness and racism, and to all that would keep us from loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matt 22:38-39), from bearing one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), and from suffering together when one member of the body suffers (1 Cor 12:26). Worship provides a language and a voice to name and to stand against the deforming and destructive force of perverted powers (Eph 6:12). So, on June 21, 2015, CityWell worshiped. We lamented. We sang. We cried. We prayed. We named the systemic evil of racism. We declared that the battle belongs to the Lord and recommitted ourselves to it. In all of this we stood against the powers in hope that they will be redeemed for the sake of the world.

**Bearing Witness to the Powers**

In the sixth chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul\(^2\) implores the recipients of his letter to “put on the whole armor of God,” so that they will “be able to stand against the wiles of the devil… against the rulers… against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly

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\(^2\) Following New Testament scholar, Douglas Campbell, I include Ephesians in the Pauline corpus. See Douglas Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014) 309ff. Campbell rejects common arguments for pseudonymity and compellingly argues for the Pauline authenticity of this epistle, though he suggests that the actual recipient community was likely the church at Laodicea rather than Ephesus.
places.” (Eph 6:11-12). Why does Paul perceive such a threat from the “rulers… [and] authorities?” Why would “the cosmic powers of this present darkness” come against the young church addressed in this letter? What Kingdom reality is breaking in among the Ephesians that so evokes the ire of “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places?”

Throughout the letter, the apostle has declared the awesome implications of the grace of God by which God has blessed, chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, and lavished riches upon us, all as a part of God’s ultimate plan to “gather up all things in [Jesus], things in heaven and things on earth” (1:3-10). The “us” named in the litany of God’s gracious deeds is a church comprised of Jews and Gentiles (categories encompassing the peoples of “every family in heaven and on earth” – 3:15), peoples formerly “alienated” from one another (2:12) but now reconstituted as “one new humanity” in Christ and reconciled to God through Jesus’ cross (2:14-16). The church exists to reveal the deep mystery of God in which the Gentiles, precisely as Gentiles, have been included in God’s family as coheirs and recipients of God’s promises to Israel in Jesus (2:12-13, 3:6). All this is in order that “through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10).

The radical reconciliation envisioned in this letter cannot be overstated. It is precisely the unity of a church that confronts the powers with God’s wisdom. The unified life of the church, therefore, will not be uncontested, for the wisdom she is to make known means the undoing of the powers’ tyranny, under which humanity is endlessly and
oppositionally divided. The life of the church is, thus, an embattled life, in which “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:12). The church is at war, and the enemy is the powers.

Naming the Powers

The church can only stand against the powers that can be seen; and the powers can only be seen if the church learns to say what the powers are and how they are at work. The New Testament language referring to the powers is various and in many ways unclear. The Scriptures do, however, offer images, visions, and symbols to frame the general purposes and potentials of these spiritual forces. Without presuming exhaustive definition, the church is equipped to adequately name the powers’ presence and operations in, around, upon, and through us, and so live faithfully in relationship to them.

While most of the New Testament language regarding the powers refers to them as opposed to the people and purposes of God, an understanding of the powers must begin with the affirmation that they are part of God’s good creation. They are organizing principles of the cosmos and thus of human life, and without them the world would be

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3 The choice to designate the church with the feminine pronoun is simply in following with the Ephesians metaphor in which the church is called the bride of Christ (5:25-32).

chaotic and void of order. The powers are a gift for which the people of God must give thanks. This view affirmed in the sweeping language of Colossians 1:15-17:

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

The powers are indeed good gifts, created by and for the Lord, and the Lord sustains and holds them together. Therefore, Paul describes Jesus’ victory over the powers in terms not of destroying them but of disarming and shaming them (Col 2:15).

To speak of the powers is to address the awesomely broad complex of intellectual, political, social, moral, economic, cultural, familial, and religious structures that give coherence to communal life in our world. The powers present in our world in both

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5 Yoder, 141.

6 Also see Romans 13:1-2 for an example of the powers as a gift from God for the ordering of creation. John 1:1-3 offers a similar affirmation of Jesus, the Word, being the source of all things, though without explicit reference to the powers.

7 The NRSV rendering of 1 Corinthians 15:24 reads: “Then comes the end, when [Jesus] hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.” This translation of καταργέω, as “to destroy,” where certainly common, is, in my view, unhelpful. The word is alternatively translated in this verse, “to abolish” (NASB), “to put down” (KJV, GNV, JUB), or “to bring an end” (CEB, CJB, NKJV). To translate the verb, “to destroy,” creates a potential contradiction of Paul’s assessment of Jesus’ victory over the powers in Colossians 2. Where there is certainly a significant, even epochal, distinction between what Paul is describing in these respective passages (namely, that Colossians 2 describes Jesus’ actions toward the powers in history at the cross, and in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul describes Jesus’ actions at the end of history at “the day of his coming;” see 15:23), to translate καταργέω as “to destroy” in the Corinthians passage problematizes the theological affirmation of the goodness of the powers, as created by and for Jesus and held together in his hand. Any of the alternative translations noted above, as well as others within the semantic range of the word (i.e. “to make inoperative,” or “to annul”) make possible an interpretation in which Jesus’ sustaining of the powers lasts into the new creation, with only their perverted operations being abolished. Robert Moses leans toward translating καταργέω in 1 Corinthians 15:24 as “render inoperative;” see Moses, 93. However, Moses is inconsistent in this translation, as he later references the same passage to speak of the “total destruction of the powers;” see Moses, 112. This inconsistency is possible because of Moses’ refusal to identify the powers with the organizing structures of the world. For more on this see pg 141 n. 266.

8 Yoder, 142-143.
ideological and structural ways, i.e., as education and universities, as economies and companies, as religions and congregations, as government and city councils, as art and museums, as law and local district attorneys. In the interplay of these ideological and material expressions, the powers are God’s gifts that make possible human society and all that is meaningful and beautiful within it. They are, at the most basic level, categories of human sociality apart from which communal life simply could not exist. The powers organize and give texture to human life and, when rightly ordered, do so for our flourishing. As Yoder declares, “We cannot live without them,”\(^9\) and would not want to. Thank God for the powers.

Concomitantly, the powers function explicitly and inextricably in relation to humanity; they cannot operate without us. The powers actualize their purpose and potential through the agency of human beings who build and execute the structures through which the powers are manifest.\(^10\) Economies, for instance, are organizing structures of human life; they are powers that contribute significant meaning to our lives through all manner of work and market exchange, but they would be meaningless and impotent without people to produce goods, create markets, build companies, and exchange currency. Within the world organized by the powers, laws are written and enforced by people; corporations are run by people; families are constituted by people; morality is embodied by people, etc. Humanity and the powers are created for symbiotic existence, and neither can survive without the other.

\(^9\) Ibid.

However, there is more to the powers than their outer aspects (buildings, books, cash, tanks, teachers, CEOs, presidents etc.). Every power, whether global or local, is also constituted by an inner aspect, a governing culture, a spiritual personality, a determinative ethos that exerts tremendous influence on the people inhabiting its structures.\textsuperscript{11} Consider, for example, how the spirit of a nation forms the imaginations, aspirations, postures, attitudes, and actions of its citizens. The powers provide a means of understanding how millions of people in Nazi Germany could wake up each day, go to work or church, come home, dote on their kids, help their neighbors in the yard, and ignore the stench of death emanating from concentration camps in their backyards.\textsuperscript{12} The material expression of any power has a spiritual center that bears its collective personality and divine vocation and which is larger than the sum of its human parts.\textsuperscript{13} So, in God’s creation, there is no clean distinction between the spiritual and the material, for all things are spiritual at their core. The New Testament, therefore, presents a picture of the powers being at one and the same time “visible and invisible, earthly and heavenly, spiritual and institutional (Col 1:15-20).”\textsuperscript{14} The question is never, spiritual or not? but rather, which spirit is animating any given structure at any given time?\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} Wink, \textit{The Powers that Be}, 3-5, 24, 189-192. Wink offers very helpful exegesis of Daniel 10, which depicts the angel of Persia in combat with the messenger of the Lord and the arch angel Michael. Wink suggests from this passage, as well as from the letters to the “angels of the church[es]” in Revelation 2-3, that every social structure has an inner spirituality imaged in the Scripture as an “angel” or “demon.”

\textsuperscript{12} One could easily make similar references to the numbing oblivion in which so many of us in the US live while horrendous atrocities have been and are committed in our name and for our comfort.

\textsuperscript{13} Wink, \textit{The Powers that Be}, 5.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, \textit{Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire} (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004), 91-94.
As presented in Scripture, the powers are neither intrinsically good nor intrinsically evil; they can serve or oppose God’s humanizing purposes in creation. But “when a power becomes idolatrous – when it pursues a vocation other than the one for which God created it – that power becomes demonic” and inevitably contributes to “an anti-human collective atmosphere” within its social manifestation. Perversion of the powers at this spiritual level is what makes them so destructive, as perverse powers pervert the very people and institutions in which they are embodied. Idolatrous powers refuse their roles as servants to humanity and instead assert themselves as absolute goods demanding absolute allegiance from humanity. The powers are awesomely capable of seducing us to serve the anti-human ends produced by their idolatry, and people are awesomely capable of colluding with the powers through our own idolatries.

Jesus and the Powers

Jesus lived completely free of idolatry and so refused the presumption of the powers to claim his allegiance and determine his path. Jesus’ freedom provoked the rage of the powers and their determination to kill him, but in freedom he laid his life down on

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16 Wink, *The Powers that Be*, 32-33. This view, which I think important to maintain, stands somewhat in contrast to Yoder’s view, where the powers only operate to “separate us from the love of God.” See Yoder, 141. Yoder’s view here is not simplistic, as he explicitly notes that the powers yet serve the ordering purposes of God, but it is unwaveringly negative in its assessment of the powers’ disposition toward idolatry. Yoder’s negative assessment of the powers is also difficult to maintain with his own assertion that the church, which he powerfully presents as called to be a messenger of the Lordship of Jesus to the fallen powers, “is itself a structure and power in the world.” See Yoder, 158. Where I agree that the church is a power, I think it imperative to see a great parallel between humanity and the powers, in which both have the agency, in any moment, for either idolatry or faithfulness.


18 Ibid., 182.

19 Yoder, 142-143.
the cross (Jn 10:18), rather than fighting the powers on their own terms and so becoming their slave. Jesus’ freedom, thereby, broke the powers’ sovereignty over humanity, disarmed them, and made a public spectacle of their rage-fueled absurdity (Col 2:15). Namely, the powers that promised people life, order, and access to God killed the very one who is life, who created and sustains all order, and who is God with us.

Jesus’ freedom from the deception of the powers is to be the church’s freedom through the gift of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:17). The church exists to reveal the liberating wisdom of God to the powers (Eph 3:10) and to call the powers back to their divine vocation. God’s redeeming work is not simply for humanity but also through humanity, for the powers and all creation as well. This is the total victory sought and wrought in the war of the Lamb (Rev 17:14). The powers are the church’s enemy, not in essence, but of circumstance, and the powers are an enemy Jesus commands us to love (Matt 5:43).

Patterns of Perversion

In CityWell’s reckoning with whiteness, racism, and race we are fundamentally engaged in a confrontation with perverted powers, in which, if we are to resist their deforming potential in our communal life, we must discern how the powers come to deviate from their created purposes. Given the similar potential of the powers and of people to either serve or oppose God’s work in the world, naming a pattern of human perversion depicted in the opening chapters of Genesis may offer a way of understanding

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20 Yoder, 144-147.

21 Wink, The Powers that Be, 34-35.
how the powers become perverted; and such naming may open paths toward liberation from the seduction these patterns present, both for powers and people alike.

Israel’s Origin Myth and the Pattern of Perversion

Israel’s origins myth in Genesis 1-11 offers insight as to how patterns of perversion impact people and powers. One such pattern entails three refusals: the refusal of the LORD God’s name, the refusal to be named by the LORD God, and the refusal to name others as the LORD God does. I call this pattern the seduction of supremacy.

As reader, you likely noticed the intentional repetition of the appellation, the LORD God, in the preceding paragraph. This designation for the Divine first occurs in Genesis 2:4, the English rendering of YHWH-Elohim, which differs from all references to God in Genesis 1:1-2:3, in which the Divine is simply called Elohim. The naming distinction is significant. Elohim is a general reference to God as creator, as supreme being over all the cosmos. YHWH-Elohim, on the other hand, is a personal reference to the God revealed by name in covenant relationship with Israel (Ex 3:13-15).23 Where there is much scholarly debate about the various names of God in Torah, I am interested here

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22 I am using term ‘myth’ here to signify the largeness of these narratives to name much more than mere happenings, if they are doing that all. I am convinced that, in the world of theology, myth names not those things that are untrue, but those things that are so true that even if they never were, they always are. Use of the term, myth, in this project is not intended in any way to engage the debate about a literal six-day creation.

23 These two names do not contradict one another, as the personal God revealed to Israel in covenant intimacy as YHWH-Elohim certainly is the creator God, Elohim, who can be perceived generally through the grandeur of creation. Psalm 19 demonstrates this distinction without contradiction vividly, the first six verses naming how creation declares the “glory of Elohim” in all places and to all peoples, and the remainder of the Psalm turning dramatically in verse seven toward very intimate personal exclamations of the ways the law, decrees, precepts, commandments and ordinances of “the LORD” – YHWH bless and delight the servant of the LORD. The general declarations of vv. 1-6 give way to the highly personal and effusive testimonies of vv. 7-14 in which the LORD is known as “my rock and my redeemer.” The two ways of knowing God are not contradictory, but nor are they equivalent. One can know of Elohim without knowing YHWH-Elohim.
simply in the distinction of general and personal ways of knowing the Divine, and the ways this distinction appears to be intentionally employed in Genesis 2-3.

Where Genesis 1 presents a picture of the supreme God creating the cosmos with mere words, Genesis 2 offers a more intimate vision of creation, in which God has dirty hands, crafting humanity from the dust of the earth, and pursed lips, breathing the breath of life into us in a moment as intimate as a kiss (2:7). In this second account the LORD God is personally present and engaged, deeply attentive to the needs of humanity, lavishly providing for those needs, and, as in Genesis 1, keenly interested in sharing creative power with the dirt-people. The double account of creation suggests that the supreme creator Elohim intends to be known as the personal, attentive, and providing YHWH-Elohim. Along with this suggestion is the reiterated message, in both accounts, that humanity exists with divinely appointed vocational tasks: fruitful multiplication, bearing the Divine image throughout creation, and tending the earth.

Genesis 2 intimates that life lived with the LORD God is to be marked by abundant provision and relational wholeness between the LORD God and people, among people, and between people and the rest of creation. The LORD God intends humanity to: 1) receive the name of the LORD God as the Divine self-offering of presence-in-relationship, 2) to receive being named by the LORD God as contingent beings who can utterly trust

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25 Ibid., 41-43. This sharing of creative power is evident in God’s commands to “be fruitful and multiply,” to “fill the earth and subdue it, and to “have dominion” over all the creatures of the earth (1:28), in the LORD God’s placing humanity in the garden to “till it and keep it” (2:15), and in allowing the dirt-man to name all other creatures (2:19-20).

26 The Hebrew name, Adam, comes from adamah, meaning dust from the ground.
and enjoy the provision, purposes, and shared power of the LORD God, and 3) to receive and name other humans as a generous and delightful gift, as when “the human” declared over the newly formed companion: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (2:23a). The relational beauty created in this threefold practice of proper naming is captured in the closing statement of Genesis 2: “And the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed” (2:25). Fully exposed before the LORD God, before one another, and before the elements of creation, human beings are to exist in affirming embrace with their Creator, their companions, and the world they are called to tend.

In Genesis 3:1 there is a conspicuous shift in language referring to the Divine: “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?”” The serpent refuses the relational name, YHWH-Elohim, and in the next verses, the man and woman follow suit: “The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”” In the mouth of the serpent, all designations to the personal and attentive LORD God disappear, and all that one hears is the name of a distant supreme creator, God. When the personal name of the LORD God is refused, the memory of the LORD God’s tenderness in creation, extravagance in provision, vulnerability in power-sharing, and attentiveness in addressing the needs and desires of humanity are forgotten, and in this amnesia anxiety creeps in.

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27 Where the text at this point only recounts the woman’s participation in the serpent’s seduction, verse six makes it explicit that the man was “with her” and his sharing in the forbidden fruit suggest his solidarity with the woman and his complicity in her refusing the relational name of YHWH-Elohim.
Seeing the ease of luring the man and woman away from a naming of the personal
*YHWH-Elohim*, the serpent continues its deception: “You will not die; for God knows
that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God… knowing
good and evil” (2:4b-5). One can imagine the questions that the serpent’s words raise in
the minds of our forgetful forbearers: Is God holding out on us? Has God deceived us? Is
God good? Can God be trusted? Only as Adam and Eve refuse the personal name given
by the LORD God, and so forget the context and contours of their life with the LORD God,
do they distrust the LORD God’s provision and purposes for them, and so disobey.
Disobedience is the fruit of refusing the name of the intimate, providing, power-sharing
LORD God, and this refusal invariably leads to humanity’s false perception that people
must provide for themselves and establish their own power.

Not stopping there, the serpent proceeds to deceive humanity into subtly but
clearly refusing to be named by the LORD God. In Genesis 2 when the LORD God formed
humanity (*ha’adam*) from the dust (*ha’adama*), humanity is implicitly named as
contingent beings, as derivative of the LORD God’s creation and molding of the earth, as
dirt-people. To be named dirt-people is to be implicitly but certainly named as not
Divine. Yet, having seduced the humans into refusing the relationship-defining name, the
LORD God, the serpent is also able to seduce them into refusing being named by the
LORD God: “…you will be like God…” (2:4b-5). The substance of the serpent’s
seduction is the promise of divinity; in effect the serpent says, ‘Eat this fruit and you will
no longer be dirt-people. You will no longer be contingent. You, too, will be supreme.
You will be like Elohim.’ This is the seduction of supremacy.
The devastating impacts of these two refusals become immediately clear as the Genesis 3 narrative continues: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves” (3:7). The blessing of being naked and unashamed that came with the right naming of the LORD God and of humanity in Genesis 2, now gives way to shame. Further ruin follows: “They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

The first two refusals of Divine naming introduced fear into humanity’s existence, and the humans hide from the one who tenderly formed them and generously placed them in this lush garden. When the LORD God finds the hiding humans, it is shown that the serpent’s trap also leads to the perversion of naming among human companions, as the one affectionately called “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” in Chapter 2 is now named in a distancing way: “The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate”” (3:12). One can imagine the man pointing a finger of blame first at Eve, “The woman…” and then immediately at the LORD God, “whom you gave me…” Relationships once received as joyful gifts are now perceived as adversarial threats.

