

PREACHING ABOUT RACE:
A HOMILETIC FOR RACIAL RECONCILIATION

By

Geoffrey Noel Schoonmaker

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Religion

May, 2012

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Professor John S. McClure

Professor Brad R. Braxton

Professor Amy-Jill Levine

Professor Dale P. Andrews

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For Dayna
Amazing partner in life, ministry, and scholarship

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this dissertation has confirmed for me that there is no such thing as an individual accomplishment. While the dissertation bears my authorship, it has been a communal undertaking. The distinguished scholars on my dissertation committee provided formative teaching in homiletics and New Testament and invaluable guidance in researching and writing the dissertation. I am especially grateful for the mentoring that Professor Brad Braxton offered me in both divinity school and graduate school over the past eleven years. Several colleagues at Vanderbilt also sharpened my thinking, including Sejong Chun, Amy McCullough, Leah Payne, Katie Rigler, Alan Sherouse, Mark Shivers, Andrew Smith, Alex Tracy, Joshua Villines, and Rich Voelz.

Three churches upheld me throughout my graduate studies. The saints of Churchland Baptist Church, Lexington, North Carolina called me as pastor, ordained me to the gospel ministry, and supported me as I applied to and departed for Vanderbilt. Their current pastor, Reverend Ray Howell, IV, is a valued friend and colleague who provided constant encouragement and read an early draft of chapter one. The saints of First Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tennessee offered a warm spiritual home during my coursework and qualifying exams, especially through the kindness of Gary and Libby Green and Chris and Brittany Jackson. The saints of First Baptist Church, Valdese, North Carolina called me as pastor as I was beginning to write the dissertation and supplied copious prayers and ample writing time over the past four years. Without their support, I could not have finished the dissertation. It has been a joy and an honor to serve such a vibrant, genuine, loving congregation, especially alongside such a supportive staff,

including Leonard Brendel, Sandra Carswell, Jeff Carter, Gail Dula, Tanya Hoffman, Chris McNeely, Reverend Allison Pryor, and Alan Shuffler.

My family played a most vital role in the dissertation. My brother and sister-in-law, Rick and Satoko Schoonmaker, my grandparents, Alvin and Betty Graham, and my in-laws, Karen and John Thompson and Leigh and Mike Pete, all offered prayerful support. My parents, Bruce and Gail Schoonmaker, empowered me in myriad ways, as they always have. They are my heroes in life and faith. My daughters, Maggie and Nora, lifted my spirits throughout my “chaptering” and celebrated every small victory along the way with dancing, feasting, and merriment. Their exuberance for life and spontaneous dashes into my study for hugs and kisses kept me sane. My extraordinary wife, Dayna, made incalculable sacrifices for the dissertation. She endured many late nights and early mornings with two children under the age of five and a stressed, weary-eyed husband who struggled to balance parenting, pastoring, and writing. She also served as my primary editor, perusing multiple drafts of the dissertation and offering insightful feedback regarding its substance and expression. Her belief in this project and confidence in my scholarship fortified my soul through the toil of the writing process. I am profoundly grateful for Dayna’s partnership in this and every endeavor.

Finally, I thank God for providing the opportunity and ability to write the dissertation. In my countless moments of weakness as a writer, God’s grace proved sufficient for me. I hope the dissertation faithfully witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ and brings glory to his name.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
PREFACE	x
INTRODUCTION	xii
Recent Homiletic Proposals for Preaching about Race	xv
Method	xix
A Theoretical Difficulty	xxi
 Chapter	
I. THE RACIAL CONTEXT OF PREACHING: CRITICAL RACE THEORY ON RACISM IN AMERICA	1
Social Constructionist View of Race	1
The Ordinarity of Racism	3
Unconscious Racism	5
The Transparency Phenomenon	8
The Interest Convergence Principle	9
Critique of Liberalism and Color-Blindness	12
White Privilege and White Superiority	14
II. WHITE EVANGELICALISM AND RACE: CHANGING THE MIND OF WHITE EVANGELICALS	17
White American Evangelicalism: Theological and Cultural Characteristics	17
Characteristics of White Evangelical Culture	18
White Evangelicals and Race: Historical and Sociological Perspectives	22
A Concise History of White Evangelicalism and Black-White Relations	22
Modern-Day White Evangelical Perspectives on Race and Racism	25
White Evangelical Solutions to Racism	29
Changing the Minds of White Evangelicals	31
Biblical Reasoning	32

	Affective Appeal.....	37
	Facilitating Transformative Personal Experiences	38
	What Preachers Can Expect After Changing Their Minds about Race	41
III.	A THEOLOGY OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION: RACIAL ATONEMENT IN EPHESIANS 2:11-22	45
	Biblical Hermeneutics for Preaching	47
	Race and the New Testament	49
	Preaching on Atonement: Pitfalls and Possibilities	51
	Major Categories of Atonement Doctrine	52
	Womanist and Feminist Criticisms of Atonement.....	53
	Responding to Womanist and Feminist Concerns	56
	Opportunities in Ephesians	58
	Preaching the Ethic of Self-Sacrificial Love	63
	The Violence of the Cross and the Ethic of Non-Violence	65
	Racial Atonement in Eph 2:11-22: A Homiletic Interpretation	67
	Eph 2:11-13: Gentiles Brought Near.....	68
	Eph 2:14: Racial Atonement Accomplished and the Wall of Racism Destroyed.....	72
	Eph 2:15-16: The Two Groups Become One Body	76
	Eph 2:17-18: Preaching Peace and Mutual Access.....	85
	Eph 2:19-22: Ecclesiological Implications of Racial Atonement.....	87
	Eph 2:11-22 as a Theological Paradigm for Preaching about Race	90
IV.	A CRITICAL CORRELATION OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND EPHESIANS 2:11-22: ECCLESIAL REPARATIONS AND CRITICAL RACE THEOLOGY.....	96
	Critical Race Theory on Reparations.....	97
	The Reparations Debate	100
	Ecclesial Reparations	103
	A Biblical Theology of Justice	105
	The Jerusalem Collection: A Homiletic Interpretation	108
	Major Interpretations of the Collection	109
	The Economics of Reconciliation.....	115
	The Fate of the Collection	116
	The Collection's Implications for Today	117
	Southern Baptist Reparations	121
	The Founding of the Southern Baptist Convention	122
	The Southern Baptist Apology for Racism.....	123
	Critical Race Theology.....	128
	Theology in Critical Race Theory	128
	Anthony Cook: Critical Race Theologian	130
	W. E. B. Du Bois: A Model of Critical Race Theology.....	133
	Du Bois's Personal Beliefs	134

Theological Racism and Slavery.....	135
Du Bois’s Use of the Bible	137
Du Bois on Sacrifice	140
The Religion of Whiteness	143
Critical Race Theology: A Homiletic Example.....	145
White Self-Sacrifice in Imitation of Christ	147
V. AN ETHIC OF PREACHING ABOUT RACE: RE-SCRIPTING RACIAL REALITY.....	150
Re-scripting Racial Reality with Eph 2:11-22.....	151
Symbolic Convergence Theory.....	153
An Analysis of White Homiletic Ethics.....	155
Charles Campbell’s <i>The Word before the Powers</i> : A Prophetic Model	155
Strategies for Re-scripting.....	159
Sally Brown’s <i>Cross Talk</i> : A Pastoral Model	165
Strategies for Re-scripting.....	168
Lucy Rose’s <i>Sharing the Word</i> : A Conversational Model.....	173
Strategies for Re-scripting.....	175
John McClure’s <i>Other-wise Preaching</i> : A Collaborative Model	178
Strategies for Re-scripting.....	181
Summary	184
Ethics of Emotion and Embodiment: Quickening the Will for Racial Reconciliation	185
Ethics of Metacommunication	188
The Preacher’s Personal Ethics.....	192
Conclusion.....	192
APPENDIX: A PRAXIS OF PREACHING ABOUT RACE: SERMONS AND CRITIQUES.....	194
Practical Theology and Praxis	194
Sermons and Critiques	195
“Behind the Curtain”.....	196
Sermon Manuscript.....	197
Critical Reflection.....	200
“And the Wall Came Tumbling Down”.....	204
Sermon Manuscript.....	204
Critical Reflection.....	209
“Better Race Syndrome”	213
Sermon Manuscript.....	214
Critical Reflection.....	221
Cumulative Critiques	225
Implications of Praxis	228
Conclusion.....	233

BIBLIOGRAPHY 235

Preface

When Barack Obama was elected the first African American President of the United States in 2008, many trumpeted the dawn of a post-racial era. Others rejected the notion that this substantive advance toward racial equality had suddenly terminated centuries of racism. Six months after Obama began work in the Oval Office, the media was in a feeding frenzy covering the arrest of African American professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Gates, a world-renowned Harvard scholar of African American history, had returned home from China to find his front door jammed. As he and his driver, also an African American man, tried to budge the door, a white woman saw them, called the police, and reported a suspected burglary in progress. A white sergeant from the Cambridge police arrived at Gates's home and asked Gates to step outside. Gates refused, which is understandable since he was being interrogated for entering his own home. After a verbal exchange, the white sergeant handcuffed and arrested Gates for disorderly conduct and took him to jail. Gates spent four hours in jail before being released on recognizance. The charges against Gates were ultimately dropped. The story became a national headline.