Refusing the name of the Lord God, refusing to be named by the LORD God, and refusing to name people as the LORD God does: this is a pattern of perversion by which humans and the powers are lured from service to opposition in relationship to God’s presence and purposes in the world. Where this pattern plays out in a variety of ways in

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28 Note the shift back to the appellation, “the LORD God,” at this point in the narrative, a beautiful suggestion that the personal, intimate, providing LORD God refuses humanity’s refusals and yet pursues us.
the stories of the Genesis origin myth, it is repeatedly matched by the determination of
the LORD God to overcome all idolatrous refusals, to call people back into communion
with the LORD God, and to return us to our divine vocations. This dual movement of
human refusal and Divine pursuit is powerful and clear in Genesis 11:1-11.

In the story of Babel all the people of the world are together in one place and
sharing one language. As the people of the earth settle in the plain of Shinar they say to
one another, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens,
and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the
face of the whole earth” (11:4). Immediately we see the second of the three refusals
endemic to perversion, as these people will not be named; they will name themselves.

The first perverting refusal, to receive the name of God, is not so obvious, but is
subtly implied in the narrative. In the Babel story, the refusal to be named is tied directly
to a desire not to “be scattered abroad,” which is a disavowal of humanity’s Divinely-
appointed vocation to “fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28). This resistance to humanity’s
primal purpose mirrors humanity’s eating of the fruit in Genesis 3, as both are
expressions of disobedience to direct commands. Only when people refuse the name of
the LORD God can they forget the utter faithfulness and goodness of the creator, and so
choose, in fear, to defy the LORD God’s desires. The Babelian fear of being scattered
abroad produces disobedience; and both fear and disobedience arise from a refusal of the
LORD God’s good, providing, power-sharing, and trustworthy name.

The third refusal, to name others the way the LORD God does, is the least apparent
in the text but follows logically from the refusal of the LORD God’s name. The self-
revelation of the LORD God in Genesis 2 was also a revelation of humanity’s identity as
the LORD God’s beloved, as those formed, provided for, and dignified by their creator.
Should the people of Babel have named one another in the way of the LORD God, they
would not have seen one another as fundamentally vulnerable people who had to name
and secure themselves. Had they so named each other, they would have seen each other
as people deeply secure in the care and purposes of the LORD God who loved them.
Instead, the people at Babel name each other as vulnerable, as threatened, and as yet
unnamed: “Come, let us build ourselves a city… and let us make a name for ourselves.
Otherwise we shall be scattered…”

While the pattern of perversion is subtly present in this narrative, so is the pattern
of the LORD God’s refusal to let human refusals be the last word. In verses 6-7, the LORD
says, “Look, they are one people, and they all have one language… Come, let us go
down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s
speech.” Then in verse 8, “So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of
all the earth…” When humanity gives in to the seduction of supremacy, the LORD God
comes down to thwart our idolatrous intentions by giving the good gift of a new
organizing principle for the world, the power of Ethnicity,\(^29\) the good way in which the
LORD God orders creation to display Divine delight in the diversity of humanity and to
invite humanity into an abundant life of transformative joining, embrace, and communion
among all the peoples of the world.\(^30\) With this gift, God creates distinct languages for

\(^29\) Where the bible does not regularly name particular powers (Mammon may be an exception,
Matt 6:24), for the sake of clarity in this project’s argument, I humbly submit “Ethnicity” as a proper name
for a particular power. Whenever referring to Ethnicity as one of the powers, the word will be capitalized.
See Chapter 2, pp.66-68, for a description of Scriptures’ arc of particularity in which this gift of Ethnicity is
sustained and celebrated throughout the biblical narrative and in the new creation.

\(^30\) Jennings, 7, 202, 266-267.
peoples who will now fulfill their divine vocation by filling the earth. The Apostle Paul links this return to primal vocation with the possibility of restored communion between all peoples and their creator: “From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him…” (Acts 17:26-27). In Paul’s Torah-formed imagination, this reference to the creation of all nations is likely rooted in the Babel story, and his positive commentary suggests the establishment of the power of Ethnicity as a great gift to humanity for the sake of renewed communion. The persistence of the pattern of perversion that turns peoples from service unto God to opposition against God will not overcome the persistence of the LORD God to pursue hiding humanity, to refuse our refusals, and to recall us to our divine vocation. I suggest the same to be true for the powers.

According to Israel’s origins myth, the power of Ethnicity is a gift given by God to counter humanity’s idolatry and disobedience exemplified in the Babel story. However, as the rest of the biblical story reveals, Ethnicity (along with all the powers) is also vulnerable to the seduction of supremacy. The biblical record is replete with evidence that the very power fashioned to create life-giving distinctions among peoples now births death-dealing conflict between peoples. When the pattern of perversion takes root within any particular ethnicity, the three refusals of divine naming produce ethnocentrism, a hubristic and self-referential posture that succumbs to the false perception that people must provide for themselves and establish their own power. Such refusals and perceptions are endemic in all of history’s bloody atrocities, as they can lead to violent assertion born of insecurity and domination born of fear.
Israel, Election and Ethnicity

God gives the gift of Ethnicity for the sake of human vocation and human unity, but under the seduction of supremacy, Ethnicity can become a very dangerous power. To contend with this danger, in the midst of a multiethnic world bent toward ethnocentric demise, the LORD God called forth Israel to be God’s priestly people for the sake of all nations, a people (laos) for all ethnicities (ethne). Israel may legitimately be called an ethnic group, but it is not merely an ethnic group.31 Israel is first a people, defined ultimately, not by ethnic markers, but by God’s election. God chose Israel as a “treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6), setting Israel apart from the world, but precisely for the sake of the world. God reveals this universal telos through particular election in the call of Abram: “And I will make of you a great nation… and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:2-3). God chose, sent, and blessed Abram to father a people who would become God’s chosen medium of revelation and reconciliation to the entire world, a light to the nations (Is 42:6, 49:6). Israel was chosen from among the nations so that the nations might join in Israel’s life with God (Is 2:2-4), but precisely as the nations (Rev 7:9, 21:24-26). Adoption into Israel does not flatten but rather highlights and celebrates the uniqueness of all ethnicities. Thus the election of Israel was God’s way of calling the peoples of world into

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31 Where biblical Israel bears the markers of an ethnic identity (shared history, rituals, culture, religion, etc.), by virtue of election, Israel is much more than merely one ethnic group among the world’s many ethnicities. Israel is first a people, the laos of God, whose identity is not encompassed by their particular ethnic markers, but rather in relationship to the God who elected them for the sake of the world. See Jennings, 252-254, 284. The designation, laos, names Israel as a spacious people, hospitable to and beckoning all the nations of the world to come in, to join, to commune – not only without threat to each nation’s ethnic particularity, but in earnest desire for such various beauty to join and deepen the beauty of Israel.
a collective life of joining, embrace, and communion constituted by and celebrating the beauty of particularity expressed in the full spectrum of the world’s ethnicities. Because God’s election of Israel is also God’s invitation to the world, the nations’ summons to salvation is always a summons into the story of Israel. Ethnicity, rightly ordered, serves the unifying purpose of God and the expansive hospitality of God, as the nations of the world are called, in all of their ethnic glory, into the elect people of God.

**Jesus: The Fulfillment of Israel’s Identity and Vocation For the World**

The covenant partnership between God and Israel came to full expression in the incarnation of Jesus, in the Father’s sending of the Son as the perfect embodiment of God’s will toward humanity and the fulfillment of Israel’s priestly calling to present God to the world and the world to God (Ex 19:6). Jesus’ incarnation reveals God’s determination to overcome our patterns of perversion by fully embracing all of humanity, and all of the cosmos, that the world might be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:19) and all humanity might become participants in God’s life (2 Pet 1:4).

God becoming flesh in Jesus (Jn 1:14) presents the ultimate evidence of God’s commitment to the particularity of peoples; Jesus is God’s affirmation of the goodness and enduring purpose of Ethnicity. God entered the world as an ethnic person, as a Hebrew, an Israelite, as one whose identity and vocation was entirely bound-up with the that of Israel, the laos of God. God’s incarnation as the son of Mary eliminated any possible question as to God’s enduring commitment to Israel, or to Israel’s enduring role in the salvation of the world. Israel was not a means to an end, not a utilitarian device serving a temporary purpose, not an opening act for the main show. To the contrary, as
the world receives God’s salvation in Jesus, the world is received through Jesus’ flesh, into Israel’s life with God, and into Israel’s vocational identity as a people for all nations.

Jesus’ fulfillment of Israel’s identity and vocation as God’s human counterpart in revelation and reconciliation does not mean Israel’s terminus; rather fulfillment names the perfect performance of Israel’s calling that joyously summons Israel, and all the nations with and through Israel, to the fullness of covenant life with God. This joyous summons cannot be reversed (Israel through the nations) or severed (the nations without Israel, or Israel without the nations); it is essentially and irreducibly a universal summons, but one that follows the logic of election: Israel for the sake of the world. And so Jesus says both: “Salvation is from the Jews” (Jn 4:22), and “… I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32). The apostle Paul also gives expression to this logic of election: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). Jesus’ fulfillment of Israel’s identity and vocation renders absurd any attempt by the church to abstract Jesus from the context of Israel, and to establish its own foundation and story apart from Israel. To lose Israel is to lose Jesus.

**Supercessionism: The Womb of Whiteness**

In the centuries following the first generation of Jesus’ Jewish followers, the church increasingly distanced itself from its Israelite heritage, seeing Jesus more as a universal Savior and less as Israel’s particular Messiah. Detaching Jesus from Israel

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allowed the Gentile church to forget that we are adopted by grace, through the flesh of Israel’s Messiah, and into Israel’s covenant relationship with God. Our adopted status precludes any claim to superiority, either over God’s firstborn son, Israel (Ex 4:22), or over any other Gentile peoples. The adoption of the Gentile church into Israel affirms our ethnicities and denounces our ethnocentrisms. However, the moment Gentile Christians abandoned the reality that God cares about the particularity of Israel, and specifically the particularity of Jesus as the embodiment of Israel, it became possible for Jesus to become the possession of competing ethnocentric interests, a weapon wielded for the subjugation of other peoples, and a religious legitimation of multifarious human atrocities.33

The history of the church is freighted with devastating evidence of its refusal to submit to the threefold naming of God: 1) submission to the revealed name of the LORD God as a Hebrew name, 2) submission to being named through adoption into the LORD God’s Israelite family through the Hebrew flesh of Jesus, and 3) submission to God’s naming of Israel as covenant partner for the sake of the world. These refusals are a supercessionist pattern of perversion, i.e., the church’s abandonment of a Christoform life of submitting, embracing, and joining.34 While multiple reasons account for the church’s move toward supercessionism, and while the timing of this move cannot be pin-pointed to a single moment, supercessionism is the fruit of the church’s threefold refusal of divine naming, and the church’s eventual idolatrous fissure of Jesus from Israel created an

33 Ironically, God’s enduring concern for the particularity of Israel, and for God’s particular relationship with Israel, is the very ground of on which Gentile nations can be assured of God’s concern for our particular ethnic identities. The insecurity of identity that comes from an imagined severing of God’s relation to Israel births the potential for all forms of cultural domination as Babelian attempts to self-assert identity and security in the world.

34 Jennings, 202.
ecosystem for the church’s continuing bondage to a myriad of baptized ethnocentric perversions.

Colonialism and Whiteness

Peoples of all faiths throughout history have engaged in ethnocentric perversions that war against God’s desire for humanity unity. However, there is one expression of this perversion that is especially egregious and relevant to this project. Where ethnocentrism of all stripes maintains and is fueled by the actual ethnic particularities among peoples, Europe’s colonialist movement into the world birthed a new perversion of the power of Ethnicity that threatened the integrity all ethnic identities. This perversion is whiteness.

With the church at the center of their socio-political worlds and crafting their imaginations of divine purpose, the nations of Europe embarked upon an ethnicity-obliterating imperial enterprise. It was the baptized language of the church that commissioned and sanctioned the plundering of lands and peoples falsely named as discovered throughout the course of Europe’s colonialist expansion into the so-called New World.35 This new moment was marked by an increasing negation of ethnic particularity of all discovered peoples.36 With the momentum of a runaway train, the perversion of Ethnicity driving European colonialism led the colonizers to subsume the particularities of native peoples throughout the world within generic and fabricated racial categories such as black. The course of time would reveal that the erasure of ethnic identity could never operate in a unidirectional way; eventually in the United States

35 Jennings, 26.

36 Ibid., 29, 139-141.
European ethnic particularities, such as Irish, Jewish, Italian, etc., would also come under threat of obliteration from the legitimating category, “white.”

Europe’s colonizing brutality was baptized under a banner proclaiming the extension of a non-Jewish Jesus’ Kingdom. That Jesus’ Kingdom came to be signified by the Portuguese, British, Spanish, French and eventually the American flag only became possible by forgetting that Jesus belonged properly to one people, Israel. It is through God’s generous welcoming of the nations into this people (Rom 11:17-24), that Jesus’ true Kingdom was and is extended. Only when Jesus is dislodged from Israel can Christians begin to eradicate the ethnic distinctiveness of others while calling it salvation. The church’s supercessionism therefore became the womb of whiteness, a perversion of Ethnicity that threatens to destroy all ethnicities with the imposition of racial identities stripped of relationship to place, history, language and culture.

Called to receive our identity from God and to embody a radical unity that bears witness to the powers, the church has too often refused God’s self-naming, God’s naming of us, and God’s naming of all others, especially Israel. In this refusal, the church has become complicit in the perversion of the power of Ethnicity, and so colluded in the birth of whiteness. What might it look like for CityWell to submit to the threefold naming of God, and so call the power of Ethnicity back to its rightful vocation in service to God’s

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37 Ibid., 26-30.
38 Ibid., 36.
39 Ibid., 138.
40 Recall this chapter’s exegesis of Genesis 2, in which God is revealed as the personal, providing, power-sharing, and delighting YHWH Elohim, the LORD God.
unifying purposes for creation? How might such submission lead us to recover our
deepest identity and so empower us to stand, as a worshiping community, in doxological
resistance against the deforming force of perverted powers? These discipleship questions
arise out of our analysis of the powers, the patterns of their perversion, and God’s
response in the gift of Ethnicity, the election of Israel, and the incarnation of Jesus.

**Antiracist Discipleship Practice #4: Naming-Submission**

If CityWell is to resist idolatrous patterns of perversion, the congregation must
continually press into a practice of naming-submission, i.e., submission to the self-
naming of God, to God’s naming of us, and to God’s naming of all other peoples. All of
the wounding and failures of communion CityWell has experienced as a congregation
reflect the perversion of our perceptions of God, ourselves, and one another. The practice
of naming-submission offers us pathways of healing and toward faithful, unified witness.

The practice of naming-submission calls the church to become a people deeply
formed by attentiveness to God’s word as revealed in Scripture. Through Scripture first,
the church receives God’s self-naming as the LORD God, as the one who is tender,
present, faithful, providing and trustworthy. Through Scripture first, we receive God’s
naming of us and of all others as beloved and belonging because of and in Jesus. Only
through naming-submission, cultivated by attentiveness to the Scripture, will the Church
be grounded in our contingency as created beings who are utterly dependent upon our
utterly dependable Creator. So receiving our name as creatures, as dirt-people, as those
desired and tenderly formed by the LORD God, the Church can resist the idolatrous and
fear-driven urges to name God impersonally or abstractly, to secure a name for ourselves,
and to name others in adversarial and diminishing ways. Given the Church’s devastating historic and present complicity in ethnocentric violence of many kinds, naming-submission is literally a matter of life or death for the Church and for the world to whom the Church is called.

The practice of naming-submission can open eyes to see the ways humanity has been deceived by perverted powers, including whiteness, and thus liberates people raced-as-white to let go of defensiveness and fear so that we might know the freedom that comes from the truth of our identity as those welcomed into the life of God through the flesh of Israel’s Messiah. Receiving the threefold naming of God through the practice of naming-submission promises to form the Church as a people who can rightly name, see and so live in faithful resistance to the spiritual forces of evil operating in whiteness, racism and race.⁴¹

⁴¹ See Appendix E for a discussion of the implications of narrating whiteness, racism, and race as distinct, while intersectional, categories.
CHAPTER 5
THE CANCER OF WHITENESS

“No. I will not be tokenized.”

I did not expect that response, and neither, until that moment, did I recognize that tokenizing was exactly what I was doing. The private conversation on my back porch went on for a few more intense minutes, while the CityWell Leadership Team waited for Gloria and me to come inside to begin our meeting. They had no idea what I had done, but I knew it needed to be named. After all, one can only live in a world one can see, and one can only see what one will say.

That morning in worship one of our student pastors had preached. As a matter of formation through experience Gloria and I asked him to prepare the whole worship gathering, including the selection of liturgists. Every Sunday CityWell has a different cast of leaders, never fewer than a dozen people having active roles up front. Gloria and I usually take point on the welcome each week with one of our bilingual CityWell members offering Spanish interpretation. Beyond that, each of us typically has one other leadership role. We are committed to this leadership practice as a matter of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12), as well as for the purpose of employing
leadership that reflects the diversity of our congregation. This is one of the more
distinctive and powerful aspects to CityWell’s gathered worship.

On this particular Sunday, our student pastor had not been as attentive to the
diversity of leadership as we intend to be, and I ended up leading in several prominent
positions. This did not hit me until a third comment during our testimony time mentioned
my leadership in an encouraging way. At that moment I realized that the student had not
asked Gloria to serve in a single leadership role and that this gathering had far too much
centered my leadership. I wished I could blame the student pastor, but I had overseen and
approved his preparation that week. This was my problem.

So, now aware of my complicity in centering my white, male self while
completely sidelining my Black, female partner, I called Gloria on the way from worship
to the Leadership Team meeting: “I see what happened today, Gloria, and I am so sorry.
Please forgive me. I was thinking you should take the lead at the LT meeting today. I’ve
made and printed the agenda, and I’ll get it to you when we get there. Sound good?”
When we arrived at my home Gloria offered her response: “No. I will not be tokenized.”

Over the last five years I have become increasingly sensitized to the ways
whiteness works, and I am regularly amazed to see how something I so ardently desire to
resist can yet lure me, with such effectiveness, into unwitting but willful participation in
its pernicious operations. Whiteness is the hidden cancer that deforms the cells of my best
intentions and allows me to attack another member of my body, which is to say Christ’s
body, without realizing what I am doing. Lamentably, episodes like this one are all too
common. This chapter presents reflections on the events of that particular day, not
because mine was a particularly spectacular failure, but precisely because it was not.
These reflections in no way arise from an exaggerated sense of personal guilt but rather from the conviction that whiteness most potently operates in the ordinary. It is in the banality of any given day that people raced-as-white must become adept at naming, seeing, and resisting this destructive force. My missteps in relationship to Gloria that day were not rooted in conscious bias or malice, and were expressly antithetical to my intentions as her partner. But whiteness does not need me to be ill-intended or bigoted in order to conscript me in its service. Whiteness only needs me to be blind to its presence, power, and preferred modes of operation. Therefore, as a matter of faithful discipleship in a multiracial congregation, an ongoing practice of naming whiteness is essential. For only through disciplined naming can a community learn to see and resist this deadly cancer.

So, as we began the meeting that day I confessed my complicity in whiteness. I confessed to my blindness and laziness in overseeing the selection of worship leaders that week, and the consequent failure to have representative leadership up front. I confessed to the deep-seated sense of entitlement by which I could center myself and marginalize Gloria without even thinking about it. I confessed the desire to protect my reputation as a racial equity ally by attempting to put Gloria forward in our Leadership Team meeting. I confessed to my attempt to make Gloria a puppet of the agenda I had prepared rather than asking her to lead out of thoughtful consideration of her gifts and submission to her

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1 In coming to reckon with whiteness, racism, and race in the church and in many personal relationships I have come to believe it imperative to delineate between guilt and conviction; guilt arises from accusation (a tool of the evil one, not the Lord) and is rarely a constructive emotion; conviction, on the other hand is a kind gift of the Spirit that leads to repentance (Jn 16:8-9, Rom 2:4). Repentance is essential to the church’s (and my) journey toward racial healing, but repentance is not about guilt; repentance is about refusing to be conformed to the patterns of this world and rather being transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom 12:2); repentance is about living into the identity given to us in Jesus as Spirit-filled partners in the work of embodying and bearing shalom for the sake of the world. The call to repentance is therefore not a judgmental and condemning gesture; to the contrary it is the generous gift of God, by whose kindness people are led to repentance and so to the life that truly is life.
leadership. And I gave thanks for a partner who would look me in the eye, resist the work of whiteness in me, and say, “No. I will not be tokenized.”

**Naming Whiteness**

Whiteness is difficult to define in terms of essence, as evidenced by the wide spectrum of ways sociologists, critical race theorists, and theologians attempt to do so, but I propose that it can be productively named in its operations. As fluency increases in naming the specific manifestations of whiteness throughout history, I am hopeful to be able to identify the general mechanics common within them and so deduce a dynamic definition that allows for ongoing application to the ever-morphing expressions of whiteness in our present world. Common among descriptions of whiteness at work is the observation that whiteness is elusive, opaque, highly adaptable, bearing a chameleon quality that makes it ever difficult to detect, especially for those of us most intractably caught up in its machinations. Therefore, I submit this chapter as a hopeful joining in the continuous work of narrating the ongoing social, political, psychological, economic, and theological evolutions that produce present manifestations of whiteness in the United States and specifically within multiracial churches in this nation. May it be that this commitment to continuous naming will yield liberated lives of sustained resistance against the dehumanizing force of whiteness upon us all.

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2 Whiteness is variously defined by sociologists and critical race theorists as a racial identity, the state of being white, a social category, and a social location within a racial hierarchical structure. See Edwards, 190 n.23. Philosophers and theologians offer an array of alternative definitions including “a normative and political site of privilege and power” (See Yancy, 12.), a “theological imaginary” (See Jennings, 58.), a “force of cultural habituation” (See Perkinson in Yancy, 137.), and “the structural, economic, and social means by which white people become white…” (See Harvey, 10-11.).
Following Yale Divinity School theologian, Willie James Jennings, I find it constructive to name whiteness, in its primal operation, as a “theological imaginary,” an ecclesially baptized way of imagining the world and one’s place within it, through which European Christians came to name and see themselves as the primary reference point of God’s will and work in creation and thus as the ground of all other human identities. This theological imaginary was facilitated by the threefold refusal of Divine naming inherent in the church’s much earlier supercessionist move away from Israel and Jesus’ Jewish flesh as the landscape of our salvation. Whiteness grows out of this heretical, European Christian re-telling of the biblical story in a mode that: 1) names God apart from God’s self-revelation as YHWH-Elohim, the God of Israel, 2) names the church as the elect of God rather than as being graciously adopted into God’s elect people through the election of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, and finally 3) presumes the perverted prerogative of naming the rest of creation for consumptive ends rather than as an act of holy and caring dominion. Whiteness is, by these means, a particular perversion of God’s good gift of the power of Ethnicity.

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3 Jennings, 58-59. Europe’s colonialist enterprise was explicitly endorsed by ecclesial institutions, whose language of “mission” and “Christianizing” the “heathen world” fueled an imagination that centered Europeans, who over time would come to self-identity as white, and identify others in direct comparison to themselves. This act of identifying became an act of racializing, and thus an act of “de-creation” that reshaped the entire world. In this de-creation, human identity and value was unmoored from relationship to God and bound explicitly in relationship to whiteness. See also Brian Bantum, The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 5, 13, 16.

4 Jennings, 32. Only when God’s deep and ongoing concern for and commitment to the particularity of Israel is erased, and when Jesus is conceived as a universal savior whose Israelite identity is accidental and insignificant to the salvation he offers – only then can a (deformed) Christian imagination allow the possibility of destroying whole ethnicities, while calling the destruction salvation.

5 Lisa Sharon Harper compellingly interprets Genesis 2:15, which describes humanity’s vocation as “to till” and “keep” the garden, as a clarifying statement as to what is meant by “to have dominion” (Hebrew, radah) in Genesis 1:28. The Hebrew word for “till” (’abad), means to serve, and the Hebrew for “to keep” (shamar), means to protect. Harper, 28, 41. The “dominion” pursued by European Christians who
The European Christian presumption to self-center in the so-called salvation of the world led to a horrifying history of Christianizing the world, in which whole peoples were denied the dignity of being bearers of the Divine image and were summarily destroyed in the name of God. Such atrocities were explicitly motivated and sanctioned by ecclesial mandates that fashioned God in the image of the European Christian colonizer, and baptized the violent economic and political agendas of European nations.\(^6\) Therefore, whiteness is at its root “a properly and peculiarly white Christian theological problem that demands a white theological response.”\(^7\) Because of the adaptive power of whiteness and its ability to operate undetected within the church and among people raced-as-white generally, I believe the urgency of such a response to be particularly heightened in multiracial churches led by pastors raced-as-white.

The most diabolical aspect of the theological imaginary animating European Christian colonization may have been the determined and concomitant wresting of identity from sites of relationality (i.e. family and ethnicity, a people’s connection to shared history, culture, and space/land), and the binding of identity to bodies.\(^8\) When colonized the world overwhelmingly looked like conquest and exploitation rather than service and protection.


\(^8\) Jennings, 29, 31, 43, 58-64.
Christian European colonizers encountered new peoples throughout the new world, they named them not in reference to their integral place in and relationship to God’s world, but in comparative reference to themselves with respect to European civilization (barbarians), religion (infidels), and eventually and most permanently by an aesthetic scale articulating an invention called race (negros, mulattos, mestizos, etc.).

In this dislocation of identity, the colonizer effectively usurped God’s role as creator (and thus the ground of all identity) and defied Israel’s creation accounts by divorcing human identity from relationship to God and all of creation. This was the work of whiteness that “reduced theological anthropology to commodified bodies.” This counter creation inserted whiteness as the primary locus of identity formation in the place of relationality to God, people, and land. This substitution fundamentally destabilized the identities of both European colonizers and the indigenes of colonized lands by disrupting the formative influence of earth-bound and storied-memories, inserting instead a fabrication tied loosely to skin tone and tightly to economics and an insatiable quest for domination. Such was the European Christian colonizing presumption to name other peoples as a self-referential act of conquest rather than as a theo-referential act of worship.

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9 Jacobson, 32-33, 35-36. The particular racial designations mentioned above come from the Andean racial scale developed by the Spanish in their 16th century conquest of Peru. See Jennings, 80.

10 Jennings, 58. The commodification of a human being requires the denial of the imago Dei in another. Only by such denial can one called Christian refuse the basic dignity of human life. European colonization and its attending slave trade necessitated the re-creation of indigenous peoples into something less than human in order for the sheer brutality of this theo-political agenda of world domination to be theologically imaginable and therefore generally palatable among the peoples of European nations.

11 Ibid., 39, 43-44, 58, 64, 81.

12 This claim has in view the ways ethnic Europeans have lost their ethnic particularity in becoming white throughout the history of the American colonies and the Unites States.
expressed through humble joining and grateful communion. When self-referential comparison combined with military power and a perverse ecclesial mandate to exercise dominion over all the earth, a racial scale of existence came into being,\textsuperscript{13} obliterating ethnicities by genocidal violence and the stripping of people’s identities from their places, cultures, and histories of belonging, and the forcibly locating identity in the body.

At the root, these identity-destroying operations of whiteness are the same ones that were at work in CityWell and in me when Gloria was effectively erased from leadership on the Sunday described at the beginning of this chapter. Within the theological imaginary of whiteness, I have been deeply formed to imagine my place in the world as a centered given. It is deeply engrained in me that I belong up front in the position of influence and that my voice should be heard and heeded. This assumption of belonging, of centering, of speaking so effectively as not to need the accompaniment of other, differing voices is the same assumption by which the European colonialist moved into a new world as the centered-self around which, and according to which, all other selves would be defined, de-centered, and silenced. Whiteness has deeply formed my vision of myself and of the world, and is constantly vying for control over my posture and actions in all relational spaces of my life.\textsuperscript{14}

Perhaps most sinister within the historically consistent operations of whiteness is the persistent prerogative to hide its domination agenda behind thin, although powerfully

\textsuperscript{13} Jennings, 19.

\textsuperscript{14} In the space of church, the impact of whiteness upon and through me is further obscured by the affirmation of my gifts for ministry, and by my ordination and pastoral appointment – none of which account for the formative power of whiteness in me or in my denomination’s leadership selection and evaluation processes.
deceptive, veils of noble intention and divine commission. Whiteness at work in European colonization was explicitly named positively by Europeans in terms of exploration, discovery, civilizing, and Christianizing. The power of seduction and perversion in such positive renderings arises from the fact that these images of nobility and Christian commission are partially true. There was much in the world for Europeans to explore and discover, and there were many gifts of European civilization and religion that could bless the peoples of other lands. However, such positive possibilities were eclipsed by the presumption of supremacy within whiteness, a presumption that presents in the refusal to be explored, discovered, civilized, and even Christianized by other peoples. In Scripture Satan is said to disguise as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). With a similar presumption to power and deception in disguise,15 whiteness presents in partial truths and with crafty masks.

As with European colonization, whiteness at work in CityWell and in me veils itself in positive terms like leadership, vision, calling, and initiative. Similarly, a presumption to power betrays these partial truths when my vision of myself and my place in the world and the church leads to my resistance to being led by, trusting the vision of, honoring the calling upon, and waiting for the initiative of others around me, especially others who are not raced-as-white. This resistance almost never presents at the level of my intentions or desires but readily manifests in action in moments when I fail to remain cognizant of the depth and persistence of my habituated default to whiteness.16


Prior to CityWell I have never questioned my prominence in leadership, the connection of this prominence to long histories of racial oppression, or the potentially racist impact of my leadership upon the communities to which I have belonged. Quite the contrary, I have simply assumed the rightfulness, the necessity, even the divine appointment of my position, of my voice, and of my influence in any given space. Equal to the power of my formation to assume my own place in the world is the power of my formation to assume the place of others, specifically people of color. It was neither a matter of accident nor intention that my Black, female partner in ministry disappeared from leadership on a Sunday when I was responsible for the distribution of leadership roles. Nor was it a matter of accident or intention that a great many at CityWell that day did not notice my elevation and Gloria’s disappearance.¹⁷ These things are matters of whiteness, of the powerful formation and deformation of collective and individual imaginations regarding who belongs where in this world.

In the counter-creation that is whiteness, instead of human beings existing in co-dignity as image bearers and tenders of the garden, people-raced-as-white assume the right to name others, place others, lead others, and silence others implicitly and explicitly, whether in the church, the office, or the public square. Regardless of dramatic shifting in cultural values in the US arising from the righteous resistance of people of color to the world fabricated by whiteness, these defaults still reside deep in our collective and individual psyches. Regardless of my personal commitment to grow in practices of antiracism and to lead a church committed to a different theological imagination, the

¹⁷ Some CityWellers did notice these dynamics and spoke directly about it to Gloria. Notably, all of those who named the side-lining were women of color.
default of whiteness made it easy, intuitive even, for me to displace Gloria and center myself. This was whiteness at work in and through me.  

The events of that Sunday also revealed the power of whiteness in me to pervert relationship with Gloria into a matter of transaction and consumption rather than communion and delight. Just as whiteness in the epoch of colonialism facilitated a profound theological perversion that allowed Europeans to see other human beings as economic resources to be exploited, so whiteness perverted my perception of and relationship with Gloria. I acted toward her in a way that sought to use her, that sought to employ her flesh for my own ends. In subtle but nonetheless violent ways, I denied the integrity of her humanity. Asking Gloria to “take the lead” in our Leadership Team meeting was a thinly veiled attempt to hide my complicity with whiteness by which I had side-lined her in worship. In that attempt, I engaged in a far uglier expression of the very thing I was trying to hide. Rather than engaging Gloria as an image-bearing human being with an identity formed by stories and people and places, I sought to employ her as a black body to do my bidding in order to create the appearance that I was humbly and thoughtfully submitting to my partner.

Carried by the same waves of whiteness that crashed upon Africa’s shores in the era of colonialism, I was willing to deny the image-bearing identity of person whose difference from me I viewed as an opportunity to use as a means of producing personal profit. After all, the white male pastor who submits to the lead of a Black woman is

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18 Gender oppression is also germane to the dynamics named in this paragraph, but for the sake of focus, I will leave that for another project.
surely humble. Such a leader must surely be woke and a trustworthy ally and advocate in the church’s work of justice in the community. Surely, if I am perceived as such a leader, more people of color will come to CityWell, and my personal platform as a multiracial church leader will increase. Indeed, I had much to gain from locating identity and value in Gloria’s body rather than in the depths of her story-and-place-formed self. This was the work of whiteness in and through me.

Tokenism is but a modern manifestation of whiteness’ determination to turn human beings into fuel for projects that reinforce white supremacy. Tokenism values a person’s skin color, but not the person. Tokenism always serves the self-congratulating and self-deceiving purposes of white leaders and white organizations. Tokenism seeks to put faces of color on display while refusing to allow people of color to leverage real power to effect change in an organization. And in the same way that the horrors of European colonization were sanitized with the language of the church and its Christianizing mission, in present day churches like CityWell, tokenization is often sanitized with the language of diversity and our mission to reflect the Kingdom of God. In both cases, the mission of the church, and thus God, is supposedly served, while the humanity of people raced-as-other-than-white is denied, even if subtly and unintentionally.

On this particular Sunday, I was willing to tokenize Gloria for the sake of my own reputation. My actions were simply a theological inversion of God’s purposes for the peoples of the world to be joined in reciprocally enriching embrace and to desire life-giving communion with one another. This was whiteness at work in and through me, and it did not need me to be a bigot or to consciously dehumanize Gloria. Whiteness merely
requires a passive acceptance of and engagement in deeply conditioned default postures of self-assertion and supremacy. Whiteness merely needs me to be blind to its work in order to use me toward its ends.

**Blinding Whiteness**

The theological imaginary of whiteness is a distorting optic through which human beings simply cannot see God, themselves, or others rightly. Whiteness operates in manifold ways to blind people, especially people raced-as-white, in order to conscript them in its service and render them impotent to resist its self-perpetuating agendas. The power and preservation of whiteness require its invisibility, and especially that people raced-as-white not see it, in order that they might continue their complicity in its propagation.

The blinding force of whiteness rests partially in what many scholars call “white normativity,” the historically and systemically reinforced assumption that white “cultural practices, ideologies, and location within the racial hierarchy… [white] understandings about life, society, and the world… are accepted as “just how things are.””19 White normativity describes the assertion of whiteness as the standard of what is normal, of what is good, of what is enduringly valuable and desirable within any society or institution governed by whiteness. White people are conditioned in such environments simply not to notice what is assumed to be normal, which is to say not to notice whiteness. This is why, by and large, people raced-as-white do not intuitively think about themselves as raced-people, why white racial identity is generally peripheral to their

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19 Edwards, 10.
sense of self, and why they often fail to recognize that their lives are as profoundly formed by race as are those of people of color (though with very different material consequences). Within the imaginary served so well by white normativity, “to be white – in the eye of one who assumes such a stance – is simply to be…”

White normativity serves the theological problem of whiteness in its presumption that white bodies are normative and therefore that all other bodies are derivative in value as non-normative. Whiteness therefore presumes to usurp God as the locus of human identity, value, and purpose in creation, becoming the determinative point of reference within which all other racial identities are imagined and against which all other racial identities are assigned relative value. In this usurpation, God is not dismissed but rather domesticated and employed by whiteness to legitimize the assertion and maintenance of white supremacy and power. In place of the biblical vision of covenant relationships and communion marked by desire, dignity, and loving dominion, whiteness imposes hierarchical relationships marked by oppression, exploitation, dehumanization, and domination. This is, again, a perversion of Israel’s creation myth, and white normativity

20 Ibid., 84.
22 Perkinson, 139. Italics original. For white readers trying to understand this dynamic more concretely, take a few moments and write down five positive things distinctive to your white racial identity. Chances are, this is an awkward, if not difficult exercise that reveals both the normativity of our racial existence (we don’t even notice being white), as well as the moral ambiguity of being white (that it is difficult to name distinct and also positive things about our racial identity). Jennifer Harvey employs this exercise with her students, and names what I am here calling “ambiguity” as a moral crisis, which will be discussed below. Harvey, 43-44.
23 Jennings, 275.
24 Bantum simply and elegantly interprets the Genesis creation story as one that reveals the essence of image-bearing to be communion-with-difference: “In the creation of humanity we see what is
is a means by which people-raced-as-white are blinded to their complicity in and benefit from this distorted story.

Whiteness suppresses one’s ability to name the ways race forms those raced-as-white, such that they are too often unable to see history through honest eyes and are therefore prone to misperceive present realities. Specifically, people raced-as-white are conditioned not to see that white racial identity was crafted via systemic oppression and phenomenal violence against people raced-as-other-than-white and that it is sustained by ongoing passive and active endorsement of the inequitable racial arrangements engendered by that violent oppression. In the diabolical pedagogy of whiteness, people are taught to think that they simply are white, rather than to see the structural, economic, and social means by which they have become and continue to become white through participation in white supremacy and the laws, social customs, and political systems that uphold it. In this sense, white racial identity is a social performance of becoming through acting out choreographed white roles on a stage built by and for white people. Given the foundation of white supremacy upon which the US stage is built, such becoming is and will continue to be automatic until and unless one consciously resists the ways that whiteness seeks to form and use people in the ongoing project of its own reinforcement.

25 Harvey, 51-52. See also, Perkinson, 138-139.
26 Ibid., 10-11, 43, 55, 135.
27 Keel, 21.
28 Ibid.
Whiteness aims to blind people to the ways that white supremacy is so thoroughly mixed into the foundation of this country as to ensure ubiquitous white structural advantage, in which power and influence in political parties, business, governmental agencies, universities, the legal system, and financial institutions of this nation rest in white hands with vast disproportionality to population. The perpetuation of whiteness depends upon white people not seeing the historical roots and the current cultivation of inequities and disparities in the US and especially the ways they benefit from them.