Many believe the arrest was a gaffe driven by racial profiling. Gates was fifty-eight years old at the time and used a cane to walk, not the typical demographic for burglary suspects. Additionally, the event happened shortly after noon in broad daylight. Still, many have supported the sergeant, claiming that Gates's belligerence necessitated the arrest.

Media coverage focused on whether the sergeant is a racist. Yet whether he is racist or not, race played a role in Gates's arrest. Had Gates and his driver been white,

would the white woman have suspected a fifty-eight year old who walks with a cane of burglary in broad daylight? If she had, and if the sergeant had treated a white suspect the same way he treated Gates, would the event have been noteworthy enough to make national headlines for a week? The answer to at least the second question is no. The controversy of Gates's arrest demonstrates that America has by no means entered a post-racial era.¹

¹ For accounts of this incident, consult, for example, Abby Goodnough, "Harvard Professor Jailed; Officer Is Accused of Bias," *New York Times*, July 20, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/21/us/21gates.html> [accessed March 5, 2010]; Jesse Washington, "Scholar's Arrest is a Signpost on Road to Equality," *Associated Press*, July 22, 2009, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/32077998/> [accessed March 5, 2010]; Katharine Q. Seelye, "Obama Wades Into a Volatile Racial Issue," *New York Times*, July 23, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/23/us/23race.html> [accessed March 5, 2010].

Introduction

Preaching about race and racism is a homiletic imperative. According to Richard Lischer, a well-known homiletics scholar, “The problem of race relations in America is not one topic among many to be addressed in the pulpit, but *the* dilemma that has haunted American life from the beginning.”¹ “Race” is a concept that “signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies,” especially differences in skin tone, facial features, and hair texture.² Racism is any program or practice of injustice legitimated by race.³ In the United States, racism is primarily “the expression of systemic power over people of color.”⁴ Indeed, Ronald Potter argues that the systemic violence against Native Americans and African Americans is our nation’s

¹ Richard Lischer, “Preaching About Race Relations—The Hope of Reconciliation,” in *Preaching In and Out of Season*, eds. Thomas G. Long and Neely Dixon McCarter (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 19 (emphasis in the original).

² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55. Frequently, scholars use “race” to connote physical differences among people and “ethnicity” to connote cultural differences. Yet, “race” and “ethnicity” are overlapping categories that should not be too sharply distinguished from one another. There is no scholarly consensus on the definitions of and differences between these two terms, and they are often synonymous in common usage. For the scholarly debate concerning the definitions of these terms, consult, for example, Paul Spickard and W. Jeffrey Burroughs, eds., *We Are a People: Narrative and Multiplicity in Constructing Ethnic Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). For an introduction to ethnicity theory, consult Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003). The dissertation will resist the common practice of subsuming race under the category of ethnicity and instead will privilege the category of race. Omi and Winant explain that while ethnicity theory reigns in academia, many theories have “missed the manner in which race has been a *fundamental* axis of social organization in the U.S.” Omi and Winant, 12-13 (emphasis in the original).

³ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 154.

⁴ Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 59.

“original sin.”⁵ The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s pointed the United States toward racial justice, but the profound problem of racism remains.

According to Brad Braxton, the slavery and segregation of the seventeenth through twentieth centuries has been replaced by “the subtle, sophisticated racism of the twenty-first century.”⁶ Lee Anne Bell, Barbara Love, and Rosemarie Roberts chronicle racial disparities in “opportunities and outcomes” in the areas of education, labor, housing, and criminal justice. For example, school districts with mostly white students have more money to spend per student than school districts with mostly students of color. A 2004 study showed that job applicants with common black names were much less likely to be called for an interview than job applicants with common white names, even though all the applicants in the study submitted exactly the same résumé. White people pay less interest than people of color with similar mortgages.⁷ The poverty rate among whites is much lower than that among African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans.⁸ White persons receive lighter punishments than people of color with similar criminal records.⁹ Racial minorities receive a “lower quality of health care” than white

⁵ Ronald C. Potter, “Race, Theological Discourse and the Continuing American Dilemma,” in *The Gospel in Black and White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 35.

⁶ Brad R. Braxton, *No Longer Slaves: Galatians and African American Experience* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 16.

⁷ Lee Anne Bell, Barbara J. Love, and Rosemarie A. Roberts, “Racism and White Privilege Curriculum Design,” in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 2nd ed., eds. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin (New York: Routledge, 2007), 125-126.

⁸ Barndt, 47.

⁹ Jacqueline Battalora, “Whiteness: The Workings of an Ideology,” in *Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion: Views from the Other Side*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 4-5.

people.¹⁰ According to Human Rights Watch, “black men are nearly twelve times as likely to be imprisoned for drug convictions as adult white men.”¹¹ In rape cases, “white complainants are more likely to be viewed as rape victims when the attackers are black. On the other side of the coin, a nonwhite male accused of rape is far more likely than his white male counterpart to be seen by jurors and judges as a rapist.”¹² In murder cases wherein a black person is accused of killing a white person, the probability of the defendant being “sentenced to death is far greater than when homicide victims and perpetrators fall into any other racial pattern.”¹³ The social power of racism is so keen that implicit attitude tests, such as those offered by Harvard University and the University of Chicago, show that many who think themselves egalitarian “unconsciously associate good with white and bad with black.”¹⁴

The subtle racism of twenty-first century America is “civilizational racism,” a mindset that assumes whiteness to be “normative and superior.”¹⁵ This tacit yet pernicious form of racism is born of a socio-cultural atmosphere long saturated with the ideology of white superiority. Civilizational racism “occurs on the level of our broadest

¹⁰ Aana Marie Vigen, “To Hear and Be Accountable: An Ethic of White Listening,” in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do*, eds. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 220.

¹¹ Editorial, *New York Times*, May 10, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/opinion/10sat1.html> [accessed March 5, 2010].

¹² Battalora, 9.

¹³ Peggy C. Davis, “Law as Microaggression,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 2nd ed., eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 148.

¹⁴ Nicholas D. Kristof, “Our Racist, Sexist Selves,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/opinion/06kristof.html> [accessed March 5, 2010].

¹⁵ Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, “Introduction,” in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, 22.

and most normative assumptions,” making white superiority common sense.¹⁶ While the Trail of Tears and Jim Crow are behind us, the momentum of history has carried civilizational racism into the present.¹⁷ Today, due to the lasting impact of our history, the American subconscious is socialized to presume that white flesh is more valuable than dark flesh.

Although the minds of Americans, especially white Americans, are trained in the ideology of white superiority, they can be changed. Preaching can alter mindsets by setting the conditions for repentance.¹⁸ The cultural contexts described above summon ministers in the United States to preach about race and racism. But how might preachers do so responsibly and persuasively? The dissertation seeks to respond to this question and other pressing issues posed by the nexus of race and Christian proclamation in the United States. Since responsibility for racism belongs primarily to white people, and since I am a white American evangelical Christian, the dissertation will focus on how white American evangelical preachers might best preach to white American evangelical congregations about race.¹⁹

Recent Homiletic Proposals for Preaching about Race

In contemporary homiletic scholarship, there is a dearth of literature on how to preach about race from a white perspective. Given the pervasiveness of racism in the

¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷ Barndt, 25.

¹⁸ The New Testament term *μετάνοια* denotes an altered mindset.

¹⁹ I use the term “evangelical” to refer to theologically conservative Protestants that place special emphasis on conversion, biblical authority, evangelism, and the crucifixion of Christ. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 8. I elaborate on white American evangelicalism in chapter two.