Insofar as they do not see, people raced-as-white are prone to refuse to accept the reality, much less recognize manifestations of white privilege, the conference of social, psychological, and material benefits - whether wanted or not - that is unavoidable for people raced-as-white in the United States. White privilege serves, then, to perpetuate white blindness to realities of racial injustice by satiating people raced-as-white in their social locations, and so dis-incentivizing resistance to whiteness. Of course, there is a spectrum of privilege among people raced-as-white that reflects other social power dynamics (class, sexuality, ability/disability, etc.), but regardless of how far down the spectrum of privilege any particular person raced-as-white may identify themselves, chances are one would not think his or her lot would improve by becoming Black, Asian, or Latino. White privilege exists in degrees, to be sure, but it surely exists, and its

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29 Edwards, 10.
30 Teel, 21.
31 Wallis, 35, 49.
32 Simply by virtue of being human, all people struggle and suffer, regardless of racial designation. However, different from other raced peoples in the US, people raced-as-white do not suffer because of their race. Thank you to the trainers of the Racial Equity Institute for this insight.
existence mitigates against white resistance to whiteness. Satiation is an opiate that quells the will to fight for justice and to change systems within which one benefits.\textsuperscript{33} Such sedative acceptance of the status quo depends not upon the flourishing of all people raced-as-white, but only upon the promise that none of them will be treated as someone raced-as-other-than-white.

Blindness to the oppressive history of white becoming, to ubiquitous white structural advantage, and to white privilege all depend upon the potency of whiteness to blind people raced-as-white to our possession of a collective identity, which is to say to a historically accountable identity. The seemingly unassailable doctrine of rugged individualism in the United States\textsuperscript{34} accelerates the impact of whiteness by predisposing the white imagination to resist notions of collective responsibility for most anything, but especially for racism past and present. The inability of liberal individualism to give voice to the “collective dimensions of our [white] experience,”\textsuperscript{35} lies at the root of common white expressions of indignation that one encounters at the mere suggestion of corporate responsibility for racism: “My ancestors did not own slaves.” “My family immigrated to this country after emancipation.” “Why should I be held responsible for something that happened hundreds of years ago?” Such expressions betray a central tenet of whiteness that resides most stubbornly among conservative white Christians, namely, that human

\textsuperscript{33} Walter Breuggemann, \textit{The Prophetic Imagination}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 26, 35.

\textsuperscript{34} Dalton, 15.

\textsuperscript{35} Lipsitz, 87.
beings are individuals who are only accountable for their own actions in history. According to this lens of individualism, one is only responsible for how one personally treats individuals of color and certainly not for the ways some other person, or even an historical group of people, does or did. So, if one is a generally considerate and non-bigoted person, one can dismiss talk of racism, collective responsibility, and any form of reparations as personally irrelevant.

The problem with the lens of individualism is simply that it creates a dishonest view of the world and of the self in which white people are unable to name and so see the ways the structural impact of whiteness and white racism created and creates the social, economic, and political trajectories that bear upon us all. On a deeper level, such blindness operates as a means of self-exoneration from responsibility in the ongoing oppressive disparities experienced by communities of color in this nation. Within this individualist narrative, racial disparities are often simplistically named as problems of suffering, poverty, or injustice. The partial truth of such naming obscures white agency in the creation and sustaining of these problems. Where did this suffering come from? Who inflicted it? Was there ever restitution? What are the roots of poverty and how might these roots be currently perpetuated in communities of color? Who benefited from the creation of this poverty, and how do those benefits continue to be passed on? If there is injustice, who is responsible? Whose actions and what systems must change in order to

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36 In Divided by Faith, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith present compelling evidence for the preponderance of what they call “accountable, freewill individualism” among white evangelical Christians. They note that where individualism is a core American value, this particular expression “renders white evangelicals even more individualistic than other white Americans.” Emerson & Smith, 76-77.

37 Harvey, 141-142.
achieve justice? Questions like these are too often unasked in the game of simplistic naming, while assertions of individual white innocence of wrongdoing allow people raced-as-white to continue, unperturbed, in the enjoyment of the benefits collectively conferred upon them through perpetual white domination and control of this society.\(^{38}\)

People-raced-as-white, and especially Christians, must be willing to acknowledge a collective racial identity if there is to be any hope of resisting the real and phenomenally unjust ramifications of that identity. In the United States, people-raced-as-white share in and benefit from a long history of racism, and only in naming that will they be able to begin reckoning with the “moral crisis of being white,” namely, that their racial identity was birthed in and remains substantively bound up with the violent oppression of people of color.\(^{39}\) Being white is not an ontological given. It is not a simple matter of skin tone or ethnic origin. Nor is being white a substantive description of personal or communal identity. Being white in this country is an ongoing social performance, a continual becoming with collective implications that are about power, privilege, and control. The existence of white racial identity is contingent upon the imposition of a racial scale of being in which there is an opposite to white, namely black, as well as a spectrum of belonging and exclusion between those poles. Therefore, to be raced-as-white in this nation is not a morally neutral way to exist in this world. It is an oppressive form of being premised either upon our blindness or our bigotry and likely some combination of both. Therefore, the performance of white racial identity in this

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\(^{38}\) Hart, 46-47.

\(^{39}\) Harvey, 11, 51.
nation requires the diminishment of everyone’s humanity, of those raced-as-white and of those raced-as-other-than-white. Only in reckoning with this moral crisis might the nation and our churches begin to imagine another way of being, another locus of identity.

Receiving the ways of Jesus as our way of life means nothing less than receiving truth-telling as a central and liberating communal practice. Truth-telling requires the acknowledgment that everyone, if not actively resisting the operations of whiteness around and within the community, is participating in them, whether consciously or not. Jesus beckons people raced-as-white to acknowledge a collective white racial identity in order that they might discover ways of collective repentance and collective redemption that are congruent with the new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).\(^{40}\)

Collective white racial identity had everything to do with my interaction with Gloria in worship and outside the Leadership Team. In those moments, I was not just Cleve. I was also a white man faithfully playing the role men raced-as-white have been conditioned by whiteness to perform for centuries. Gloria did not experience that day as only an unfortunate interaction with an individual person-raced-as-white because my actions invoked and offered one more manifestation of a long and ongoing history of exploitative actions of people raced-as-white against people like Gloria. In those moments, my personal identity melted into my collective identity as a white man. My words were not standing on their own but were bearing the collective weight of all the other oppressive words spoken to Gloria by men like me throughout her life. Those

\(^{40}\) See Appendix D for an exegetical and homiletical expression of the call to acknowledge collective identity and engage in collective repentance for the sake of collective redemption. This sermon was preached at the Duke Divinity School Chapel on June 28, 2015, the day after the Charleston Massacre.
moments illustrated that I am not just a person. I am also part of a pattern, a history, a collective. In relationship to Gloria that day, I was blind to the ways I was performing white normativity, assuming that Gloria should run the Leadership Team meeting in the way that I would according to my agenda. I was embodying white structural advantage by presuming to be the person in power who could graciously share that power with another person who otherwise would not have right to it. I was employing white privilege by betting on the likelihood that the Leadership Team, as well as the congregation, would extend to me the benefit of the doubt and see past my racist oppression of Gloria. And I failed to recognize the impact of my collective racial identity by not seeing that my sin against Gloria was connected to and compounded by the many sins of other people-raced-as-white throughout history. This was whiteness at work in and through me.

Whiteness is, at its core, a theological problem, arising from a distorted biblical hermeneutic\cite{Jennings} and producing histories of oppression, economies of exploitation, and hierarchical socialities, all organized around fabricated identities located in newly racialized bodies. The theological imaginary of whiteness is the world’s greatest threat to all ethnicities and thus stands against God’s good creation and God’s desire to gather up all things - including the ethnicities of the world - in Christ (Eph 1:10). The Western church simply cannot be exonerated in the propagation of whiteness and its derivative minions, race and racism. Likewise, as a man raced-as-white, I cannot be exonerated from the history that has produced my racial identity, nor the ways in which I participate in my own white becoming. Rather, we who are raced-as-white must learn to name, see, \cite{Jennings}

\footnote{Jennings, 58-59. I outline this distorted hermeneutic above on pg. 112.}
and resist the power of whiteness in the malformation of our theological imagination, in the perversion of our sense of the world, and in the destruction of relationships through which the Lord intends to tell a truthful story about the tearing down of dividing walls and the resurrection of a new humanity in Jesus. Such naming, seeing, and resisting constitutes the road of repentance and racial healing for all who are raced-as-white.

**Antiracist Discipleship Practice #5: Remembering Our Baptism**

Baptism is a site of collision, and it is deadly. In the sacred waters two stories collide, and only one can survive the impact. The first story, the story of truth, is named in the initial two questions of CityWell’s baptismal liturgy: 1) “By God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, will you rejoice in Jesus as the Savior and Lord of all, and do you desire God’s forgiveness, power, healing, and redemption for your life?” And, 2) “By God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, will you trust that you are who God says you are: God’s beloved child, accepted and fully embraced by God through Jesus?” This first story tells us the deepest truth of every human being: that we are beloved of God, forgiven, empowered, healed, redeemed, and embraced in Jesus, the Savior and Lord of all. This is the story declared over the one being baptized and remembered by the congregation in every baptism. This is the story that alone can orient and re-orient a life toward a truthful way of walking as friends of God in this world. The story told in baptism tolerates no rival and exposes all false stories that vie for any other allegiance and seek to pirate all identities for anti-Kingdom purposes.

Colliding with this story of truth is a second story, acknowledged in the third question of CityWell’s baptismal liturgy: 1) “By God’s grace and the power of the Holy
Spirit, will you allow God’s daily kindness to lead you to repentance of your sin, to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, and to reject the evil powers of this world; and will you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” The second story is one that seeks to rival, to undermine, and to overcome the true story. It encompasses all false narratives, all forms of deception, and all of the lies that assault the truth of our identities expressed in the first story. This second story centers upon spiritual forces of wickedness, evil powers, sin, injustice, and oppression. This is the story within which whiteness, racism, and race belong. This second story has proven very powerful in its potential to shape the human imagination and so determine the contours of human life. This is the story unfolding in every form of violence and destruction in our world. This is the story underneath every expression of oppression and exploitation. This is the story that contends against the true story of our identities. All of humanity finds itself assaulted, seduced, employed in, and in desperate need of deliverance from this second story.

In the sacrament of baptism, God declares the true story over and through the church, and in this declaration the second story is revealed to have no future and, therefore, no authentic purchase on the identity of the ones who go through the waters. In the act of baptism, proclamation is embodied in immersion. The second story, like Pharaoh’s army (Ex 14:26-29), is drowned in the waters of deliverance, and out of the pool emerges a person and a community whose identity is claimed, formed, and dripping in the true story of belonging, forgiveness, empowerment, healing, and redemption. Baptism is thus a sermon enacted. Because this proclamation is, in the first instance, a proclamation of God, its declaration produces the very thing declared. As over the waters
of the pre-creation void God declared, “‘Let there be light’, and there was light” (Gen 1:1-3) so in God’s declaration over the baptismal waters, the truth of one’s identity is firmly and irrevocably established and secured.

Every time CityWell participates in God’s world-creating proclamation of baptism, the liturgy reminds the congregation that this act is not just about the person to be baptized; this sacrament implicates us all. Within the baptismal liturgy, the whole congregation reaffirms the baptismal vows, repenting of sin anew, and committing again to walk in the ways of the Kingdom by renouncing and resisting all spiritual forces of wickedness and all forms of evil, injustice and oppression. Following the emergence of the newly baptized person from the waters, the whole congregation is invited to come forward, to touch the water, and to remember that they too have been claimed and are upheld in the true story these waters tell.

The remembrance of baptism is an essential antiracist discipleship practice because whiteness, racism, and race are, at their roots, false stories created to undermine and overcome the true story revealed in Jesus. As darkness will not overcome the light of Jesus (Jn 1:5), neither will the false story withstand the illumination of the true story. Baptism is a means of grace through which God reminds the Church of and calls us back into this true story, and God’s call is always effectual. Therefore, the remembrance of baptism is one of the ways that God is continuing unto completion the work of deliverance, healing, and redemption begun in Christ (Phil 1:6) This practice furthers God’s ongoing salvation among people. In recalling baptism’s declaration of belonging and unity, the Church receives language to see and resist the violence of exclusion inherent within the story of whiteness, racism, and race. Remembering the call and
empowerment of baptism to renounce all spiritual forces of wickedness and all forms of evil, injustice, and oppression, the Holy Spirit strengthens the Church to name and resist the ways whiteness, racism, and race pervert individuals, congregations, communities and nations. In remembering one’s baptism, one is reminded that our racialized identities are falsifications of the true story of our baptismal identity, especially in the ways they erect dividing walls of hostility between peoples made one in the new humanity of Jesus’ crucified and resurrected flesh (Eph 2:4-8, 13-18).42 This antiracist discipleship practice declares to all: “Remember your baptism, give thanks, and resist every false identity laid upon you.”

42 As the truth of one’s baptismal identity does not mean one ceases confessing the sins by which one continually denies that identity, neither does a person’s baptismal identity call for them to cease reckoning with and naming their racial identity as an ever-present contender against the true story of who they are. Just as one must always acknowledge any sin that continues to afflict and/or conscript, one must also continually acknowledge, precisely as a means of resistance, the racial identities that afflict and conscript.
CHAPTER 6
SIN AND REPENTANCE

On October 30, 2016, CityWell celebrated five years of ministry and life together. Rather than listening to a traditional sermon during worship, the whole congregation was invited to participate in the proclamation of the gospel through individual testimonies as to how we have seen “the mighty acts, wondrous works, and awesome deeds of the Lord”¹ in CityWell's five years. Amid the many things shared, three voices of testimony cohered to narrate CityWell’s journey of reckoning with whiteness, racism, and race. In the first voice, several people testified to the miraculous working of God to gather such a diverse group of people into one church family. Sensing that the narrative of diversity as a sign of God’s awesome deeds needed nuancing, a second voice arose as one of CityWell’s Black leaders stood and named the pain in our five years and related it to the diversity in the room. This faithful friend named the mighty acts of God in keeping us at the table in the midst of this great pain. As the person responsible for much of the pain referenced, I represented a third voice in testifying to the wondrous works of God in sending the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, lead in repentance, and thus make healing and

¹ This testimony prompt came out of our praying Psalm 145 together that morning.
unity possible. In a truthful telling of CityWell’s story, these three voices of testimony belong together. Our journey has been miraculous, painful, and necessarily marked by kind act of God (Rom 2:4) to reveal sin and to lead in repentance.

The Omission of Sin

Perhaps the reader has noticed that, as of yet in this analysis of the havoc whiteness, racism, and race wreak in multiracial churches, there has been very little explicit mention of Sin.² Though the argument heretofore has very much been about Sin, the omission of this specific language has been intentional for two primary reasons: First, turning quickly to the language of Sin when considering whiteness, racism, and race often precludes rigorous consideration of the particular manifestations by which these produce so much harm in our world and in our churches. Second, within a Christian imagination, naming whiteness, racism, and race as manifestations of Sin necessarily points us to repentance, healing, and unity, which are the closing subjects of the present chapter.

Sin is a strong word in the Christian vocabulary. To apply the word quickly to racism likely gives to many a false sense that racism has been appropriately condemned, and so allows people to move on without getting to the roots (whiteness) or the fruits (race) of this particular weed.³ When Christians say Sin, they too often mistakenly think they know more than they actually do about what is being named, and such presumption

² In capitalizing Sin, I intend to designate a reality larger than, but encompassing, any and all particular sins. Sin, so designated, will be described more fully in the proceeding argument.

³ For more on the paradoxical, derivative relationship between whiteness, racism, and race, see Appendix D.
to understanding can impede processes of deep reflection that lead to truer understanding and more specific repentance. One sees evidence of this conundrum in the ease with which a great many Christians in the US can denounce racism as a sin while not at all seeing, much less resisting, its structural and institutional forms. In such instances, racism is often viewed as a problem of old, or only current in fringe communities, or in so-called bad apple individuals. Such condemnations of racism rarely implicate the person naming the sin. In such instances, repentance of racism, if not completely elusive, can only be partial at best. With respect to whiteness, racism, and race, the potential for shallow understanding and partial repentance is particularly problematic for those raced-as-white. The extreme individualism of Western culture, and most particularly within the theological imaginations of many Western Christians, leads to individualistic understandings of Sin, which are inadequate to understand the machinations of whiteness, racism, and race.

To name this trinity of evil as Sin directs us to repentance, healing, and unity. Having acknowledged and begun grappling with the complexity, collectivity, and interrelatedness of whiteness, racism, and race in the first five chapters, these can now be named as Sin without collapsing into simplistic theological labeling that allows for shallow gestures of repentance that undermine genuine efforts toward racial healing and unity. Such naming, when rigorous and thoughtful, is a hopeful move, as Sin has been judged and overcome in the cross and resurrection of Jesus and therefore has no rightful claim upon humanity and no legitimate place in the Church. May it be that naming

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4 Emerson and Smith, 76-80.
whiteness, racism, and race as Sin might be a means of Jesus’ light shining in the darkness, and of God to empower the Church for repentance and resistance.

Sin and the Powers

In literature about the powers and principalities, one commonly finds Sin listed among them. However, following Yoder and Wink, chapter three presented the powers as the good, albeit fallen, creation of God (Col 1:15-16), intended by God for the right ordering of the world. The powers are thus destined for redemption, as God’s goodness entails an unwavering commitment to restoring the goodness of creation. If this argument is sustainable, Sin cannot be one among the powers, for neither did God create Sin nor does Sin hold together in Christ (Col 1:17).

The common association of Sin with the powers arises from the ways that Paul personifies Sin and suggests that it has agency and power over humanity. For instance, in Romans 6 Paul speaks of Sin as something that enslaves humanity (6:6), and as something that humans can “obey” (6:16). In Romans 7:8, 11, 13, 20, Paul describes Sin as “seizing the opportunity,” as “working death in me,” as “producing in me all kinds of covetousness,” as “deceiving me” and “killing me,” as “working death in me,” and

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6 Moses, 77. Moses acknowledges this conundrum and chooses to read Paul’s uncontested letters in tension with the Colossian hymn, where the powers are unequivocally named as God’s good creation: “Thus the view that Paul presents all the powers as God’s creatures does not find support in Romans, or anywhere else in Paul’s writings.” I find this conclusion uncompelling and unhelpful both in its assumption of the pseudonymity of Colossians, (which, with Campbell, I believe to be Pauline; see *Framing Paul*, 260-309.) and in its direct identification of Satan, Sin and Death as among the powers. When one instead chooses to accept the Colossians vision of the powers being created through and for, as well as being held together by Jesus, the New Testament presents a coherent vision of both the powers and of Satan, Sin and Death.
as causing me to “do what I do not want.” This language is markedly different from that found in rest of the New Testament where sin is spoken of in terms of people’s actions and desires, i.e. “forgive us our sins” (LK 11:4). The possible exceptions to this more common use are in John 8:34 where Jesus says “anyone who practices sin is a slave to sin,” in Hebrews 3:13 where the writer exhorts that none be “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin,” and in Hebrews 12 where sin is described as that which “clings so closely” (12:1) and against which humans are called to struggle and resist (12:4). However, these possible exceptions can be read without necessarily personifying sin, where Paul’s logic in Romans 6-8 rests in large measure upon the agency of Sin to resist God’s purposes and oppress God’s people.