United States and the vast amount of scholarship on race, the paucity of homiletic resources on how to preach about race from a white perspective is intriguing. White homileticians have dedicated entire books to preaching on social issues, such as domestic violence, economic justice, and the ecclesial and societal roles of persons with physical and mental disabilities, but there are no recent book-length discussions of how whites can preach about race and racism.²⁰

Recent homiletic literature that addresses how to preach about race from a white perspective exists primarily in the form of brief essays. For example, in *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*, Christine Smith has a chapter entitled “Conversion Uproots Supremacy—WHITE RACISM.” She casts racism as primarily a white problem and encourages white preachers to confront their complicity in the system of white supremacy and to engage in a lifelong struggle to resist white racism. According to Smith, preachers must expose white racism as manifest in economic violence and cultural imperialism.²¹ Moreover, preachers must preach for conversion, which involves repentance, reparation, and ultimately, racial justice.²²

²⁰ Consult John S. McClure and Nancy J. Ramsay, eds., *Telling the Truth: Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998); André Resner, Jr., ed., *Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003); Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). The most recent homiletic monograph I discovered on preaching about race from a white perspective is R. Frederick West, *Preaching on Race* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1962).

²¹ Christine M. Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 118-124.

²² *Ibid.*, 124-125. Smith has also edited a collection of essays entitled *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*, in which three contributors make brief suggestions on how to preach about race from various racial perspectives. Martin Brokenleg argues that preaching for justice in Native American communities involves calling for the United States to honor treaties with Indians. Martin Brokenleg, “A Native American Perspective: ‘That the People May Live,’” in *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Christine Marie Smith (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 36. Eleazar Fernandez says preachers should decry racial discrimination and the deification of the majority race. He encourages preachers to portray race as a locus for encountering a “color-loving God.” Eleazar S. Fernandez, “A Filipino Perspective: ‘Unfinished Dream’ in the Land of Promise,” in *Preaching Justice*, 71, 76-77. Eunjoo

Ronald Allen and Jicelyn Thomas have written an essay entitled “The Challenge of Preaching on Racial Issues for Euro-American Preachers.” They suggest a twofold movement for preaching on race. First, the preacher describes “the dynamics of racism and its inappropriateness in the light of the gospel.” Second, the preacher helps the congregation envision interracial relationships characterized by love and justice.²³

In his “Preaching About Race Relations—The Hope of Reconciliation,” Richard Lischer advises that preachers should not rely on “common sense, self-interest, psychology, or the politics of liberalism” but instead build upon an evangelical and biblical foundation when addressing race relations.²⁴ Specifically, he suggests Eph 2:11-22 as a promising text.²⁵ In many ways, this dissertation is a response to Lischer’s essay, making use of Eph 2:11-22 to construct a homiletic for preaching about race from a white perspective.²⁶

Several monographs have advanced homiletic theory by employing disciplines such as ethnography, rhetoric, phenomenology, semiotics, philosophy, and performance

Kim enjoins ministers in Korean American contexts to expand their preaching beyond individual salvation in order to address systemic racial injustice. She also charges such preachers with the task of building Korean American identity. Eunjo Mary Kim, “A Korean American Perspective: Singing a New Song in a Strange Land,” in *Preaching Justice*, 108, 123. For her account of preaching in a globalized context, consult Eunjo Mary Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

²³ Ronald J. Allen and Jicelyn I. Thomas, “The Challenge of Preaching on Racial Issues for Euro-American Preachers,” in *Sharing Heaven’s Music: The Heart of Christian Preaching: Essays in Honor of James Earl Massey*, ed. Barry L. Callen (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 172.

²⁴ Lischer, 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

²⁶ Additionally, J. Philip Wogaman offers brief homiletic reflections on “racial and ethnic tensions” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 66-69.

art, but few, if any, have employed critical race theory.²⁷ The dissertation seeks to fill this lacuna in homiletic literature by exploring the intersection of critical race theory and homiletics. The distinguishing mark of the dissertation is sustained analysis of how critical race theory can inform preaching in white American evangelical congregations.²⁸

Critical race theory is a discipline formulated by legal scholars—mostly scholars of color—whose work “challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole.”²⁹ Since race is a formal legal concept in the United States, and legal meanings of race have exerted lasting influence in American race relations, critical race theory is an indispensable tool for analyzing race and racism in the United States.³⁰

²⁷ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale employs ethnography and semiotics in *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). Craig Loscalzo employs Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory in *Preaching Sermons that Connect: Effective Proclamation through Identification* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992). David Buttrick employs phenomenology in *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). John McClure employs Roland Barthes’s semiotic theory in *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) and Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy in *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001). Jana Childers employs performance art in *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

²⁸ Although the dissertation is similar to Allen and Thomas’s work in that it deals with white ministers preaching on racial issues, it differs from Allen and Thomas’s work in that it engages critical race theory in detail, articulates a biblical model of racial reconciliation, and focuses on white evangelical congregations. The dissertation also bears some similarity to the work of Nibs Stroupe and Caroline Leach, who have underscored Eph 2:11-22 as a theological vision for a multicultural, multiracial church. Nibs Stroupe and Caroline Leach, *O Lord, Hold Our Hands: How a Church Thrives in a Multicultural World; The Story of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 54-55. However, while Stroupe and Leach interpret Eph 2:11-22 in terms of Christ’s victory over the cosmic power of racism, the dissertation will interpret Eph 2:11-22 in terms of Christ’s blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7), especially the sin of racism. This atonement theology carries great authority in white evangelical churches and will stand alongside the Christus Victor model articulated by Stroupe and Leach. In espousing any atonement theory, white preachers must be aware of how the “hermeneutics of sacrifice”—“the understanding that personal sacrifice in the imitation of Christ is the sine qua non of Christian character”—has been utilized to oppress African Americans. JoAnne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African American Experience* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 22.

²⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995), xiii.

³⁰ “Critical race theory has exploded from a narrow subspecialty of jurisprudence chiefly of interest to academic lawyers into a literature read in departments of education, cultural studies, English,

Critical race theory emerged in the 1970s as a result of dissatisfaction with traditional civil rights discourse and the stalled progress of the Civil Rights Movement. Legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Alan Freeman began to ponder ways to address new, subtle varieties of post-Civil Rights Movement racism.³¹ These scholars theorize race as a social construction that influences life in America in myriad ways.³² My goal is to show how critical race theory's keen analyses of racial dynamics can assist white evangelical preachers in addressing racism.

Method

In *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry*, James Poling and Donald Miller identify several types of practical theology. One type, which they call "Type IIIA," takes the form of a "critical confession with a primary emphasis upon the church's vision for the larger society."³³ The method is confessional in that it interprets or reinterprets the Christian tradition and treats it as normative. The method is critical in that it dialogues with modern scientific and philosophical disciplines, though it ultimately privileges Christian tradition. According to Poling and Miller, "Type IIIA holds the tradition as normative and the church as the locus of practical theology. But finally it holds to a faith-informed vision of what is possible for the total society against which any

sociology, comparative literature, political science, history, and anthropology around the country." Angela Harris, "Foreword," in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, xx.

³¹ The founding scholars of critical race theory are "usually identified as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams." Derrick Bell, "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory?" in *The Derrick Bell Reader*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 83.

³² Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 7.

³³ James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 50.

particular expression of church life can be judged.”³⁴ The vision for society distinguishes this method from other critical confessional models that more narrowly focus on the life and identity of the church.

The dissertation will use this method of critical confession for the purpose of transforming the church toward racial reconciliation through a set of persuasive practices in Christian preaching. First, the dissertation will employ critical race theory to provide an account of racial problems in America. Second, the dissertation will discuss white American evangelicalism in relation to race. Third, the dissertation will offer a theology of racial reconciliation through an interpretation of Eph 2:11-22. Fourth, the dissertation will critically correlate critical race theory and Eph 2:11-22 by presenting an ecclesial model of racial reparations and a critique of theological racism. Fifth, the dissertation will use critical race theory, Eph 2:11-22, and recent literature in homiletic ethics to construct an ethic for preaching about race and a homiletical approach to race within white evangelical congregations.

While critical race theory reveals that racial injustice is central to American society, Eph 2:11-22 reveals that racial reconciliation is central to the gospel. The dissertation will argue that a critical correlation of these two sources yields a helpful homiletic for racial reconciliation in white American evangelical congregations. This homiletic promotes a righteous race consciousness that leads to repentance, reparation, and reconciliation. Reconciliation does not erase racial distinctions but instead calls for solidarity without sameness.

³⁴ Ibid., 56.

A Theoretical Difficulty

Given that the following pages summon white preachers to recognize their own racism en route to disavowing it, I must acknowledge before going any further that I am a racist. I am not a malicious or intentional racist, but I have unconscious racist tendencies that I have trouble controlling. Such tendencies can affect even the most ardent antiracist.³⁵ It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for me to escape my whiteness and the privileges it affords.

There is a theoretical difficulty inherent in the fact that I am a white, unintentional racist writing a homiletics dissertation about racial reconciliation, especially since I seek to elevate critical race theory, a scholarly tradition led by people of color. My research suggests that unintentional racism and white privilege will affect my interpretations of race, racism, and homiletic theory, as well as my constructive suggestions for preaching about race, despite my best efforts to the contrary.³⁶ Like white homiletician Susan Bond, who wrote her doctoral dissertation on black homiletics, I acknowledge that I am an outsider to the scholarly tradition I seek to elevate and that this “cultural distance” will affect my interpretations. Yet, like Bond, I aim to write about this tradition with “respect, reasonable knowledge, and a certain familiarity.”³⁷

³⁵ For example, in 2003, white antiracist activist Tim Wise boarded a plane, as he had done hundreds of times previously. But this time he saw something he had never seen before: both pilots behind the controls were black. Though Wise was raised antiracist, thinks racism is totally illogical, and has had an illustrious career fighting racism, his first thought was, “Oh my God, can these guys fly this plane?” This type of automatic racist impulse demonstrates the profound influence of racism in American society. Tim Wise, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, rev. ed. (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 165-166. For similar examples of my own struggles with racism, consult the appendix.

³⁶ Consult the discussions of “Unconscious Racism” and “White Privilege and White Superiority” in chapter one.

³⁷ L. Susan Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), xiii.

Despite the theoretical difficulties intrinsic to the dissertation, I hope its merits outweigh its flaws and that it supplies a viable homiletic for racial reconciliation in white American evangelical churches. Even if the reader doubts my motives or abilities for writing about race as a white male, my preference for the theories of scholars of color will incite further conversation that in turn will advance the cause of racial reconciliation. According to African American homiletician Evans Crawford, when people of other races learn black culture, they “participate in the spiritual depths of racial reconciliation.”³⁸

³⁸ Evans E. Crawford, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 22.

Chapter I

The Racial Context of Preaching: Critical Race Theory on Racism in America

Discerning the context of preaching is crucial because preaching is a highly contextualized act. Since American culture is saturated with racism, white American evangelical preachers can benefit from understanding the racial context in which they preach. This chapter introduces critical race theory as an invaluable resource for understanding race and racism in American society. Not only does critical race theory provide concepts and insights that expose subtle forms of modern-day racism, it also provides constructive suggestions for seeking racial justice and reconciliation.

Critical race theory is an expanding form of racial analysis that originated in the legal academy. Spearheaded by scholars of color, critical race theory proffers perspectives on race and racism that especially challenge white people. In what follows, I offer an overview of critical race theory, underscoring themes germane for preachers. The following summary aims not to exhaust but simply to identify features of critical race theory that are most important for homiletical practice in white American evangelical congregations.

Social Constructionist View of Race

Critical race theory views race as a product of social thought and interaction. Race is not an objective category that corresponds to biological reality, as has often been assumed, but instead a category that society produces, alters, and retires at will.¹ Recent science verifies that race is a social construction. Research has shown that there are no

¹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 7.

genetic qualities shared by all blacks but not by non-blacks. Concomitantly, there are no genetic qualities shared by all whites but not by non-whites. In fact, genetic research has found that “greater genetic variation exists *within* the populations typically labeled Black and White than *between* these populations.”²

To acknowledge that race is not defined by innate human differences is not to deny its impact. Race plays a prominent role in socio-political structures. For example, race suffuses all types of law, including “property law, contracts law, criminal law, federal courts, family law,” and corporate law. Race also plays a leading role in our personal lives, affecting our habits of speech and dress, even our style of walking. Race is a contributing factor in our job possibilities, economic prospects, political tendencies, and place of residence.³

While race is not an objective fact, it is nonetheless obvious. We are socialized in a way that makes race common sense and a fundamental category through which we understand the world. Scientific studies of children evince the powerful effects of racial socialization. For example, when a black child was asked about making a little girl from clay, she said that white clay should be used instead of brown clay because “it will make a better girl.”⁴ Though race is socially fabricated, its social and psychological influence should not be underestimated.

In light of the social provenance of race, preachers can decry biological theories of race while taking seriously the acute impact race exerts as a social reality.

² Ian F. Haney López, “The Social Construction of Race,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 166 (emphasis in the original).

³ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

⁴ Richard Delgado, “Tort Action for Racial Insults, Epithets, and Name-Calling,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 134.

Understanding the social origins of racism can provide encouragement for the homiletic task, for if racism is produced by society, it can also be reduced by society. The power of racism is so pervasive and coercive that devitalizing it may require an appeal to transcendence. Many Americans may take God's desire for racial reconciliation more seriously than a humanitarian plea for racial reconciliation. If this is the case, preachers and other religious authorities may be the best hope for racial reconciliation in America.

The Ordinariness of Racism

Critical race theory maintains that racism is ordinary in the United States. Racism is not a special event; it is the routine experience of people of color.⁵ Alan Freeman contends that racial discrimination can be approached from either the perspective of the perpetrator or the perspective of the victim. The perpetrator perspective identifies racism as racist acts, but the victim perspective identifies racism as quotidian social conditions facing racial minorities.⁶ The victim perspective is apt because small acts of racism called "microaggressions" permeate American social existence.⁷ Mundane racist interactions, whether intentional or unintentional, incessantly reinforce white privilege and disparage people of color. For example, when black people attend social gatherings that historically have been all white events, whites often cannot censor their eyes from

⁵ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 7.

⁶ Alan David Freeman, "Legitimizing Racial Discrimination Through Antidiscrimination Law: A Critical Review of Supreme Court Doctrine," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 29.

⁷ Davis, 142.

giving black guests “the look,” an optic expression that inquires, “What are *you* doing here?”⁸ Alarming, critical race theorists describe microaggressions as “automatic.”⁹

Critical race theorists observe that the perpetrator perspective enables recognition of only the most overt or egregious forms of racism. This is a critical shortcoming because the majority of racism is subtle and routine. Subtle racism can be just as damaging as overt racism. Therefore, subtle racism is the primary target of critical race theory’s analytic and activist efforts.

Underlying the victim perspective is the assumption that racial minorities have experiential expertise in recognizing and analyzing racism. The idea that racial minorities have special competence on racial matters has been labeled the “voice of color thesis.”¹⁰ For example, Mari Matsuda advocates “looking to the bottom,” or locating those who have experienced racial discrimination on society’s underside, because they are an important epistemological source when analyzing the concrete effects of racism.¹¹ Epistemologically speaking, critical race theory privileges the real life experiences of people of color over the abstractions of scholars.¹² The notion that racial issues should be viewed from the perspective of racial minorities rather than from the perspective of whites is perhaps the clearest unifying theme in critical race theory.¹³

⁸ Braxton, 9 (emphasis in the original).

⁹ Davis, 148-149.

¹⁰ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 9.

¹¹ Mari Matsuda, “Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 63.

¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³ Derrick Bell, “Who’s Afraid of Critical Race Theory?” 80.

It is important for preachers to understand that the primary form of racism in the United States is social patterns that privilege white people and oppress people of color. Racially responsible preaching in white evangelical churches, therefore, facilitates a congregational shift from the perpetrator perspective to the victim perspective. Convincing whites that racism is ordinary is a daunting challenge that requires preachers to sensitize listeners to microaggressions and other racist social patterns in everyday life. Only when white people are convinced that racism exists, that racism is ordinary, and that racism has grave effects on people of color can further work toward racial reconciliation be endeavored.

Unconscious Racism

Critical race theory suggests that much racism is unconscious. According to Charles Lawrence, III, everyone is infected with the disease of racism, but most of us are unaware of it.¹⁴ Lawrence explains that our historical experience has made racism an essential aspect of our culture, yet paradoxically modern society denounces racism as immoral. When our ingrained racist ideas encounter the societal ethic that condemns them, our minds respond by excluding racism from consciousness.¹⁵ Lawrence contends that much racism is “tacitly transmitted and unconsciously learned,” especially racial stereotypes.¹⁶ He also insists that unconscious racism has the same deleterious effects as intentional racism. Lawrence challenges the legal doctrine of “discriminatory purpose,”

¹⁴ Charles R. Lawrence, III, “The ID, the EGO, and Equal Protection Reckoning with Unconscious Racism,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 237.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

which requires that discriminatory intent be proved, because he believes “the injury of racial inequality exists irrespective of the decisionmakers’ motives.”¹⁷ In short, whether racism is intentional or unconscious does not matter as much as its harmful effects.

In this vein, Kimberlé Crenshaw distinguishes between restrictive and expansive views of antidiscrimination. Restrictive antidiscrimination “treats equality as a process, downplaying the significance of actual outcomes.” Expansive antidiscrimination, on the other hand, focuses on eradicating the substantive conditions of racial subordination and “stresses equality as a result.”¹⁸ One problem with the restrictive vision is that it aims only to prevent future injustice rather than redressing current and past injustice. According to critical race theory, redressing past injustice through racial reparations is integral to the process of racial reconciliation because it acknowledges the abiding economic impact of racist policies such as slavery and segregation and guards against cheap reconciliation.¹⁹ Another problem with the restrictive approach to antidiscrimination is that it reduces wrongdoing to “isolated actions against individuals” instead of understanding discrimination as “a social policy against an entire group.”²⁰

Some Americans conceive racism as a matter of individual actions. This individualistic approach usually stems from the assumption that society is nonracist based on its stated racial ethic. Yet Thomas Ross insists,

¹⁷ Ibid., 236.