So, how is Sin to be spoken of, if not as one of the powers? In moving toward an answer to that question, consideration will be given to both exegetical and theological conceptions of Sin that will suggest what repentance of whiteness, racism and race might entail. This line of consideration will lead to an imagining of a way in which God might redeem white racial identity.

Conceptions of Sin: Exegetical

When reckoning with the Bible’s, and especially the New Testament’s, concept of Sin, one must also deal directly with Sin’s conjoined siblings, Satan and Death. In a scripturally formed imagination, Satan, Sin, and Death form an anti-trinity that opposes the creation and purposes of the Triune God by perversion of the powers and the deception and destruction of humanity. As with whiteness, racism, and race, the anti-trinity of Satan, Sin and Death exhibits a co-mingled and derivative relationship; Satan
leads to Sin, and Sin leads to Death. Beyond mere linearity, however, the three exist together in a feedback loop of evil.

Biblical writers, reflecting the worldviews of their days, believed the world to be controlled by spiritual forces, both good and evil. A baseline assumption in Scripture is that there are forces inimical to God permeating the world. Early Christians, building on the language of the Hebrew Scriptures, attributed to Satan and his minions all spiritual opposition to God (cf. Acts 14:8-20; 17:16-34; 19:23-41; 28:1-11). The writers of the New Testament, and particularly Paul, also draw a strong connection between Satan and Sin in describing the forces that oppose the will and work of God in God’s world and among God’s people (i.e. Matt 16:23, Mk 4:15, Acts 26:18, 2 Thes 2:9, Rev 12:9).

Where it has been and remains common in the modern theology of the Western church to demythologize biblical references to the spiritual realm, and especially those that suggest a personal adversary to God (variously designated in the Bible), there is consistency in the biblical witness to the reality, pervasiveness, and power of this realm.

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7 Moses, 10-12.

8 Ibid.

9 This tendency is typified and perhaps most influentially present in the seminal work of Rudolf Bultmann, who viewed the biblical language of the demonic and the powers as belonging to a pre-scientific epoch now transcended by the enlightenment. Where his demythologizing project was an attempt to maintain the relevance of Scripture to the modern reader, his paradigm, and the articulations of scholars who followed his lead, proved incapable of naming the profound sense of evil, both personal and structural, felt by many in the wake of two world wars and the German Holocaust. Ibid., 3-4.

10 Abaddon and Apollyon (Rev 9:11), Accuser (Rev 12:10), Adversary (1 Pet 5:8), Angel of Light (2 Cor 11:14), Antichrist (1 Jn 4:3), Beast (Rev 14:9-10), Beelzebub (Matt 12:24), Belial (2 Cor 6:15), Deceiver (Rev 12:9), Devil (Rev 12:9), Enemy (Matt 13:39), Evil One (Jn 17:15), Father of Lies (Jn 8:44), God of this Age (2 Cor 4:4), Lucifer (Is 14:12-14), Prince of the Power of the Air (Eph 2:1-2), Satan (Mk 1:13), Serpent (Rev 12:9, 20:2), Tempter (Matt 4:3), Thief (Jn 10:10).

11 Walter Wink is significant among a growing number of post WWII theologians who are reclaiming the biblical language of evil, the demonic, and the powers. But he, too, even while offering a
This project adopts a hermeneutic of suspicion with respect to the limits of our modern, scientific worldview and its tendency to discount the enduring relevance of ancient views of the demonic. Instead, it submits to the biblical witness by referring to Satan as a personal being who acts with intellect and will in determined opposition to God and God’s people. As Richard Hays writes, “We should indeed be suspicious when we read the Scripture – suspicious of ourselves, whose minds need to be transformed.”

The word Sin first appears in the biblical text in Genesis 4:6, but Sin is commonly regarded as coming onto the scene in the account of Genesis 3, traditionally known as the fall. The ubiquity of this view is represented in Paul’s assertion that Sin entered the world through Adam (Rom 5:12-21, 1 Cor 15:21). Insofar as Genesis 3 is exegetically foundational to a biblical understanding of Sin, Sin is related to the presence of the serpent. Indeed, all biblical reference to Sin follows the introduction of the serpent, whom scriptural tradition links closely with Satan.

The linkage between Satan/serpent and Sin is strong in Paul’s personification of Sin, which appears to arise from a reading of Genesis 3, with particular emphasis on the role of deception. In Romans 7:11 Paul writes, “Sin… deceived me.” This language

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14 See Moses, 74 n.83, where the author notes Revelation 12:9, 20:22 both refer to Satan as “the ancient serpent,” and that Paul may have a similar connection in mind in Romans 16:20 where he writes, “The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet,” an apparent echo of Gen 3:15.
directly echoes Eve’s lament in Genesis 3:13: “The serpent deceived me,”^{15} and evinces a parallel in Paul’s mind between the operation of Sin and that of the Serpent.

Paul’s dependence upon the Genesis narrative arises again in 2 Corinthians 11, where Paul expresses anxiety that his young congregation in Corinth is in danger of being deceived. Paul says “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray” (11:3). His concern is that a false gospel is being proclaimed (11:4) by false apostles who are “deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (11:13). Paul connects such deceivers to Satan, who “disguises himself as an angel of light” (11:14), declaring these false apostles to be “ministers” of Satan (11:15).

Finally, there is a possible echo of Genesis 4:7 in 1 Peter 5:8. In the Genesis text Sin is a crouching predator waiting to pounce, and in 1 Peter the devil is the prowling predator waiting to pounce.^{16} If this is an intended echo, the parallelism between sin and the devil is suggestive. Thus, Sin operates in parallel fashion to the deceptive serpent of Genesis 3, and the serpent in the New Testament is closely identified with Satan.

Paul also personifies Death and ties it explicitly to Sin. In Romans, Death is said “to exercise dominion” (5:14,17), and, “sin exercised dominion in death” (5:21). In 1 Corinthians, Death is named as the last enemy to be rendered inoperative (15:26)^{17} and is

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^{15} Ibid.

^{16} The depiction in 1 Peter 5:8 of the devil as a roaring lion prowling in search of prey to devour appears to arise from traditional Jewish interpretations of Genesis 4:7, where Sin is said to be “lurking at the door,” its desire being for Cain. In Sirach 27:10 sin is described as a lion lying in wait for its prey. From Genesis, through Sirach, to 1 Peter, one sees an evolution of expression in which the devil is closely related to, if not directly identified with, Sin.

^{17} Recall the argument in Chapter 4 (pg 86, n.7) for translating καταργέω as “render inoperative” rather than the more common translation, “destroy.” In the larger context of the use of this verb, the case for a non-obliterating translation becomes stronger. 1 Corinthians 15:25 says that Jesus will reign until he has “put all his enemies under his feet.” In the next verse, Paul writes, “And the last enemy καταργείται is
directly addressed as a vanquished adversary: “When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (15:54-55). The verse that follows again connects Death explicitly to Sin: “The sting of death is sin” (15:56).

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Death is connected not only to Sin, but also directly to the devil. “Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might [render inoperative] the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:14-15). In the imaginative framework of the New Testament, Satan, Sin, and Death are intertwined in purpose and effect. Where Scripture often speaks of Satan, Sin and Death discretely and with some distinction, at a

dead. The repetition of the designation “enemy” in vv. 25 and 26 suggests a parallelism in which καταργέω in this context must be roughly equivalent to what Paul means by the putting of enemies in subjection under Jesus’ feet. The unlikelihood of this language having an obliterative meaning is amplified by its repetition in verse 28 where Jesus is said to be subjected to God, who is the one who puts all things in subjection under Jesus in the first place. Certainly, Jesus being put in subjection to God does not mean Jesus being destroyed. So, why should enemies being put in subjection to Jesus mean their destruction? If this interpretation of καταργέω holds, then one will have to reckon with inevitable tensions that will arise with its application to Hebrews 2:14, where it is written that “through death [Jesus] καταργήσῃ the one who holds the power of death, that is, the devil.” For instance, would this translation suggest redemptive possibilities even for Satan, who also is part of God’s good creation?

18 James 1:14-15 similarly personifies Sin and Death: “But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.” Perhaps most famously, Death is also personified in Revelation 6:8, which reads: “I looked and there was a pale green horse” Its rider’s name was Death…” (c.f. Revelation 20:13-14).

19 In the New Testament the terms “Satan” and “devil” are synonymous, as evidenced in the occurrence of both in Matthew 4:10-11. See Moses, 109.
significant level their operations and manifestations are so similar as to render these words, in many contexts, nearly synonymous.  

Conceptions of Sin: Theological

In *Dogmatics in Outline*, Karl Barth writes: “In the strict sense, there is no knowledge of sin except in the light of Christ’s cross.” The conviction expressed in this provocative Barthian dictum radically reframes the Christian understanding of Sin such that one can only rightly speak of Sin by first speaking of Jesus. Proclaiming the goodness of Jesus does not depend on knowing the badness of Sin. Rather the badness of Sin comes into sharper relief as one knows and experiences the goodness of Jesus. Jesus is the bar against which Sin is measured and accounted as Sin. So, while exegetical articulations of Sin are important, they can only come close to a serious reckoning with Sin when one proceeds in such work from the starting point of Jesus’ sinless life (Heb 4:15), his becoming Sin in our place (2 Cor 5:21), his suffering death to Sin on the cross (1 Pet 3:18, Rom 6:10), and his victory over Sin in the resurrection (Rom 8). Only in light of Jesus is the horror, destructiveness, and unfathomable depth of Sin grasped. Only in light of Jesus will be able to name, resist, and repent of the tri-partite sin of whiteness, racism, and race.

Beginning with Jesus, one can say that Sin is that which inflicts death upon all creation in measure to its insatiable appetite, and which is limitles in its desire for the

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\[\text{20 For example, in his commentary on Romans, N.T. Wright suggests that sin is “an indirect way of saying Satan.” N.T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), 530.}

devolution of the created realm; this is the story mythically depicted in Genesis 3-11,\textsuperscript{22} and horrifically played on repeat with endless iterations in the histories of ethnocentric and national conflicts throughout the world. Whiteness, racism, and race are one iteration of Sin’s insidious assault upon humanity and all of creation. Sin, therefore, is the proper name for the pattern of perversion that constitutes whiteness, racism, and race by refusing to accept the name of the LORD God, to be named by the LORD God, and to name others as the LORD God does.

In the incarnation of Jesus, it is revealed that in God’s being unconditionally for humanity God is also unremittingly against Sin. Therefore, God sent “his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh… to deal with sin [and] condemn sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). This is the significance of the dramatic declaration in John 1:14 that “the Word became flesh.” God did not merely become a man (\textit{anthropos}) or simply take on a body (\textit{soma}). God became flesh (\textit{sarx}). \textit{Sarx}, in the theological imagination of the New Testament writers, is commonly a name for that which is fallen and, emphatically unlike the Spirit, is susceptible to the temptation and deception of Sin (Jn 6:63, Rom 8:4-13, 1 Pet 2:11). Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, in the deepest way imaginable. The writer to the Hebrews declares, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”

\textsuperscript{22} Israel’s creation myth maps the ever-expanding trajectory and impact of Sin from simple disobedience in the Garden (3:1-6), to the brewing of interpersonal comparison and bitterness (4:3-7), the first act of violence with Cain’s murder of Able (4:8), the development of an ethic of unlimited retaliation expressed in Lamech’s declaration of vengeance (4:23-24), the ubiquity of evil in all the inclinations and thoughts of humanity (6:5) and subsequent corruption and violence of all the earth (6:11-12), and the presumption of all humanity to refuse the name of God, refuse being named by God, and refuse to name one another as God does (11:1-9, recall the exegetical argument about the Babel narrative in Chapter 4 of this project).
(Heb 4:15). Jesus “became sin” (2 Cor 5:21) for our sake, “becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3:13), all in order that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). The depth of God’s against-Sin-ness is determined by the measure of God’s for-us-ness. In Jesus’ willing assumption and suffering of all that kills, steals, and destroys humanity (Jn 10:10) and that holds all of creation in bondage (Rom 8:20-21), one sees the profundity of God’s love of humanity and of all creation. So it is that the Apostle Paul can be “convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

To understand the power and devastation of Sin requires speaking of Sin in light of Jesus. Only in so doing can the desperation of the human situation and the hopefulness of deliverance be recognized. Only in seeing Jesus empty himself of Divine prerogative and assume the role of servant who would be ignobly lynched on a Roman cross and subsequently exalted by the Father (Phil 2:5-11) is it possible to see the value of redemption and also the road to repentance. Jesus is the agent and the way of salvation. In God’s for-us-ness, Jesus saves us for the sake of intimate communion with the Triune God and for Kingdom partnership in the ongoing work of making all things new. In Jesus’ salvation from Sin’s pattern of perversion he provides humanity the means to receive the name of the LORD God, be named by the LORD God, and come to name others as the LORD God does. Through Jesus’ salvation alone comes the hope to name and see the tri-partite sin of whiteness, racism, and race for what it is. Through Jesus alone comes the hope to resist and repent of human complicity in the perversion of the power of Ethnicity. Through Jesus alone comes the power to resist the demonic forces that employ
whiteness, racism, and race in the destruction of humanity. Only with God is such repentance possible. Only with God might those who are raced-as-white discover an honoring way to live in relationship with those raced-as-other-than-white. Only with God might the church come to bear faithful witness to the healing power of the gospel. Only with God. Thank God that in Jesus, God is with us.

**Antiracist Discipleship Practice #6: Repentance**

I believe that the Lord, in being determinedly for us, calls all people raced-as-white to repentance, not only of racism but also of whiteness itself. The New Testament word for repentance is *metanoia*, which literally means a change of mind. As employed by the Jewish writers of the New Testament, this word also carries the Hebrew connotation of the word *shuv*, which means to turn. So, to speak of repentance is to speak of learning of new way of thinking, of turning from a former way of speaking, seeing, and living in the world, and toward a new way informed by Jesus’ way of being in the world. And so the Apostle Paul writes: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds…” (Rom 12:2).

When presented with the call to repent of whiteness, one often observes or experiences an instinctive and rapid turn to defensiveness among people-raced-as-white, especially among those who are genuinely opposed to all forms of racial bigotry. Such defensiveness is a barrier to life-giving practices of repentance. Often, this defensiveness arises from narrow understandings of racism limited to willful acts of bigotry, and understandings of whiteness limited to skin tone. In such understandings the call to repent of whiteness can sound like a false accusation or like a call to repent of one’s very
identity. In either case, the call to repentance sounds like an attack against one’s personhood and so is vigorously rejected. However, the call to repentance of whiteness is actually a call toward true personhood as those bound up in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Repentance is a gift of God’s kindness (Rom 2:4).

Recall that whiteness, far from being defined by skin tone, is a particular, sinful perversion of God’s created and good power, Ethnicity. As Sin perverts Ethnicity, it produces a disordering of the world premised on the Babelian idolatry of “establishing a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4), rather than receiving our name from the LORD God. This perversion of Ethnicity then presumes to name all other peoples of the world in reference to whiteness rather than according to the LORD God “from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its [proper] name” (Eph 3:14). This disordering demands a hierarchical orientation of bodies along a fabricated aesthetic scale called race. Whiteness thus denies the integrity of all ethnic identities and produces oppressive structures and systems in the world that deform the relations between peoples, as well as between God and humanity. In the culture of the United States these structures and systems are ubiquitous, producing negative impacts on people of every racial designation. Because these structures and systems are designed to assert and perpetuate white supremacy and ascendency, all who are raced-as-white are complicit, to some degree, in the oppression that these structures and systems produce.

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23 This point reveals a fundamental limit and contradiction in contemporary nomenclature around racial identities: namely, the common term “people of color” is precisely a naming in reference to whiteness, and thus, in some measure recapitulates whiteness and racism. Where language will always hit limits, surely in resisting the deforming influence of whiteness, racism, and race in our world, one must press toward new language that does not undermine one’s best intentions. Thank you to Richard Hays for sharing this insight in a personal conversation.
Whiteness obscures the fact of our complicity by employing the mechanics of white normativity\(^\text{24}\) in order to remain largely invisible. When blinded by the invisibility of whiteness, people raced-as-white cannot see that, apart from conscious resistance, they are willfully but unwittingly participating in their own dehumanization, as complicity in oppression diminishes one’s own humanity.\(^\text{25}\) Therefore, the call of repentance is a call to resist the disordering of the world and to receive the gift of redeemed humanity in Jesus.

So what might repentance of whiteness entail? If repentance is about receiving our humanity and the truth of our identity from Jesus, and so the abundant life Jesus came to give (Jn 10:10), then repentance must mean taking up the way of life Jesus demonstrated. Philippians 2:5-11 records a hymnic expression of the early church’s understanding of this Jesus way:

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\text{Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—}
\text{even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus}
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\(^\text{24}\) White normativity describes a social/cultural arrangement in which ways of being and doing things in the world that are typically embodied by people who have been raced-as-white are presumed to simply be the way the things are or ought to be. Organizations, systems, and structures based on white normativity depend on the unquestioned assumptions of such norms. Edwards, 10-11.

every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Repentance of whiteness in the way of Jesus means eschewing all forms of self-assertion, as Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped or exploited. Jesus’ way is one of humble and trusting submission, of receiving rather than seeking to establish or assert his own name. In this light, Jesus is the antithesis of whiteness. Rather than asserting the privilege and supremacy rightfully due him, Jesus assumed his place among the oppressed of the world, being born into poverty, amid stigmatized circumstances, and among a colonized people. Rather than inhabiting a social location established and sustained by the oppression of others, Jesus “[took] the form of a slave,” in order to “let the oppressed go free” (Lk 4:18).

Because one can repent only of that which one can see and because one can see only that which one will say, repentance must begin with a determination to name whiteness. Insofar as whiteness is an asserted, grasped, and exploitative self-naming (and concomitant mis-naming of others) that presumes un-rightful privilege and supremacy, repentance must mean naming whiteness as fundamentally incompatible with and opposed to the way of Jesus. Repentance will thus entail letting go of “the politics of self-exoneration”26 and refusing to continue living uncritically within a system that calls some people white and imbues them with violently grasped privileges. To name whiteness and white racial identity as problematic is to repudiate the possibility of living as neutral

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26 Coates, 97.
white bodies. Theologian Karen Teel contends that “uncritical white bodies are seldom truly neutral, for our everyday acts constantly accrue the advantages of whiteness, like interest compounding in a forgotten bank account; we are no less beneficiaries for being oblivious.” The advantage accrued through being raced-as-white is inextricably bound up with the disadvantage historically and presently levied against all who are raced-as-other-than-white.