¹⁸ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 105.

¹⁹ Critical race theorists have demanded reparations for several different racial groups that have been historically marginalized, including Native Americans, African Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 134. I discuss reparations extensively in chapter four.

²⁰ Crenshaw, 105.

The public ideology has become nonracist, [while] the culture continues to teach racism. The manifestations of racial stereotypes pervade our media and language. Racism is reflected in the complex set of individual and collective choices that make our schools, our neighborhoods, our work places, and our lives racially segregated. Racism today paradoxically is both ‘irrational and normal,’ at once inconsistent with the dominant public ideology and embraced by each of us, albeit for most of us at the unconscious level.²¹

Underestimating the prevalence of racism permits the rhetoric of white innocence, which saturates affirmative action debates and other race-related discussions in America. When one begins to confront unconscious racism, the rhetoric of white innocence falls apart. An important insight begins to take shape: there are no nonracist white people. In fact, if unconscious racism pervades white existence, then the rhetoric of white innocence turns out to be racist discourse.²²

One crucial insight from critical race theory, therefore, is the need for preachers to undergo this paradigm shift from assumed white innocence within a professedly non-racist society to an awareness of pervasive, largely unconscious racism within a society structured to protect white privilege and cultural hegemony. Focusing first on our own re-education, preachers can begin to acknowledge and strive to recognize our own unconscious racism and then begin to nurture a similar effort among our parishioners. At the same time, preachers can persuade whites that the results of racism are more important than the motives, and that unconscious racists can perpetrate the most damaging forms of racial injustice.²³ Convincing whites to focus on the results of racism will be difficult since white people frequently focus on interior motives when discussing

²¹ Thomas Ross, “Innocence and Affirmative Action,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 641.

²² *Ibid.*, 641-643.

²³ Ian F. Haney López, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, rev. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 102.

racism. Perhaps the obsession with intention is not so much an introspective moral examination as a strategy for disregarding racism's consequences. Racially responsible preaching belies the rhetoric of white innocence and facilitates the transformation of white guilt into racial repentance. If all white persons are unconsciously racist, then racial repentance is required of every white person.

The Transparency Phenomenon

One important form of unconscious racism is the transparency phenomenon. Barbara Flagg defines it as “the tendency of whites not to think about whiteness, or about norms, behaviors, experiences, or perspectives that are white-specific.”²⁴ The proclivity of whites to disregard our own racial characteristics may be a defining characteristic of whiteness: “to be white is not to think about it.”²⁵ The transparency phenomenon makes white culture appear neutral, raceless, and normal. Transparency permits whites to disavow white supremacy while imposing white culture on people of color.²⁶

Preachers, therefore, must find ways to help white congregants realize their own whiteness, especially in all-white congregations, where whiteness easily goes unnoticed. This is essential because “whiteness exists as the linchpin for the systems of racial meaning in the United States” and other races are “tropes for inferiority” that orbit the

²⁴ Barbara J. Flagg, “‘Was Blind But Now I See’: White Race Consciousness and the Requirement of Discriminatory Intent,” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 629.

²⁵ Barbara J. Flagg, “The Transparency Phenomenon, Race-Neutral Decisionmaking, and Discriminatory Intent,” in *Critical White Studies*, 220.

²⁶ Flagg, “Was Blind But Now I See,” 629.

unacknowledged norm of whiteness.²⁷ Effective antiracist preaching practices will make “non-obvious white norms explicit.”²⁸ For example, according to sociologist Pamela Perry, the values of individualism, personal responsibility, mind over body, self-control, self-determination, and “the belief that the present holds no debt to the past” are characteristic of white culture, though many assume them to be universally valid.²⁹ Preachers that find ways to name such norms “white” can begin to rob whiteness of its ability to be everything and nothing at the same time, thereby enervating its social sway.³⁰ The goal is to expose whiteness as a form of particularity posing as universality, partiality masquerading as neutrality.

The Interest Convergence Principle

Critical race theory’s concept of “interest convergence” states that white people support advances for people of color only when it serves the self-interest of whites. Derrick Bell, the intellectual father of critical race theory, suggests that the historic *Brown V. Board of Education* decision was fueled more by white self-interest than a genuine desire for racial equality. He explains that, although black people had been litigating against school segregation policies for one hundred years, the decision to desegregate was not made until 1954. At that time, it served the interests of America’s white leadership by improving America’s image as it struggled against communist

²⁷ López, *White By Law*, 132.

²⁸ Flagg, “Was Blind But Now I See,” 629.

²⁹ Pamela Perry, *Shades of White: White Kids and Racial Identities in High School* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 23, 97.

³⁰ Richard Dyer, “White,” in *Cultural and Literary Critiques of the Concepts of “Race,”* ed. E. Nathaniel Gates (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 7.

countries to win the loyalty of the mostly non-white Third World. Desegregation also reassured black veterans returning from World War II that the freedom and equality touted during the war might become a reality at home. Thus, the *Brown* decision quelled black anger about post-war prejudice and thereby soothed white leaders' fears of a social uprising.³¹ The upshot of Bell's analysis is that *Brown V. Board of Education* was precipitated primarily by political necessities rather than by moral concern about racial injustice. Bell's bold assessment of *Brown V. Board of Education* drew fierce criticism when first published, but subsequently the historical research of Mary Dudziak corroborated Bell's hypothesis.³²

Bell observes interest convergence in civil rights gains throughout American history. For example, he suggests that Lincoln's issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation was not an act of moral heroism but an effort to help the Union army win the Civil War.³³ After the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, almost two hundred thousand blacks joined the Northern army, and they made a decisive difference in several battles. Moreover, while the Emancipation Proclamation abrogated "the legal claims of slave masters, it created no substantive rights in the slaves themselves." Consequently, blacks were thereafter re-subjugated by the "black codes" and by racial violence. When

³¹ Derrick A. Bell, Jr., "Brown V. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 22-23.

³² Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 106-117.

³³ Derrick Bell, "The Role of Fortuity in Racial Policy-Making: Blacks as Fortuitous Beneficiaries of Racial Policies," in *The Derrick Bell Reader*, 41.

the promise of “forty acres and a mule” was not kept, recently freed blacks had no means of survival.³⁴

In Bell’s account of interest convergence, one can observe another hallmark of critical race theory: revisionist history. Critical race theorists revise dominant historical narratives in light of the experiences and perspectives of people of color. Bell’s analysis of interest convergence concludes that “the benefits to blacks of civil rights policies are often symbolic rather than substantive.”³⁵

The interest convergence principle implies that, if real advances are to be made in the quest for racial justice, white people must forfeit white advantage. White people, however, do not have much incentive to forfeit racism-based privileges. Elite whites benefit materially from racism, and working-class whites benefit psychologically from racism (e.g., “I may not have money, but at least I’m not black”).³⁶ Therefore, many critical race theorists are skeptical that racial equality is a realistic possibility in America.

Critical race theory’s doctrine of “racial realism” acknowledges the permanence of racism while paradoxically calling for a struggle against it. According to Bell,

Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary ‘peaks of progress,’ short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance.³⁷

³⁴ Derrick Bell, “An American Fairy Tale: The Income-Related Neutralization of Race Law Precedent,” in *The Derrick Bell Reader*, 118.

³⁵ Derrick Bell, “The Racial Preference Licensing Act,” in *The Derrick Bell Reader*, 49.

³⁶ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 7.

³⁷ Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 12.

Bell believes the social stability of America depends on the maintenance of white ascendancy, and therefore white ascendancy will endure as long as the United States endures.³⁸ If the social stability of the United States depends on white dominance, then racial issues are quite radical; they go to the root of American society.³⁹

In light of these ideas, preachers must realize that preaching for racial equality disrupts the very foundation of the social order. Because of this, ministers interested in racial reconciliation risk their jobs. Critically informed preaching about race is intrinsically agitating and de-stabilizing. When preachers are aware of the interest convergence principle, they will be vigilant for ways in which the maintenance of white advantage masquerades as racial equality. They will exercise ongoing skepticism about the motives of whites in promoting racial equality, even their own motives. Although there are instances in which the upshot of interest convergence is a welcome improvement, preachers will be increasingly aware of the ways in which people of color are allowed only those social advances that paradoxically buttress white power.