29 Sally Noland MacNichol, “We Make the Road by Walking: Reflections on the Legacy of White Antiracist Activism” in Harvey et al., Disrupting white Supremacy from Within (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 189.

30 Harvey in Yancy, 96.

31 Ibid.
Since one of the primary tactics of whiteness is to obscure itself in order to avoid detection and resistance, those of us who desire to receive our restored humanity through the gift of repentance must become practiced at making visible that which works invisibly to deform our humanity. Christians must name whiteness as a problem germane to discipleship, as it militates against Jesus’ commands for us to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. As theologian James Cone writes: “Love is a refusal to accept whiteness.”\textsuperscript{32} We must name whiteness in ways that make explicit its violence against all humanity. We must speak of whiteness in such a way, and with such frequency, as to render it odd and problematic rather than assumed and normative.

Although these chapters represent one form of naming whiteness, repentance must also include more mundane forms of naming. At CityWell we are committed to a regularity of such expressions. It is not uncommon during weekly testimonies to hear someone begin a statement with, “As a white person…” This simple preface does significant work, acknowledging the fact that people in our church family experience different social realities based on racial classification. These open floor times also often include confessions of complicity in the destructive work of whiteness, not only from congregants raced-as-white and but also those of color who have named the ways they have believed and perpetuated the lies of whiteness by internalizing and projecting the stigmas of racism upon themselves and people in their own communities.\textsuperscript{33} In addition,


\textsuperscript{33} Thank you to Sam Park, Cari Carson, and Granvel Johnson for your courage and vulnerability in these moments.
pastoral responses to racially charged current events regularly name whiteness as the root of racist violence.

Frequently the CityWell Leadership Team reckons explicitly with the ever-present power and gravity of whiteness to dominate the culture of the congregation. Most recently, the team addressed a troubling trend of increasing white homogeneity within our Wells, the small groups that meet in homes throughout the week. Pressing into questions of what might contribute to this trend, a Latina member of the team offered, “In my community we are in one another’s homes all the time; we just don’t do it like white people. We don’t schedule a once a week gathering with designated beginning and ending times. We just show up and end up spending the whole day or evening together. It’s organic.” The Black and Asian members of the team all nodded their agreement. Conversations like these strip whiteness of the power of normativity, of the assumption that the ways people-raced-as-white do things are better or normal or right. Conversations like these militate against any focus on misguided and damaging questions like: Why aren’t the people of color in CityWell as committed to community as white folks apparently are? Conversations like these help us to see that whiteness consists not in the particularities of white cultural preferences, which can be well and good, but in the hidden assumptions that white cultural preferences are universal or superior to other cultural norms. When not actively named and resisted, whiteness always self-asserts to undermine CityWell’s call to tear down dividing walls as a multiracial church family.

34 Thank you to Nini Jadue for this helpful insight.

35 An example of such resistance is the repeated request over the years for CityWell to offer a shorter early worship gathering for those who do not prefer the length of our typical two (plus) hour service. Tellingly, these requests have only come from people raced-as-white, and the fluidity and length of
The Philippian hymn declares that Jesus refused to assert privilege and supremacy by not grasping for his rightful equality with God, and also that he “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (2:7). Jesus demonstrated God’s solidarity with the oppressed of the world by entering the world as one who was oppressed. This profound gospel truth is why many theologians assert that Jesus is not white and would not be white. More specifically, as James Cone famously contends, “Jesus is black.” Cone’s argument is not for a literal racial designation of Jesus but for the explicit and emphatic continuity of the historical Jesus, who was counted among the oppressed, and the kerygmatic Christ. “Jesus is Black because Jesus was Jewish.” Apart from such explicit naming of the particularity of Jesus’ oppressed, Jewish flesh, Christian communities can and do interpret Jesus according to their communal contexts: “In US contexts, if Jesus’s race is not overtly re-envisioned, Jesus is white.” Such is evidenced by the ubiquitous portrayals of white Jesus in popular American religious art.

our time of worship is one of the most notable non-white expressions of our corporate life. As is true in this example, the resistance to submission to non-white cultural expressions I have encountered at CityWell has rarely been belligerent, and also rarely recognized as an assertion of white normativity.

Teel in Yancy, 26-28. Teel makes the insightful note that were Jesus to incarnate today, he would not assume the flesh of a US citizen at all, any more than he did as a Roman citizen. Teel in Yancy, 33, n.20. In all speculation about how Jesus might incarnate in any place or point of history, one must resist any tendency to de-particularize the actuality of Jesus’ once-for-all incarnation within the history of Israel, and so refuse to drive a wedge between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. Thank you to Richard Hays for sharing this significant caution in a personal conversation.


Harvey in Yancy, 90.


Harvey in Yancy, 89.

Explicitly naming Jesus as non-white, historically and analogically, is another way of resisting whiteness in common language and mundane settings. One can disrupt assumptions of whiteness merely by speaking of Jesus, whether in daily conversation or in formal preaching, as a poor, brown-skinned, middle-eastern, Jewish refugee who was incarcerated and lynched by a government whose justice system systematically terrorized and oppressed his people. Such naming is not only consistent with the biblical presentation of Jesus, and specifically the Philippian hymn, but is also essential if the Jesus we believe, follow, and proclaim is to lead us in repentance of the whiteness out of which we have blasphemously presumed to create him in our own image.

For Christians raced-as-white, repentance in the order of Jesus’ kenotic solidarity with the oppressed must lead us, too, into ever-increasing solidarity with people in marginalized communities around us. Like Moses, who refused to continue living in Pharaoh’s house, we who are raced-as-white must also learn what it means to choose “rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Heb 11:25). At CityWell, this means regularly calling the church family to participate in local activism such as the NAACP Moral Mondays movement that advocates for racial justice in voting rights, health care, and in education. CityWell congregants also frequently align with local community organizing efforts such as the FADE (Fostering Alternatives to Drug Enforcement) coalition in fighting for change in our criminal justice system or with Durham CAN (Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods) in seeking fair housing for low-income people in our city.

Perhaps most poignant in my own journey of repentance has been the ongoing process of learning to stand with, submit to, and advocate for Gloria, my Black partner in
ministry. This partnership in pastoral leadership has been a deep practice of kenotic renunciation of power, rights, and entitlement to which I, as the founding pastor of our church and as a man raced-as-white, am by default inclined to assume. My participation in this partnership is an imperfect practice of resistance and repentance through solidarity with an image-bearing, Spirit-filled, Black woman. She, in more ways than I will ever know, has experienced the onslaught of whiteness’ presumption to mis-name her, to diminish her, and to use her as a prop for its own perpetuation. Learning to stand in solidarity with Gloria in the midst of an ecclesial system that was constructed by and for men like me continues to be a means of transformation through which the Lord is leading me toward freedom through repentance and gratitude.

Repentance for those raced-as-white will not be an event but rather a lifestyle marked by resistance to the structures, logics, and machinations of whiteness in our personal lives, in our communities, and in our churches. Such repentance must be kenotic, as the way of Jesus is the way of self-emptying and relinquishing presumptions to power and position. This repentance must be cruciform, as we learn to die to the sin of whiteness, for which Jesus died. Only by repentance of this kind will we come to receive anew our restored humanity in Jesus, and so the possibility of deep racial healing in our churches. May it be.
CHAPTER 7

THE REDEMPTION OF WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY

The depth of God’s grace is revealed in Jesus, who binds us to himself and refuses to let humanity, even those of us raced-as-white, be defined by Sin. Though the way forward is far from simple, for people who believe that Jesus became Sin for them (2 Cor 5:21) and so became their redemption (1 Cor 1:30), there is confidence that God can take what was meant to do harm and use it for good (Gen 50:2, Rom 8:28). Through the love and determination of Jesus, even white racial identity can and will be redeemed.

Where Ethnicity is a gift of God that reveals God’s delight in beauty through diversity, as well as God’s intention for people to bear the divine image through communion with one another, ethnicities are fluid;¹ ethnicities come and go, shift, blend, and transform through time. Where this is a simple historical observation, it is also a profoundly hopeful one with respect to people raced-as-white, as it points toward the possibility that white racial identity could be redeemed as an ethnic identity.

Ironically, the story of people raced-as-black by those who would presume to be white in the US offers a picture of hope toward just such a transformation. When

¹ Secrest, 53.
Africans of countless ethnicities were kidnapped, enslaved, and brought to this land, whiteness attempted to obliterate the integrity, histories, traditions, rhythms, cultures, and religions of these many and varied peoples by violently imposing upon them a clumsy and presumably monolithic and inferior identity called black. However, 400 years later one can now speak of Black people in this country as having a distinctive and robust ethnic identity. Out of the rubble of many flattened ethnicities emerged a new ethnicity, as God brings life from the dust and beauty from ashes (Gen 2:7, Is 61:3). To this point, Jennifer Harvey avers: “One might usefully say that the “blackness” that white supremacy constructed, disparaged, and subjugated has been repeatedly transformed, re-created, embraced, and celebrated as “Blackness” over the course of US history.”

Harvey narrates the transformation of black to Black powerfully:

People of African descent always rejected both the legal status white supremacy ascribed to “blackness” and the ideological claims that to be “black” meant one was legitimately destined for servitude. People of African descent reinterpreted Christian Scriptures, risked life and limb by running North, came back again for family members, revolted, petitioned the US government to recognize their rights, and on and on. People of African descent created spirituals, the blues, literary canons, religious traditions that critiqued, refused, defied, and completely repudiated in creative and poignant ways the ideologies of white supremacy that attempted to constrain and defined them.

Ta-Nehisi Coates captures this transformation succinctly: “We have taken the one-drop rules of the Dreamers and flipped them. They made us into a race. We made ourselves into a people.”

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2 Harvey, Dear White Christians, 54.
3 Ibid.
4 Coates, 149. In Coates’ work, Dreamers is what he calls people who believe themselves to be white.
Black people is, indeed, a powerful and hopeful story that begs the question: If black could become Black in this nation, can white become White?

People-raced-as-black did not become Black people by some momentary happening. Rather the miracle of this transformation occurred, and continues to occur, through a long history of people engaging in a sustained, communal struggle against the forces of whiteness that would destroy them. It is “the agency-filled resistance that communities of African descent have always lived out… that transforms ‘black’ to ‘Black.’” It is a common history of shared suffering, shared struggle toward a shared goal, and shared resistance against a shared enemy through which the miracle of ethnic emergence has and is occurring. This project proposes that it cannot be otherwise for those who are raced-as-white.

People called “white,” who accrued and accrue the material, social, and political benefits of that designation are, like people who were called “black,” moral agents, i.e., human beings created in the image of God, beckoned by God to live into the identity given to us in Jesus, and gifted by God’s Spirit with power to do so. As moral agents, they can choose either to acquiescence to whiteness (knowingly or not), or to resist it, refuse it, and subvert it by a myriad of mundane and spectacular means. The sum of such agency-filled choices is the kind of life that can only come through death. As Jesus said, “Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:25). If one is to live as Christ, one must die to whiteness.

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5 Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 161.
Writing broadly about death to the powers, Walter Wink names the kinds of death inherent in whiteness and necessary to any possible redemption of white racial identity:

We are dead in so far as we have been socialized into patterns of injustice. We died, bit by bit, as expectations foreign to our essence were forced upon us. We died as we began to become complicit in our own alienation and that of others. We died as we grew to love our bondage, to rationalize, justify, and even champion it. We died as we set ourselves in the place of God and tried to control our own lives. And by a kind of heavenly homeopathy, we must swallow what killed us in order to come to life.⁶

Wink goes on to say: “…at some point we must begin to become ourselves. And to do that, we who are dead must die to our learned preferences for domination.”⁷ Could those who are raced-as-white, through God-given and Spirit-inspired agency, join in a sustained and collective resistance to the ways whiteness conscripts people in its own agendas of domination? Harvey argues compellingly that “only through active work, sustained over a long period of time…” – recall the centuries of Black resistance to whiteness – “and pursued not just individually but also collectively, might we have any hope for disrupting and transforming the meaning of “white” as a racial category.”⁸

With Harvey, I agree that any such transformation will come through sustained, collective, and strategic disruptions of “the very social processes and systems that produce our “white” identities.”⁹ Though certainly modest and imperfect in form and impact, CityWell’s practices of confession, contextualization, active memory, naming-submission, remembering our baptism, and repentance through naming and resisting

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⁶ Wink, 93-94.
⁷ Ibid. 94.
⁸ Harvey, Dear White Christians, 162.
⁹ Harvey in Yancy, 98.
whiteness are all ways that we seek to respond to God’s call to become a people whose identity is bound to a crucified and risen Lord; our identities are not bound to racial categories that, along with all expressions of Sin, have ultimately been left in an empty tomb. Therefore, going beyond Harvey, this project would suggest that redemption in fullness will mean the eventual undoing of racial categories all together, as all eschatological identities will be determined in relationship to Jesus and, through him, to Ethnicity, which will be redeemed as part of his good creation. Whatever the road forward may be, the degree to which the people of God can begin to experience redemption from whiteness, racism, and race will be inextricably bound to the degree to which they actively engage practices of discipleship that inform an antiracist way of life.

May it be that all who have inherited and inhabited white identities constructed through the systematic oppression of others might become those who resist and repent of these pseudo-identities – by ceasing to grasp for the God-likeness attempted in the racial naming of ourselves and all others, by emptying ourselves of unrighteous privilege, by standing in solidarity with all who are oppressed on account of whiteness, and by submitting to death, even death to whiteness itself. May CityWell be a site of Jesus’ bringing at least some modicum of healing to the deep wounds that whiteness, racism, and race have inflicted. May it be that this congregation bears faithful witness to the power of the gospel to tear down the dividing walls of racial hostility that continue to fracture our churches and war against the truth that Jesus has bound us together as one new humanity. May it be that we so become a people who receive the ways of Jesus as our way of life, for the sake of his glory and for the sake of the world. Amen.
PART THREE

MINISTRY STRATEGY
CHAPTER 8
A LITURGY FOR ANTIRACIST DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING

The following outline marks the contours and content of a two-day training designed as a liturgy of worship, in which participants will come to better name, see, and resist the deforming forces of whiteness, racism, and race by engaging in the antiracist discipleship practices identified in this project. The training is divided into eight sessions, each designed to impart information, invite personal application, and to frame our common life as a practice-formed witness to the power of Jesus over every demonic force that would pervert the world and the Church. Throughout the training, participants will engage with biblical and theological reflections, as we grapple with the ways whiteness, racism, and race operate around, upon, in, and through all people in the United States.

Day 1

8:30-9:00, Opening Eucharist
- Narrate Eucharist, through the invitation to the Table and the Great Thanksgiving, as fuel for contending with forces of darkness
  - What the evil one intends for death, Jesus uses for life, for family, for covenant.
  - Our coming to the Table is an embodied proclamation of unity.
  - This is an eschatological meal that allows us to freely name the ‘not yet’ in light of the ‘already’ of Jesus’ finished work.

Beginning with Eucharist sets the tone for the entire training. In reckoning
with the immense darkness of whiteness, racism, and race, God’s people of hope are
called to Jesus’ Table – free to confess, to declare forgiveness, to share Christ’s peace,
and to share in the body and blood of Christ by which the Holy Spirit makes us one with
Jesus, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world. All that follows in this
training presupposes the proclamation of the Table, namely reconciliation to God and to
one another.

9:00-10:30, Session 1: Introductions & The CityWell Story (content from Chapters 1 & 2)

• Introductions: Who are you and why are you here? – 9:00-9:30
  o 3 minutes to respond with two sentences written on a notecard
  o Each participant shares what is written on their notecard

• What story are you entering here? Outline of the CityWell story – 9:30-10:00
  o The call
  o The Big Scary Dream
  o The Intentional Miracle (prayer for provision: people, building, finances)
  o Stumbling
  o The Easter Awakening (complexity, fragility, and a new imperative)
  o The Commitment to Antiracist discipleship
  o Sharing Power (Gloria)
  o The Vision (many congregations and NCCU campus ministry)

• Question & Response Time – 10:00-10:30

  Session 1 is designed to help participants begin to see that each person brings a
particular story into the space and that CityWell has a particular story that each one needs
to know. CityWell’s story both grows out of and has significantly transformed our
communal sense of calling. Since CityWell’s vision for antiracist discipleship is so
rigorous and so uncommon among US churches, every congregant needs to embrace this
calling for the sake of the congregation’s health.

10:30-10:45, Break

1 NCCU is North Carolina Central University, where Gloria started a CityWell campus ministry in 2014.
10:45-12:30, Session #2: The WHY: Biblical & Theological Vision for the Multiracial Church (content from Ch. 1 & 2)

- Setting up the WHY 2 min
- Biblical Foundations (6 small groups of 8 people meditating on Scripture passages and reporting back) 45 min
  - 20 minute work time
    - 3 minutes to respond on notecards
    - 10 minutes to share notecards with group
    - 7 minutes to collaborate on report-out
  - 4-minute report outs 25 min
- Passages (one per group):
  - Matthew 28:18-20 – Go unto all the nations, making disciples…
    - Discipleship is our one job.
    - Disciples do what the Master does… tearing down dividing walls.
  - Revelation 7:9-10 (Heaven’s multiethnic church)
    - Particularity maintained before the throne
    - Connect this vision to the Lord’s Prayer… on earth as in heaven.
    - “Heaven is not segregated. Why on earth is the church?” – Mark DeYmaz
  - Revelation 21:24-26 (The Glory of the Nations)
    - God desires the glories of the nations to remain integral to the kingdom forever.
    - Do our churches delight in the glories of the nations like God does?
  - Acts 11:19-26 – (Antioch, the place of the Christians)
    - Exhort to steadfast devotion. Why?
    - Why is it here that folks are first called Christians?
    - When dividing walls are torn down people see little Christs.
  - Acts 13:1-3 – (Antioch the missional church)
    - Multiethnic Leadership: 5 leaders of four cultures and 3 continents
    - The church of the world becomes the church for the world.
  - Ephesians 2:13-19 – (Gentiles & Jews… One New Humanity, One New Family)
    - Note the done-ness of this claim.
    - One new humanity, one new family
    - Living into the reality of our identity
  - Is This Just a New Testament Vision?
    - Genesis 12:1-4 – through you all the families of the earth...
    - Isaiah 2:2 – the nations streaming to the mountain of God
    - Isaiah 56:7 - house of prayer for all people
    - Jeremiah 29:4-7 – your shalom wrapped up in their shalom
    - Jonah – even Nineveh
• Theological Lenses (whole group discussion) 45 min
  o God’s Trinitarian Image – How does Trinity inform our vision for the multiethnic church? 10 min
    ▪ Unified & Equitable Diversity
    ▪ Holy submission
    ▪ Reciprocal glory: delighting in the other
    ▪ Non-assimilated unity
    ▪ Think back to Revelation 7 & 21
  o Incarnational inclusion – How does incarnation inform our vision for the multiethnic church? 10 min
    ▪ Embrace that refuses distance
    ▪ Unity with the other changes God forever – the word became flesh
    ▪ Incarnation is the tearing down of the ultimate dividing wall.
    ▪ What are other ways Jesus tears down dividing walls?
  o Eucharist – How does Eucharist inform our vision for the multiethnic church? 10 min
    ▪ Confession
    ▪ Forgiveness
    ▪ Peace
    ▪ Memory
    ▪ Nourishment
    ▪ The re-membering of Jesus’ dismembered body
  o Kingdom of Justice and Shalom – How do the biblical images of Kingdom, justice and shalom inform our vision for the MEC? 10 min
    ▪ What does God’s justice look like?
      o i.e. Isaiah 58:6-12
        ▪ honest confession of exploitation and oppression
        ▪ active undoing of exploitation and oppression
    ▪ What does God’s shalom look like?
      o i.e. Isaiah 65:17-25
        ▪ all have enough
        ▪ equity in housing, in health, in good work
        ▪ all things flourish together
• Why might biblical and theological vision, while imperative, not be enough? 10 min

Session 2 is designed to help participants understand a biblical and theological foundation for multiethnic churches. Where such a foundation is essential for the flourishing of churches like CityWell, the session ends with a provocative question as to why biblical and theological vision might not be enough for a church like CityWell to
live faithfully into its calling. The tension intended with that question sets up the following session, where contextualization is put forward as an essential antiracist discipleship practice for rightly understanding and so rightly bearing witness to the gospel in our particular place, in this particular moment of history.