Critique of Liberalism and Color-Blindness

Critical race theory offers a stringent critique of liberalism, especially the specious virtue of “color-blindness.” Neil Gotanda contends that the liberal ideal of racial nonrecognition is self-contradictory and “fosters the systematic denial of racial subordination and the psychological repression of an individual’s recognition of that

³⁸ Derrick Bell, “The Racial Preference Licensing Act,” 52.

³⁹ Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 267.

subordination, thereby allowing it to continue.”⁴⁰ A color-blind approach to race is literally impossible to achieve, for while medical color-blindness indicates that one cannot perceive part of what is actually before one’s eyes, racial color-blindness requires fully ignoring what has already been noticed. The self-contradictory nature of color-blindness is exposed in Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s keen analysis of racial formation in everyday social life:

One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them (along with their sex) is their race. We utilize race to provide clues about *who* a person is. This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize—someone who is, for example, racially ‘mixed’ or of an ethnic/racial group we are not familiar with. Such an encounter becomes a source of discomfort and momentarily a crisis of racial meaning.⁴¹

Racial recognition plays such an enormous role in our social impulses that it is impossible to ignore race altogether.

Not only is racial nonrecognition impossible, it is also ethically inadequate.

Viewing race as a neutral feature of individual appearance does not account for how race is a determinant of social status or for how race carries into the present the historical subordination of people of color.⁴² In assuming that racism consists of individual attitudes and actions, color-blindness does not account for the social origins of racism. Worse yet, in seeking to remove the significance of race, color-blindness implies the elimination of the distinctive cultures of racial minorities. Color-blindness, therefore, reinforces the dominance of white culture.

⁴⁰ Neil Gotanda, “A Critique of ‘Our Constitution is Color-Blind,’” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 35.

⁴¹ Omi and Winant, 59 (emphasis in the original).

⁴² Neil Gotanda, “A Critique of ‘Our Constitution is Color-Blind,’” 262.

Race is a historical and social reality that cannot be ignored. To ignore race is to ignore racism. Instead of ignoring race, preachers can redeploy the language of race in antiracist ways.⁴³ Critical race theorists suggest that, “ironically, what is necessary in order for race to become irrelevant in the social world...is for race to be acknowledged as relevant, even as we work to collapse racial constructs.”⁴⁴ Therefore, the best preaching about race will unveil the faults of color-blindness and convince white people that the only way toward racial reconciliation is to pay attention to race.

This introduces another persuasive difficulty for preachers. White people accustomed to color-blindness are usually shocked to discover just how racially minded they need to become in order to seek genuine racial reconciliation. Preachers will need to develop homiletical practices that promote this awareness incrementally and consistently, shaping a pervasive racial awareness in the everyday lives of listeners. Preachers will need to find a way to promote a pervasive race consciousness for the sake of racial reconciliation. This will be challenging in light of the 2008 Presidential Election, which has fueled a growing post-racial perspective in America.

White Privilege and White Superiority

According to critical race theory, racism involves both the oppression of people of color and the privileging of white people, and the former is the means to the latter. The primary reason racism exists is not to harm people of color but to benefit white people.

⁴³ “While whites have historically used conceptions of ‘race’ to subordinate people of color, some communities of color have successfully re-appropriated the categorizations and united around them. They have redeployed ‘race’ as an affirmative category around which people have organized to assert the power of their group and its identity. To deny the term ‘race’ any content...is to deny a powerful metaphor to ‘racial’ groups and to preclude valuable modes of resistance.” Jayne Chong-Soon Lee, “Navigating the Topology of Race,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 443.

⁴⁴ Battalora, 12.

Jacqueline Battalora argues that although academics prefer the term “white privilege,” we must understand that “white privilege is the outcome of a pervasive presumption of the racial superiority of whiteness.”⁴⁵ The subtle and sometimes unconscious ideology of white superiority is the fundamental problem in American race relations. White superiority is a system in which “‘white’ bodies, and cultural and social practices associated with those deemed ‘white’—are seen as normative and superior, and through which white people are granted advantaged status of various kinds.”⁴⁶ Since white privilege saturates society, no white person is exempt from participation in it.⁴⁷ Joseph Barndt is right: “The most important issue in understanding racism is not what it does to *hurt* people of color, but what it does to *help* white people.”⁴⁸

The ideology of white superiority and the social fact of white privilege bring us to perhaps the most difficult project in addressing racism. Elevating people of color from their subordinate status requires a corresponding lowering of white people from our privileged status. White people must sacrifice our racism-granted privileges. Since whiteness is a type of property in America that affords many benefits, it will be difficult and counter-intuitive for white people to reject race-granted advantages.⁴⁹ The racialization process has convinced white people that “with racism, we gain, and without

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶ Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁸ Barndt, 81 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁹ Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness As Property,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 277.

it we lose.” Since the oppression of people of color and the advantages of whiteness mutually reinforce each other, “everything must change at once.”⁵⁰

Preachers face a difficult task when it comes to helping white congregations understand how white privilege causes the oppression of people of color. Even more difficult is the task of challenging white listeners to relinquish the privileges of whiteness.

⁵⁰ Barndt, 217.

Chapter II

White American Evangelicals and Race: Changing the Mind of White Evangelicals

Chapter one introduced critical race theory as a crucial resource for white American evangelical preachers who aim to counter racism and advocate racial equality and reconciliation. Alongside a basic grasp of critical race theory, white evangelical preachers need to understand white evangelicalism in relation to race. Preachers also need ideas for how to change the minds of white evangelicals about race.

Therefore, this chapter will introduce white American evangelicalism in relation to race with specific attention to black-white relations. It will address four questions. Who are white American evangelicals? How do they understand race and racism? What does it take to change a white evangelical's mind about race? What personal and vocational transitions do white evangelical preachers undergo when they change their minds about race and commit to seeking racial equality and reconciliation?

White American Evangelicalism: Theological and Cultural Characteristics

The term “evangelical” has myriad connotations in American culture. It is used to describe Protestants in general, Protestants in Free Church denominations, Protestants with conservative theology, Protestants that emphasize evangelism, Protestants with conservative political views, and Protestant fundamentalists that withdraw from society, to name only a few of its common usages. Given this broad spectrum of meanings, let me clarify what I mean by the term “evangelical.”

Evangelical historian Mark Noll traces evangelicalism to mid-eighteenth century revivalism, when Christian leaders such as Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Nicholas von Zinzendorf sought to revive churches in North America and northern Europe. Noll delineates four distinctive marks of evangelicalism. First is *conversionism*, an emphasis on individuals being “born again” through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Second is *biblicism*, a reliance on the Bible as the ultimate authority for religious belief and behavior. Third is *activism*, a prime concern for verbally spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Fourth is *crucicentrism*, a focus on Christ’s atoning work on the cross.¹ I therefore use the term “white American evangelical” to refer to American Protestants who self-identify as white and place special theological emphasis on conversion, biblical authority, evangelism, and atonement.

Characteristics of White Evangelical Culture

In preaching to white American evangelicals, it is important to understand white American evangelical culture. I do not provide here an exhaustive treatment of white evangelicalism but a brief outline of key characteristics. I focus specifically on aspects of white evangelicalism that pose keen challenges for preachers in addressing race.

First, white evangelicalism is characterized by *individualism*. The evangelical emphasis on having a “personal relationship” with Christ through faith, prayer, and Bible reading can engender personal and social transformation.² On the other hand, Soong-Chan Rah’s research suggests that evangelical individualism can also result in privatism

¹ Noll, 8. Noll follows British historian David Bebbington in identifying these distinctive features of evangelicalism.

² Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77.

and narcissism. For example, Rah observes that white American evangelicals often interpret Jer 29:11—“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope”—as a promise that God will bless the individual believer, even though the “you” in the text is plural, indicating the prosperity of a community.³ Rah also observes that popular evangelistic methods in white evangelicalism such as “The Four Spiritual Laws” and the “Bridge Diagram” depict salvation as a purely individualistic transaction.⁴ According to Rah, since the salvation of individual souls is so highly valued in white evangelicalism, direct attention to social justice issues such as racial equality is sometimes viewed as a distraction.⁵

Second, white evangelicalism is characterized by *anti-intellectualism*. According to Noll’s research, there is a widespread assumption in evangelicalism that critical thinking hinders the propagation of the gospel, which is regarded as Christianity’s chief task.⁶ Noll suggests that a desire to take urgent action leads evangelicals to over-simplify intricate issues rather than engaging in careful, critical reflection.⁷ Institutionally speaking, evangelicals produce freestanding seminaries and private Bible colleges rather than research universities, which reinforces the disconnection between evangelicalism

³ Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 35. All Old Testament quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise noted. All New Testament quotations are my own translations unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Consult <http://www.campuscrusade.com/fourlawseng.htm> and http://www.intervarsity.org/evangelism/download.php?article_id=5805&version_id=7807 [accessed December 30, 2011].

⁵ Rah, 40-41.

⁶ Noll, 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

and critical reflection in the sciences and humanities.⁸ Evangelical anti-intellectualism is epitomized in the fundamentalist movement that emerged in the early twentieth century. Fundamentalism assumes that in order to be truly spiritual one has to extract oneself from the world and disregard secular wisdom.⁹

Third, white evangelicalism is characterized by *anti-structuralism*. According to Michael Emerson, white evangelicals' emphasis on personal accountability frequently leads them to deny that individual decisions are subject to social structures. Whatever is wrong in people's lives is ascribed to personal responsibility. Emerson's research suggests that white evangelicals often underestimate how legal patterns, institutional patterns, employment patterns, political patterns, and the like influence personal opportunities and choices. It further suggests that white evangelicals are often unwilling to accept explanations of social problems, including racial inequality, based on anything besides individual conduct.¹⁰ Theologically speaking, Tony Campolo and Michael Battle find that white evangelicals view sin "only in individualistic terms and it is hard to convince them that there is such a thing as structural, or systemic, evil."¹¹

Fourth, white evangelicalism is characterized by *consumerism*. According to Rah, consumerism can reduce both human beings and the spiritual life to commodities. One important manifestation of evangelical consumerism is the phenomenon of "church shopping." Rah's research suggests that white evangelicals tend to view the church as an

⁸ Ibid., 15-22.

⁹ Ibid., 123.

¹⁰ Michael Emerson, "Faith that Separates: Evangelicals and Black-White Relations," in *A Public Faith: Evangelicals and Civic Engagement*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 192-193.

¹¹ Tony Campolo and Michael Battle, *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 51.

institution that caters to their individual needs and spiritual preferences. They often choose the church that best suits their preferences and then change churches whenever another church better suits them. As a result, white evangelical preachers can easily fall into a pattern of simply trying to please worshippers in order to keep them coming to church. This can diminish a preacher's motivation to address difficult topics such as economic injustice and racial inequality.¹²

Fifth, white evangelicalism is characterized by *otherworldly focus*. According to Noll, white evangelicals frequently display “a fascination with heaven while slighting attention to earth, a devotion to the supernatural and a neglect of the natural.”¹³ Noll's research indicates that white evangelical focus on the eternal afterlife can undercut attention to racism and other social problems that are viewed as aspects of a transient world. Evidence of this is found in the popular evangelical hymn, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.” The refrain states, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.”¹⁴

In summary, white American evangelicalism is marked by individualism, anti-intellectualism, anti-structuralism, consumerism, and otherworldly focus. These cultural characteristics can lead white evangelicals to underestimate both the severity of racism and the urgent need to counteract it. Preachers should therefore keep these cultural characteristics in mind when broaching the topic of race in white evangelical churches. It is also helpful for preachers to have historical and sociological perspectives on white evangelicalism in relation to race.

¹² Rah, 63.

¹³ Noll, 32.

¹⁴ Wesley L. Forbis, ed., *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 320.

White Evangelicals and Race: Historical and Sociological Perspectives

White evangelicals have a checkered history with regard to race. At times, they have represented the vanguard of racial justice activism, especially during the nineteenth century movement to abolish slavery. For the most part, however, white evangelicals have been implicated in both subtle and egregious forms of racism throughout American history. I offer a concise historical sketch of white evangelicalism vis-à-vis black-white relations.

A Concise History of White Evangelicalism and Black-White Relations

The eighteenth century revivals that birthed the evangelical movement in the United States were arenas of both racial solidarity and racial oppression. On one hand, they subverted the prevailing racist social structures, especially slavery, by facilitating egalitarian interracial worship experiences. According to Peter Heltzel, this was the first “contact between whites and blacks that moved relations between the two races beyond the level of master and slave.”¹⁵ Many revivals featured what Ted A. Smith calls “acts of transgressive equality” wherein blacks and whites converted to Christianity at the same altar.¹⁶ Some white evangelicals viewed this phenomenon strictly in terms of otherworldly implications, but others, such as Hugh Bryan and John Hopkins, viewed the egalitarian logic of conversion as reason to condemn slavery.¹⁷

¹⁵ Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Jesus and Justice: Evangelicals, Race, and American Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 17.

¹⁶ Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 143.

¹⁷ Heltzel, 17.

Revivals therefore generated a stream within white evangelicalism that sought to abolish slavery. The early nineteenth century saw the rise of several prominent white evangelical abolitionists, including “Jonathan Blanchard, the founder of Wheaton College in Illinois; Charles G. Finney, the father of modern revivalism; and Asa Mahan, the first president of Oberlin College in Ohio.”¹⁸ Finney, for example, had a broad understanding of the Wesleyan notion of “sanctification” that encompassed both individual piety and social structures. When people came forward to profess faith at his revivals, he often encouraged them to join the abolitionist cause.¹⁹

On the other hand, revivals sometimes fortified the prevailing racist social structures including slavery. White evangelicals generally favored evangelizing enslaved African Americans without subverting the system of slavery. Countless white Christians in the south owned slaves, and many of them took the opportunity at revivals to preach on the New Testament injunction for slaves to obey their masters (e.g., Eph 6:5). When revivals concluded, blacks and whites invariably returned to life amid slavery, an institution that divided them until the Civil War eventuated its demise in the 1860s.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, W. E. B. Du Bois and other African Americans protested Jim Crow and other social structures that oppressed people of color. White evangelicals, however, “generally held that there was equality of opportunity” for all people during this time period.²⁰ White evangelical revivalist Dwight Moody segregated his revivals, marking a pivotal regression in white evangelical

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹ Ibid. For more on Finney, consult Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures*.

²⁰ Emerson and Smith, 41.

relations with African Americans.²¹ Moreover, between 1880 and 1930, approximately five thousand African Americans were lynched, often with the endorsement of white evangelicals. Many white evangelicals viewed lynching as a holy “sacrifice” that could “propitiate the sin of blackness” and redeem Christian civilization in America.²²

Consequently, when Ida B. Wells embarked on a courageous crusade to end lynching, she encountered firm resistance from white evangelicals.²³

During the Civil Rights Era, white evangelicals sometimes criticized personal racial prejudice but seldom condemned the racist social structures that the Civil Rights Movement sought to upend. In fact, many white evangelical churches became strongholds for segregationist ideology, adopting policies that excluded African Americans from church membership and prohibited them from worshipping in white evangelical sanctuaries. For example, in response to the desegregation of public schools in 1954, many Southern Baptist churches “started their own Christian schools designed explicitly for whites alone.”²⁴

Although white evangelical history encompasses some robust antiracist efforts, white evangelicalism is implicated in numerous ways in the racist regime throughout American history. According to Heltzel, “from slavery to segregation, white evangelicals have often been blind to their role in perpetuating racism and often justified it through

²¹ Heltzel, 42.

²² Ibid., 37, 39.

²³ Ibid., 42.

²⁴ Campolo and Battle, 49-50.

conservative evangelical theologies.”²⁵ Sociological research suggests that this trend continues today.

Modern-Day White Evangelical Perspectives on Race and Racism

Sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith have conducted extensive research on modern-day white evangelical perspectives on race, in part through hundreds of interviews with self-identified white evangelicals. Their findings suggest that white evangelicals view the American race problem in one or more of the following ways: (1) prejudiced individuals that cause hostile and sinful interracial relationships; (2) people of color attempting to make racism a group issue or social structural problem when in reality racism consists of a few prejudiced individuals; (3) a fabrication of self-interested groups such as people of color, liberals, the media, or the government.²⁶ Emerson and Smith’s research indicates that white evangelicals tend to individualize, and thereby minimize, America’s race problem. In fact, they find that white evangelicals are “more

²⁵ Heltzel, 204.