12:30-1:30, Lunch

1:30-3:00, Session #3: Contextualization: Where are we? (content from Ch. 3 & 4)

- All discipleship must be contextualized and our context is racialized, so our discipleship must reckon directly with whiteness, racism, and race.
- Cross the line exercise: Common Humanity
  - Demonstrate human commonalities and shared hopes, hurts, and experiences
- Cross the line exercise: Racialized people
  - Demonstrate stark differences in lived experience because of racial designations
- Discussion Question (brief): Why, given our common humanity, do we have such different experiences of life along lines of race?
- What is the origin of race?
  - Does race arise from the heart & mind of God? (discuss)
  - Is race a biblical category? (discuss)
  - How does the Bible differentiate between people groups? (discuss)
  - Ethnicity
    - A definition: a people grouping based upon common and distinctive culture, religion, language, ancestry or land.
    - Revelation 7:9, 21:24, 26 (ethnos)
    - Does ethnicity arise from the heart & mind of God? (discuss)
  - The role of ethnicity in God’s Story (teach)
    - Creation narrative (Genesis 1 & 2)
    - The blessing of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)
    - Abram for the world (Genesis 12:1-3)
    - Prophetic imaging of the nations gathered (I.e. Isaiah 2:2, 25:6-8, Jeremiah 3:17, Micah 4:2)
    - Pentecost and the consummation of Babel (Acts 2:1-12)
    - Gentile Inclusion (Acts 10 & 15)
    - God’s intention w/ Ethnicity (Acts 17:26-28)
    - One new humanity (Ephesians 2:11-22)
    - Gathered before the throne (Revelation 7:9ff)
    - The glory of the nations (Revelation 21:24)
- So what is race? (teach)
  - One (unfortunately common) definition: a category of humankind that
shares certain distinctive physical traits
  o A more honest definition: “A specious classification of human beings created by Europeans during a period of world-wide colonial expansion, using themselves as the model for humanity, for the purpose of assigning and maintaining white skin access to power and privilege.” (from Dr. Maulana Karenga)
  o Definition from CityWell Pastors Position on Race and Racism

• What impact does the creation of race have upon ethnicity? (discuss)
  o Race is a clumsy and violent category that erases ethnicity and therefore opposes God’s design and purpose.
  o Race squeezes people of many beautiful ethnicities into one clumsy category that obliterates particularity.
    ▪ Think about Romans 12:1-2. If presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice looks like the peoples bringing the glories of the nations into the new Jerusalem, what might that mean for us?

• Discussion question: How have you experienced loss inside American racial categories?
• Discussion question: If race is not real, and opposes God’s celebration of ethnicity, why should Christians pay any attention to race? Why not just talk about “the human race?”
  o Race may be a lie, but it is a very well organized and executed lie that has very real social, political, economic and psychological consequences.
  o Race is a scheme of the devil that Christians must oppose, but we cannot oppose it without reckoning with it and its impact in our lives personally and collectively.
  o Resisting race as an ultimate identity marker – note the language, “raced-as-x”

• What is racism?
  o Definition from CityWell Pastors Position on Race & Racism
  o Racism Beyond Bigotry: Learning to See the Chameleon Sin
    ▪ Think powers before people
    ▪ Think institutions before individuals
    ▪ Think systems before symptoms
  o If we are trained to see racism beyond bigotry, we can begin to name its work in the disparities that surround us in every institution and quality of life outcome in this country.

• Punchline: in one way or another, all of us are subject to the forces of race and racism in this nation and have felt their impact.

Session 3 introduces the imperative distinction between ethnicity and race, naming the former as arising from the heart of God and essential to God’s intention for the world. Participants will then reckon with race as a social construct, a human invention.
rooted in Sin. Discussion questions will lead participants to see that race is actually the enemy of ethnicity and that racism operates most perniciously at the level of institutions, systems, and power. This serves to frame the context in which we live and into which we are called to offer gospel witness.

3:00-3:10, Break

3:10-4:30, Session 4: Active Memory: How did we get here? (content from Ch. 3)

- Posing of the question of affirmative action
- History of Racism in the US
  - The Evolution of Racism
    - Chattel slavery
    - Black Codes, convict leasing, Slavery by Another Name
    - Jim Crow & Lynching Terrorism (over 4,000 people)
    - Economic Terrorism
      - Social Security
      - GI Bill
      - FHA
      - Redlining
      - Ghetto development & deindustrialization
      - White flight
      - Gentrification
  - The War on Drugs & mass incarceration
  - The whitening of racial others (Irish, Italians, Jews, etc)
    - The continual morphology of racism requires that we be students of this thing. We have to continually learn how to see this chameleon sin.
    - Revisit CityWell pastors’ definition of racism
- Answering the question of affirmative action
- Collective identity, collective guilt, collective repentance: A Sermon on Acts 2
- Internalized inferiority and superiority
- A beginning of confession
  - Using notecards: How have you benefited from our racist history? Even if harmed by this history, how are you complicit in the perpetuation of racism? Invite responses.

Session 4 invites participants into the antiracist discipleship practice of active memory, naming how our context became what it is and how we have become who we are as racialized peoples. This session presents a history of racism’s operations in the United States, focusing primarily on its institutional and systemic expressions. The
session then moves to make the case that each participant (especially people raced-as-white) must understand the reality of our collective identities, in order that we might begin to imagine the collective repentance needed for racial healing in our churches and in our nation. The session ends with a beginning to the antiracist discipleship practice of confession.

**Day 2**

**8:30-9:00, Eucharist**

Again, the day begins with Eucharist, the embodied declaration that with Jesus there is no condemnation, and that all of us find our true identity in the bounty of God’s grace. The focus in the invitation and Great Thanksgiving will be on the walls of division between God and humanity and amid human communities that are torn down in Jesus’ cross and resurrection. The Table will be narrated as the nourishment of hope, strength, and freedom for resisting the destructive forces of whiteness, racism and race.

**9:00-11:00, Session #5: Powers and Perversion (content from Chapter 4)**

- **Teaching on the Powers**
  - Discussion Question: What comes to mind when you hear the expression, “powers and principalities?”
  - Colossians 1:16-17 & 2:15 – the Good gift of the Powers
  - Powers are: 1) good gifts of God’s creation, 2) fallen, & 3) to be redeemed
- **Recall teaching on God’s gift of Ethnicity**
  - Ethnicity as a good power for the ordering of the world to God’s glory
- **How powers and people become perverted: naming-refusal**
  - Naming-refusal in Genesis 3
  - Naming-refusal in Genesis 11
  - Discussion Questions:
    - What consequences can you imagine in refusing the given name of God? In refusing to be named by God? In refusing to name others as God does?
- **Perversions of Ethnicity**
  - Ethnocentrisms of all stripes
  - Supercessionism: A uniquely destructive perversion
Discussion Question: How do you see the threefold naming-refusal expressed in supercessionism?
  o Supercessionism and the birth of whiteness
  ▪ Incorporate the argument from Chapter 4

- Continuing confession (using notecards): Specifically, with regard to race and racism, how have you, whether knowingly or not, refused the name of God, God’s naming of you, and God’s naming of others? Invite shared responses.
- Naming-Submission exercise – Who is God? Who are you? Who is the other? How might naming-Submission transform our sense of God, self and others with regard to race?
- Romans 12
  o Impact of naming submission on internalized inferiority
  o Impact of naming-submission on internalized superiority
  o Impact of naming-submission on our sense of mission in the world

Session 5 introduces the language of the powers and reframes the biblical images of Ethnicity in this light. Drawing on the content of Chapter 4, participants will be invited to grapple with the pattern of perversion by which Ethnicity becomes whiteness, and by which we all are complicit in the workings of whiteness through our own refusal of God’s given name, of the name God gives us, and of the ways God names all others. The session closes with a call into the antiracist discipleship practice of naming-submission.

11:00-11:15, Break

11:15-12:30, Session #6: Whiteness, the root of racism and race (content from Ch. 5)
- What is whiteness?
  o A perversion of Ethnicity, and so a force of darkness against which we are called to contend
    ▪ Reflection on Ephesians 6:10-13
  o A theological imaginary (a distorted lens that colors how we see everything)
    ▪ Presumed reference point of human identities
  o A power arrangement (not first a description of pigment or even culture)
- The blinding invisibility of whiteness:
  o Language disguises, historical and present
  o White hegemony
  o White structural advantage
  o White normativity
  o White supremacy
- Relationship between whiteness, white racial identity, and white culture
The imposition of white racial identity
- The moral dilemma of white racial identity
- The distinction between whiteness and white racial identity
- The distinction between whiteness and white culture

- The universal grip of whiteness (not just a problem for people raced-as-white)
- Whiteness as an anti-creation story
- Remembering our Baptisms (overcoming false stories with the true story)
  - Baptismal declarations of identity
  - The call of baptismal identity: baptismal vows
  - Invitation to the waters: remember your baptism and give thanks

Session 6 calls participants to recognize whiteness as a particular perversion of Ethnicity. Whiteness will be narrated as something other than and beyond skin color or culture, something operating upon all peoples and that underlying all racial identities. Participants will be asked to reckon with the possibility that white racial identity, where an imposition like all other racial identities, is particularly problematic and morally compromised. Whiteness will be named as a false story, an anti-creation story. Participants will be invited into a liturgy of remembering our baptisms as a way of overcoming the false story of whiteness with the true story of the gospel.

12:30-1:30, Lunch

1:30-3:00, Session #7: Repentance & Resistance (content from Chapter 6)
- Understanding Sin, Satan and Death
  - Sin: a force of darkness and a chosen participation
  - Satan and the Serpent: deception and opposition to God and God’s creation
  - Death: the destruction of all God intends for creation
- Revisiting whiteness, racism, and race in light of Sin, Satan and Death
  - Table Discussion Question: How do you see whiteness, racism, and race as expressions of Sin, Satan and Death?
- Repenting of whiteness: a call to true personhood
  - Review: whiteness as a perverted power, not a personal identity
  - Repentance as a refusal of all that militates against our true identity in Jesus, our true humanity
  - Rendering whiteness visible: saying, seeing, and resisting
    - Naming the incompatibility of whiteness and Jesus
    - Naming the operations of whiteness around and in us
Permanent rebellion, not simplistic rejection: acknowledging and resisting whiteness around and in us
- Repenting of whiteness: the liberating call to everyone who lives in a racialized world (not just people raced-as-white)
- Repenting in the way of Jesus: Kenotic Power
  - Reflection upon Philippians 2:5-11
  - Repenting of self-assertion: What forms does this take in your life?
  - Choosing identification with the oppressed rather than the comforts of the oppressor – Hebrews 11:25
- Reimagining repentance: naming ways of resisting whiteness
  - Naming Jesus: God’s solidarity with all whom whiteness seeks to diminish
    - Poor, brown-skinned, middle-eastern, Jewish refugee, who suffers under an unjust criminal justice system that incarcerates and lyncheshim
- Table Discussion Questions:
  - How might CityWell’s Covenant Practices serve as forms of resisting whiteness, and therefore as acts of repentance?
  - What are other specific ways we can resist whiteness and so repent? In our personal lives? As a church family?

Session 7 begins with an analogy between the biblical images of Satan, Sin and Death, and the already-explored categories of whiteness, racism, and race. Participants are then called into a process of imagining what repentance of whiteness might entail as a necessary discipleship practice for all US Christians and not just those raced as white. This session frames repentance in light of the Christ hymn of Philippians 2 and calls participants to appropriate the postures of Jesus elucidated in the hymn in personal and communal ways.

3:00-3:10, Break

3:10-4:30, Session #8: Envisioning a Hopeful Future (content from Chapter 7)
- The becoming of Jesus
  - Becoming sinful flesh (sарх) – John 1:14
  - Becoming Sin – 2 Corinthians 5:21
  - Becoming a curse – Galatians 3:13
  - Becoming our redemption: 1 Corinthians 1:30
- Dying with Christ, dying to Sin
  - Romans 6:11
  - 2 Corinthians 5:14
The becoming of ethnicity
- The redemptive journey from black to Black
- Becoming through shared resistance to deforming force of whiteness

Eschatological hope: living honestly and hopefully between the already and the not yet
- Refusing to deny race, refusing to embrace race
- Intended for harm, used for good
  - Romans 8:28
  - Genesis 50:2

Table prayer: The Lingering Lord’s Prayer
- Our father
- On earth as in heaven
- Trusting God’s faithful provision: releasing the false need to establish ourselves
- Forgive us and help us to forgive
- Lead us and deliver us from evil
- Declaration of trust and assurance: yours is the Kingdom, power, and glory

Session 8 calls participants to live into the gospel truths that Jesus became flesh, became Sin, and became a curse for us in order that we might be free of these things. Biblical reflections will invite participants to understand that the human story is fundamentally wrapped up in Jesus’ story and therefore that in Christ each person has died to sin and so to whiteness, racism, and race. The session then explores the fluidity of ethnicity and the particular case of people raced-as-black in the United States becoming Black people, a people bearing the integrity of a shared ethnicity forged through common resistance to the deforming force of whiteness. Participants will be invited to imagine a journey of resistance toward a redeemed White ethnic identity. The training will close with a lingering immersion in the Lord’s prayer, in which each phrase will be a beckoning to pray toward the healing of our racialized realities.
APPENDIX A
CITYWELL DEMOGRAPHICS

Sociologists of religion commonly define multiracial congregations as those in which “no one racial group accounts for 80 percent or more of the membership.”¹ Research on race relations in many contexts suggests that when minority groups within an organization reach 20 percent of the total population, a critical mass is achieved that inevitably impacts the culture and structure of the organization.² Today, six years into the CityWell adventure, our church family demographics far surpass that benchmark but still do not adequately reflect the diversity of our city. Where the numbers vary slightly from source to source, the city of Durham’s racial demographics are approximately: 40 percent Black, 38 percent white, 14 percent Latino, 5 percent Asian, and 3 percent more than one race.³ As of March 2017, CityWell’s racial demographics for Sunday gatherings are approximately: 59 percent white, 21 percent Black, 10 percent Latino, and 8 percent Asian and 3 percent biracial.⁴ However, when including regular participants in CityWell’s campus ministry at North Carolina Central University (most of whom do not attend worship on Sundays), CityWell’s demographics shift to approximately: 48 percent white, 33 percent Black, 8 percent Latino, and 6 percent Asian and 2 percent biracial.⁵ Within this racial makeup, the congregation represents no fewer than 12 nations.

Where the NCCU campus ministry is an integral and vital element of CityWell, it remains necessary to view the church’s racial demographics through the two lenses offered above, as participation in campus ministry activities is largely racially

¹ DeYoung et al., United by Faith, 2-3.
² Emerson, People of the Dream, 35.
⁴ These numbers include approximately 180 people who regularly attend Sunday worship gatherings.
⁵ These numbers include 60 regular campus ministry participants with the 180 Sunday worship attendees.
homogenous. Therefore, only reporting the second demographic estimates (including NCCU students) falsely portrays the degree to which CityWell is a racially integrated congregation. The campus initiative at NCCU began 30 months ago. In the last twelve months, integration of NCCU students into CityWell’s corporate worship life has increased significantly. The congregation hopes and is working to see that trend continue.

Where CityWell’s racial diversity is impressive relative to the vast majority of congregations in the United States,\(^6\) demographic shifts within the congregation over the last few years have revealed just how fragile this diversity is. For instance, when one Black family left the church in December of 2014, our Black demographic dropped 3 percent. The smaller the minority groups within CityWell, the more tenuous their representation. So, the Asians constituency at CityWell is the most fragile, at 8 percent. That percentage will drop significantly with the loss of a single family. This fragility of minority representation is particularly striking in light of the opposite reality among our white demographic, which has increased 8 percent over the last twelve months. There can only be so many years of that inverse dynamic before CityWell no longer embodies a credible witness to the unity and diversity of the Kingdom coming. Along with apparent trends of whitening within the congregation, CityWell experiences a high degree of transience among worshipers that also threatens the stability of our demographic diversity. Located in a university town, CityWell draws many from student populations. The faces of our congregation change dramatically from year to year, as students matriculate to and away from Durham. In addition, having many Duke Divinity School students call CityWell home contributes to the fragility of our demographic diversity because most of them are beholden to serve in field education placements that draw them away from CityWell for significant seasons. This diversity fragility is evidence of Emerson and Smith’s contention that heterogeneous congregations are inherently unstable.\(^7\)

\(^{6}\) Duke’s 2012 National Congregations Study indicates that less than 13 percent of American religious congregations are multiracial, with Protestant churches being the overall least heterogeneous.

\(^{7}\) Emerson & Smith, 147.
With regard to socio-economic status, CityWell’s diversity is similarly impressive and unstable. Of 180 regular attenders, 8\(^8\) 37 (or 21 percent) come from low-income households, 93 (or 53 percent) come from middle-income households, 8 (or < 5 percent) come from upper income households, and 38 (or 22 percent) are students who are temporarily low-income. Over CityWell’s six years the number of middle-income attenders has increased significantly, indicating an increasing fragility to our economic diversity as a congregation. In addition, there is a strong correlation in CityWell between lower-incomes and lower attendance consistency. Where a variety of factors likely contribute to this correlation, the impact is that on any given Sunday our economic diversity is less than the numbers above indicate.

\(^8\) These numbers were current as of March 7, 2017.

\(^9\) The US Department of Education defines a low-income individual as “an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount.” Based upon figures from the Pew Research Center, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/09/the-american-middle-class-is-losing-ground/st_2015-12-09_middle-class-02/
Communal Prayer of Lament and Confession

Lord Jesus – our lynched savior – hear our cry. We are your people and we need you. We cry out to you because you are our shepherd – the faithful one who has always led us, protected us, provided for us and corrected us when needed. We cry out to you from the depths of a great darkness because you, O Lord, are light.

**Restore us to yourself and to your ways, O God. Let your face shine that we may be saved.**

O God of justice – may a noose remind us that we are an unjust nation built upon the murders, suffering, exploitation, dehumanization and exclusion of so many of your children. May a noose remind us that still in our country, the color of one’s skin impacts life outcomes in almost every way imaginable.

**Restore us to yourself and to your ways, O God. Let your face shine that we may be saved.**

O Father of light – we are a nation dwelling in darkness and we cannot see. Too many of us are blind to our history and blind to the ongoing ways in which racism runs unrestrained in our systems and institutions, enslaving all of us in shackles of fear, anger, and mistrust. We cannot see or will not see the way racism continues to rob all of us of the dignity of being made in your image. We cannot see or will not see; and it is easier not to see. But you, O God of light, are the one who brings sight to the blind. May your grace transform a noose into a lens through which we can truthfully see.

**Restore us to yourself and to your ways, O God. Let your face shine that we may be saved.**

O Spirit of Truth – we are a people so capable to self-deception. We are prone to allow the bigotry of a few to deceive us into thinking “we” are not “them.” May a noose at Duke remind us that even the most “enlightened” spaces of our country and of our own hearts are always concealing deep sin. O Spirit of truth – convict us of our sin that we may be free of the lies we love and think we need.

**Restore us to yourself and to your ways, O God. Let your face shine that we may be saved.**

O God of Creation, Father of Nations, All in All – We have failed to live into the identity you have given us in Jesus, who tore down the dividing walls of hostility, reconciled us to you, and brought us together through his blood as one new humanity – as your family. We lament the sin that separates us from one another and destroys our communities. We
lament the sins of fear and hate we hold toward one another. We lament the sin of willful amnesia by which we ignore our history. We lament the sin of self-deception by which we believe our history is not alive today. O God of creation, Father of Nations, All in All – forgive us and free us to see that we all belong to you, that we are one people.

**Restore us to yourself and to your ways, O God. Let your face shine that we may be saved.**

O Jesus, our lynched savior – like so many black men, women and children in our country, you were falsely accused, denied fair trial, tortured as less than human, and hung on a tree to satisfy a bloodthirsty mob and to terrorize an oppressed people. May the cruel sign of the noose this week be for us the sign of your cross, that we may know your solidarity with all who are oppressed, threatened, denied justice, or humiliated. Lead us all in repentance for the nooses on our campuses, in our systems and in our hearts.

**Restore us to yourself and to your ways, O God. Let your face shine that we may be saved.**

O Jesus, who weeps, heals and makes all things new – rend the heavens and come down! May your tears silence our debates and lead us to weep with you in the face of all this hurt. You are our only hope. Transform us by the power of your Spirit; lead us by the light of your word; cleanse us by the gift of your blood. We are lost without you. Come, Lord Jesus. Come!

**Amen.**
A quick survey of church leaders’ commentary on race reveals the breadth of competing definitions that lead to stalemate in attempts to reckon with race and racism in the church. Multiracial church leader, David Anderson, writes of race in terms of human variety and beauty within God’s creation.\(^1\) John Piper, one of evangelicalism’s most influential teacher/preachers, presents a more nuanced and ambivalent understanding of race, calling it “a fuzzy and minimally helpful term that has often been hijacked by ideology for racist purposes.”\(^2\) Piper goes on to note the ambiguity of biological distinctions between races,\(^3\) as well as the ideological employment of science in origins of the anthropology of races,\(^4\) but he stops short of a dismissal of the scientific categorization of humans by race. Efrem Smith, a multiracial church and denominational leader within the Evangelical Covenant Church, offers a far more direct description of race, calling it “an artificial social structure,” intended to enforce a hierarchy of people groups.\(^5\) Lutheran pastor and antiracism trainer, Joseph Barndt, defines race even more precisely as “a social/political construct with no basis in reality and without scientific validity,”\(^6\) the primary purpose of which was “to establish the superiority of the Caucasoid (European/white) race and to justify European dominance over all other races, as well as the taking of their land resources.”\(^7\)

\(^{1}\) Anderson, 33-34, 37, 65, 139, 146.


\(^{3}\) Ibid., 236.

\(^{4}\) Ibid., 237.

\(^{5}\) Smith, 77-78.

\(^{6}\) Barndt, 25.

\(^{7}\) Ibid., 26.
Definitions of racism are equally varied to those of race. Anderson understands racism almost exclusively as a matter of personal sin, of acts of overt bigotry, and of an individual’s rejection of God’s delight in and desire for people of all races. Piper employs the 2004 Presbyterian Church of America’s definition of racism as, “an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races.” As with Anderson, in Piper’s analysis, racism is an equal opportunity sin, readily available to anyone regardless of race.

Explicitly leaning on Barndt’s definition, Smith defines racism as “prejudice plus power used to discriminate or oppress a group of people solely because of their race.” The introduction of power as a qualifier distinguishes race prejudice from racism, and changes the definition of the latter such that it can only be attributed to the dominant race in a society. Barndt’s definition specifies power as being “the power of systems and institutions,” the institutionalization of racism occurring in the shaping of an institution “in a way that effectively serves and is accountable to only one racial group, while at the same time, it does not effectively serve nor is accountable to other racial groups.” Barndt argues compellingly that all of the systems and institutions in the US “were created originally and structured legally and intentionally to serve white people exclusively.” In his view, therefore, racism, which has only served the purposes of white supremacy in the United States and in our churches, is (contra Piper) a uniquely white sin.

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8 Anderson, 17.

9 Ibid., 38. Within Anderson’s paradigm, anyone can be a racist, regardless of one’s racial or ethnic identity, and reconciliation is primarily a matter of individuals of different races learning to embrace one another, literally and figuratively, and to delight in one another’s differences. See pp. 18-19, 148.

10 Piper, 18, 239. Where Piper readily acknowledges and discusses the reality of structural racism in the US, his baseline definition of racism does not account for power, which is precisely the point where structural, and institutional racism becomes possible.

11 Smith, 76. See also Barndt, 84-85.

12 Barndt, 84.

13 Ibid., 116.

14 Ibid., 117.
APPENDIX D

SERMON FOLLOWING CHARLESTON MASSACRE


I spent the last several days reflecting on the texts given for this service and preparing a sermon about how God reconciles people to one another into a family called church. Last night, Dylann Roof, a 21 year old white man, walked into Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, sat down in a prayer service and then after some time stood and opened fire on the small gathering of children, women, and men. Nine Black people, six women and three men were massacred. One five-year-old girl survived by laying in the blood of her slain church family members and pretending to be dead. This morning, when I learned of last night’s terror in Charleston, the sermon I had prepared went into the trash. Today is not the day for a white man to preach about reconciliation.

Acts 2 in short. The Holy Spirit falls upon the small band of Jesus’ followers, and they are immediately emboldened to head to the streets and empowered to proclaim the good news of Jesus’ resurrection in many languages - in the very city where their master and friend had been unjustly arrested, brutalized by the police of his day, and lynched on a tree outside the city. Peter preaches his first sermon, and three thousand people repent and place their faith in the resurrected Jesus. A new community that will eventually be known as the church forms and begins a radical and beautiful way of life together that would literally change the course of history. That’s Acts 2 in a nutshell. In verse 12, many in the crowd who hear the followers of Jesus speaking in many different languages ask, “What does this mean?” I also have been asking that question today, as my meditation on this passage has collided with my wrestling with the news of the Charleston Massacre. What does this mean?

I spent most of today asking the Lord, “What does this mean?” And I have a simultaneous sense that God has given me something I must say and that I also must be very careful not to say more than I should. And so I want to begin by acknowledging that I do not know how to speak, nor am I convinced that I should speak in any direct way to
my Black brothers and sisters today other than in the voice of confession and lamentation. But to my white brothers and sisters I am compelled to speak of word of exhortation.

In verse 14 and verse 22 of our passage Peter makes clear the identity of those to whom he speaks. In verse 14, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to what I have to say” and then in verse 22, “You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say.” Presumably there are people present in the crowd who are not inhabitants of Jerusalem, Israelites or men of Judah, but Peter says in effect to the specified audience, ‘What I have to say is especially for you.” So, in that same spirit tonight I say, “White people let this be known to you and listen to what I say.”

In the sermon recorded in this chapter of Acts, Peter pulls no punches in naming the collective identity, the collective guilt, the collective responsibility, and the collective need of salvation among his very specified audience: “You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.” Do you hear it? Collective identity, collective guilt, collective responsibility, and collective need of salvation. These are not individual you’s. These are collective you’s, plural you’s that hold together thousands of people in the audience in one collective identity: Jesus-killers. Collective identity, collective guilt, collective responsibility, and collective need of salvation.

Theologically, we have accepted this collective narrative in many ways. We are relatively comfortable saying things like, ‘It was our sin that Jesus bore in on the cross.’ However, when read in light of something like the Charleston Massacre or racism in general, this is a troubling text for us white folk, who detest and resist at great effort the idea that we bear a collective racial identity. We are determined to think of ourselves as individuals, and this especially when dealing with issues of race and racism. If we were in the crowd identified and addressed by Peter, I imagine we would have responded with predictable self-justifications: ‘I didn’t nail Jesus to the cross. I didn’t whip him or mock
him or spit on him. I didn’t issue false witness against him. I didn’t betray him. I wasn’t even there. I have a Jewish friend.’ And whenever people pull a Peter on us white folk and start talking about us as a collective community, especially in conversations about race and racism, we push back hard by asserting our individuality and therefore our presumed innocence: ‘I never owned slaves. I don’t use the n-word. I have black friends and Latino friends and Asian friends.’ We look at officers shooting Michael Brown, strangling Eric Gardner, or slamming Dejirra Becton to the ground by her hair, and we protect ourselves behind talk of police brutality. ‘But “I” have never done anything like that.’ Part of what it means to be white folk, it seems, is to live with the insistence that we are all individuals with no collective identity, no collective guilt, no collective responsibility and no collective need of salvation. But I believe Peter’s you’s are spoken to us!

In the passage read earlier from 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul makes the incredible claim that “in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” This is an awesome declaration of the church’s identity, of our identity. We might read this today to say, “in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Black & white, Latino and Asian, rich and poor—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” This is our identity, as followers of Jesus from many cultures, races and backgrounds. In Christ, we are one body… and this body is called the Church. Acts 2 is the story of how the Church was born. But I believe that we, and particularly we white folk, must see today that the church’s birthing was by way of collective repentance. You see, the crowd to whom Peter preached was not plagued, as we are, with the desperate façade of individualism. They did not hear his collective indictment and erupt in a chorus of defensiveness or individual justification. Rather, in verse 37 we find that “when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” What should we do? What should we do?

That question, my white brothers and sisters, must become our question in light of the collective indictment rising from our Black, Latino, and Asian brothers and sisters throughout our country. Their voices address us as a collective, white community and
name, bold as Peter, the sins of our racism past and present. And if we are to love our neighbors of color as ourselves or even come close to living into the vision cast in 1 Corinthians 12 where “If one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer together with it,” then we white folk MUST accept our collective identity, own racism as our collective sin and learn together through collective confession how to walk in collective repentance. We must not excuse ourselves by thinking or speaking of Dylann Roof as an individual, as someone apart from ourselves, someone we can distance ourselves from by talking about as a madman, or a troubled youth, or a lone actor in “his” heinous crime. Rather, like the Israelites in Peter’s crowd, we must not resist the collective indictment that sees the Charleston Massacre as just the latest car in a long train of white terrorism that’s been chugging through communities of color in this land for 400 years. We must own that we, as white people, built a nation, a society, a history and an economy upon the sinister premise of white supremacy. We planted that seed. We nurtured that seed. And that seed has grown into a massive tree. And we know a tree by its fruit. We must collectively own the fact Dylann Roof’s decision to drive an hour and half from his home town to one of the most historically significant Black churches in our country and to massacre nine praying Black people- this is fruit of the tree we planted. The seemingly countless expressions of police brutality finally getting mass attention across the country are fruit of the tree we planted. If we fail to acknowledge this tree, our common history in cultivating this tree, or the fact that this same tree, which has been the lynching tree of so many, is also the shade tree for the white community… if we fail to receive this collective indictment, we cannot suffer together with our brothers and sisters who know their grief grows in the soil of our racism. We cannot love our neighbors if we refuse to see the realities that our tree imposes upon them. We cannot be the church, if we are not collectively cut to the heart and asking, “What can we do?”

I find in this passage a tremendous challenge for us as a white community, but I also find tremendous hope. Peter does not accuse to condemn. His words of judgment are the truth that creates the possibility of freedom. In response to the question, “What can we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy
Spirit.” Collective indictment leads to collective repentance and the gift of the Spirit that makes Jew and Gentile, slave and free, black and white, Latino and Asian, rich and poor one body, who in times of suffering can truly confess together, grieve together, hope together, and stand together as a new family called Church. Through collective repentance the collective identity of Jesus-killers gives way to the collective identity of Jesus’ brothers and sisters. O God, may it be so among us. White brothers and sisters, may our collective racist identity, through collective repentance, give way to the collective salvation in which we can truly suffer together with those in our body who are suffering, and so truly be the Church. And to my brothers and sisters of color, until that day comes, may you be strengthened in faithfulness knowing that as Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in Spirit.” Amen.
Throughout these reflections on the ways whiteness, racism, and race work in our world, in CityWell, and in me, I have attempted to hold these three terms in distinction from one another, even as they operate in intersectional ways. Specifically, I argue that whiteness, racism, and race exist primordially in a derivative relationship rooted in the perversion of God’s good creation of the power, Ethnicity.

In this schema, whiteness names a path of idolatry in which Ethnicity pursues a vocation other than for which God created it; namely, whiteness becomes a way for Ethnicity to dominate rather than serve humanity, as well as to pursue self-determination and self-perpetuation rather than to submit to Divine determination and contingency. In this path of idolatry, Ethnicity seizes upon the imaginative possibility opened by the Western Church’s supercessionism, and conscripts European nations to theologically legitimize and logistically execute its project of world domination. As this path unfolds, Ethnicity takes an-ever increasingly destructive turn away from its created purpose to display Divine delight in the diversity of humanity, and to invite humanity into an abundant life of transformative joining, embrace, and communion among all the peoples of the world. This path of destruction leads to phenomenal violence against the many ethnic groups encountered in Europe’s colonial expansion into the New World.

Retrospectively, one can see the trajectory that connects the earliest expressions of this interethnic violence to current manifestations of what has come to named as racism, a power-driven oppression and exploitation of people groups deemed to be other-than, by those who would come to name and see themselves as white. In the midst of this trajectory, there arose a need to create an enduring construct of essential difference that would justify European (and eventually the United States’) violence against the indigenous peoples of colonized lands.\(^1\) Race proved effective to this end, offering a

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\(^1\) Recall that the initial stated motivations for European colonial conquest were civilization of the barbarians and Christianization of the heathens. These motivations proved inadequate to the agenda of whiteness, as the barbarian could become civilized and the heathen could become Christian, thus removing the legitimacy of European domination over such peoples. The invention of race, and its emphatic location
justifying logic to the demonic operations of racism and serving the ultimate idolatrous purpose of whiteness to establish itself as an absolute good demanding absolute allegiance and unconditional submission from humanity.\textsuperscript{2} Naming this flow in reverse, race serves to make racism palatable, while racism serves the self-perpetuating idolatry and domination agenda of whiteness.

Where current expressions of whiteness, racism, and race are thoroughly interrelated,\textsuperscript{3} the articulation of their derivative relationship is important for several reasons:

1) This relationship illuminates the violent agenda underneath the absurd invention and imposition of untenable racial categories, which enables us to reimagine identity in affirming, rooted, and liberating ways.

2) Naming racism as derivative of whiteness rather than of any specific ethnic group helps us to maintain racism’s distinction from ethnocentric conflicts and oppressions throughout our world’s history, which is essential to seeing racism’s particular threat and violence against all ethnicities.\textsuperscript{4}

3) Naming whiteness as a perversion of the power, Ethnicity, and as something beyond and bigger than racism and race, allows us to locate its roots in moments that would not otherwise be associated with racism and race, namely, in the epoch of European colonization that preceded the explicit development of racial logics and categories. Such ability to get behind or underneath racism and race, so to speak, increases our potency in resisting the domination agenda of whiteness by attacking the roots of the problem instead of just mowing its weeds.

\textsuperscript{2}Yoder, 142-143.

\textsuperscript{3}As racism and race matured as intractable components of the world constructed by whiteness, their interplay moved beyond sequential derivation, such that where racism produced the insidious invention of race, racism also depends on categories of race for its ongoing operations. In addition, where both racism and race arise out of whiteness, they also infuse whiteness with social, political, psychological, economic and material meaning.

\textsuperscript{4}Recall the argument of Chapter 3, in which race is named as the undoing of Ethnicity. See pp. 64-71.
4) Naming whiteness as the perversion of a power also establishes a critical distinction between whiteness and skin color. This distinction allows us to see people raced-as-white as pawns, and even to some degree, as victims in a project not of their own devising, even while being a project in which people raced-as-white are deeply complicit. Separating whiteness from melanin, and even from Europe, therefore, properly situates whiteness as over and against even those of us raced-as-white, and so makes it possible for people-raced-as-white to resist and reject whiteness without fundamentally rejecting ourselves; in fact, such resistance may be the path toward receiving a God-honoring ethnic identity rather than perpetuating the Babelian prerogative of whiteness to “make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4). Identifying whiteness as the perversion of Ethnicity allows Christians-raced-as-white and Christians raced-as-other-than-white to stand with one another against the “cosmic powers of this present darkness,” because our struggle is not against each other; the enemy is not flesh and blood (Eph 6:12).

5) Finally, naming whiteness as a perversion of Ethnicity allows for all Christians to maintain the affirmation that the powers are a good part of God’s creation, and that though fallen, are yet to be redeemed. Such an affirmation, especially in relation to Ethnicity, is imperative if one is to resist particularity-flattening impulses such as colorblindness and race itself, and so persist in delighting in the diversity of humanity in which God delights; only in affirming Ethnicity as a good gift of God, can one hope to receive the abundant life God offers by way of humble and desire-driven joining and communion among all the peoples of the world.


Websites