²⁶ Emerson and Smith, 74. I rely heavily on Emerson and Smith’s work because it represents the most extensive and persuasive sociological research to date on modern-day white evangelical perspectives on race. Sociologists Nancy J. Davis and Robert V. Robinson conducted an earlier study that found no evidence that orthodox Christian belief results in more conservative understandings of black-white inequality. Nancy J. Davis and Robert V. Robinson, “Are the Rumors of War Exaggerated? Religious Orthodoxy and Moral Progressivism in America,” *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 3 (1996): 756-787. More recently, however, the sociological research of Penny Edgell and Eric Tranby corroborated Emerson and Smith’s finding that white evangelicalism shapes the conservative racial views of its adherents. Edgell and Tranby state, “Conservative Protestants are more likely than others to oppose government intervention to alleviate African American inequality and less likely than others to believe that charities should do more to help African Americans... While Davis and Robinson... find that religious conservatism among whites is not related to attitudes towards African American inequality, we clearly find that it is.” Penny Edgell and Eric Tranby, “Religious Influences on Understandings of Racial Inequality in the United States,” *Social Problems* 54, no. 2 (2007): 281; cf., 265. Intriguingly, Edgell and Tranby also find that the conservative racial views of the white evangelical community are driven largely by women evangelicals and more-educated evangelicals. Edgell and Tranby, 279-280, 283. Victor J. Hinojosa and Jerry Z. Park’s sociological research further corroborates Emerson and Smith’s finding that white evangelicalism shapes the conservative, individualistic views of race often displayed by its adherents. Victor J. Hinojosa and Jerry Z. Park, “Religion and the Paradox of Racial Inequality Attitudes,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 2 (2004): 229-238.

individualistic and less structural in their explanations of the black-white socioeconomic gap than other whites.”²⁷

According to Emerson, white evangelicals generally operate within a “Ku Klux Klan model of racism,” meaning they understand racism as deliberate and hostile prejudice against people of color perpetrated by a few radical individuals.²⁸ This perpetrator perspective leads many white evangelicals to overlook ordinary racism, such as socioeconomic patterns that disadvantage people of color. Emerson and Smith’s research suggests that while most white evangelicals criticize the Ku Klux Klan, few insist that socioeconomic inequality between racial groups is immoral and must be counteracted.²⁹ It further indicates that most white evangelicals assume that the vast majority of whites are not racially prejudiced. Thus, when asked about America’s race problem, white evangelicals often accuse people of color of exaggerating it.³⁰

Emerson, Smith, and David Sikkink find that “a pivotal and dearly-held assumption for a large majority of [white evangelicals] is that all Americans have equal opportunity.”³¹ Since white evangelicals assume America constitutes a genuine meritocracy, they tend to interpret black-white inequality as resulting from either inadequate motivation on the part of African Americans or deficiencies in black culture

²⁷ Michael O. Emerson, Christian Smith, and David Sikkink, “Equal in Christ, But Not in the World: White Conservative Protestants and Explanations of Black-White Inequality,” *Social Problems* 46, no. 3 (1999): 413. Hinojosa and Park’s research confirms that “evangelical Protestants are more individualistic in their interpretations of [racial] inequality than the nonaffiliated.” Hinojosa and Park, 236.

²⁸ Emerson, 188.

²⁹ Emerson and Smith, 160.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 80-82.

³¹ Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink, 407.

such as family breakdown.³² The majority of white evangelicals in the General Social Survey of 1996 said that black people are poor “because they lack sufficient motivation.”³³ In light of critical race theory, when white evangelicals claim that racial inequality results from flawed people of color and not a flawed social system, they exhibit unconscious racism.

According to Emerson and Smith, white evangelical individualism produces “a tendency to be ahistorical, to not grasp fully how history has an influence on the present.”³⁴ For example, white evangelicals generally do not connect modern-day black ghettos to nineteenth century plantations, nor do they view current economic disparities between whites and blacks as a vestige of chattel slavery. Rather, Rah observes that white evangelicals often regard the notion of “social structural racism” as an aspect of a liberal agenda.³⁵ As a result, white evangelical churches frequently adopt a “politics of resignation” with regard to race. Whereas many white mainline denominations have had antiracism initiatives for decades, most white evangelical groups have not adopted such initiatives.³⁶

Rah suggests that a focus on evangelism is another reason white evangelicals often downplay the cause of racial justice. For many white evangelicals, anything that diverts energy from evangelism must be de-emphasized. Moreover, white evangelical

³² Emerson and Smith, 109. Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink, 407-410.

³³ Emerson and Smith, 94-96. White evangelicals preferred this explanation to three other choices: discrimination, lack of access to education, and less in-born ability to learn.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁵ Rah, 41. This tendency reflects a longstanding political alliance between many white evangelicals and the Republican Party, though evangelicals are by no means politically monolithic. John C. Green, “Evangelicals and Civic Engagement: An Overview,” in *A Public Faith*, 13.

³⁶ Campolo and Battle, 48.

churches sometimes employ evangelistic methods that reinforce racism. For example, many white American evangelical churches operate, implicitly or explicitly, in accordance with the Homogenous Unit Principle of church growth that was popularized during the Church Growth Movement of the late twentieth century.³⁷ The Homogeneous Unit Principle espouses that racially homogeneous churches grow faster because people prefer to attend church with people who are like them. According to Rah, “De facto segregation perpetuated by the church growth movement [yields] disenfranchisement of nonwhites from the larger evangelical movement.”³⁸ In this case, not only is evangelism prioritized over racial equality and reconciliation but racial segregation is upheld for the sake of evangelistic effectiveness.

According to Emerson and Smith, most white evangelicals avoid “rocking the boat” on racial issues, instead choosing to live within the confines of a racist culture.³⁹ One reason is that white evangelicals usually support the American system of free market capitalism and the Protestant work ethic and are unwilling to reexamine or nuance these ideals in light of racial injustice.⁴⁰ Another reason is that many white evangelicals inhabit social worlds that are racially homogeneous. Several of Emerson and Smith’s interviewees acknowledged their isolation from people of color. Critical race theory suggests that when whites encircle whites, the transparency phenomenon takes over and white experience appears normative and normal, which can cause whites to underestimate the very real struggles of people of color within a racist social system.

³⁷ Consult Emerson and Smith, 150-151.

³⁸ Rah, 98.

³⁹ Emerson and Smith, 21. Notable exceptions include Sojourners and The Christian Community Development Association. Consult Heltzel, 160-202.

⁴⁰ Emerson and Smith, 22.

In summary, Emerson and Smith's research suggests that white evangelicals deny the reality of social structural racism, assume a meritocracy, and hold people of color responsible for racial inequality, thereby exacerbating racism.⁴¹ As Eric Tranby and Douglas Hartmann contend, "Individualism not only blinds white evangelicals to structural inequalities involving race, but it also assigns blame to those who are disadvantaged by race and normalizes and naturalizes cultural practices, beliefs, and norms that privilege white Americans over others."⁴² Even white evangelical solutions to racism can paradoxically serve to reinforce it.

White Evangelical Solutions to Racism

According to Emerson, white evangelicals assume that transforming individuals is the way to rectify social problems. Specifically, many white evangelicals affirm the "miracle motif," which states that social problems are automatically solved as more and more people convert to Christianity.⁴³ A survey conducted in 2000 by the University of Akron showed that seventy-three percent of evangelical laypersons agreed with the statement: "If enough people are brought to Christ, social ills will take care of

⁴¹ Ibid., 112.

⁴² Eric Tranby and Douglas Hartmann, "Critical Whiteness Theories and the Evangelical 'Race Problem': Extending Emerson and Smith's *Divided by Faith*," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 3 (2008): 354.

⁴³ Emerson, 197. Consult also Jack Rogers, *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001), 23.

themselves.”⁴⁴ As one white evangelical told Emerson and Smith, “If everybody was a Christian, there wouldn’t be a race problem. We’d all be the same.”⁴⁵

Given the white evangelical assumption that transforming individuals is the way to transform society, it is no surprise that white evangelicals rarely propose solutions to racism that transcend the individual and interpersonal spheres. According to Emerson and Smith’s findings, white evangelicals commonly propose the following solutions to racism: “become a Christian, love your individual neighbors, establish a cross-race friendship, give individuals the right to pursue jobs and individual justice without discrimination by other individuals, and ask forgiveness of individuals one has wronged.”⁴⁶ Ultimately, white evangelicals simply desire to be color-blind people in a color-blind society.⁴⁷

According to Emerson and Smith, racism is like a building with faulty design and white evangelicals are trying to improve the quality of the bricks. Part of the reason is that changing the design itself would exact considerable cost from whites. Emerson and Smith find that white evangelicals are averse to rearranging their lives for the sake of racial justice and reconciliation. Notice that the solutions to racism enumerated above omit financial and cultural sacrifice on the part of whites, instead maintaining “the non-costly status quo.”⁴⁸ Here is interest convergence writ large. White evangelicals propose

⁴⁴ Green, 15-16.

⁴⁵ Emerson and Smith, 117.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

solutions to racism that maintain white privilege. This raises a key question for preachers: what does it take to change the minds of white evangelicals about race?

Changing the Minds of White Evangelicals

To my knowledge, there are no recent studies on how to change the minds of white evangelicals about race. However, there are testimonials available in which white evangelicals recount how they changed their minds on other topics. For example, Alan F. Johnson has edited *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals*. In this volume, twenty-seven white evangelicals, almost all of whom are American, recount how they changed their minds from thinking women should not serve as leaders in the church to thinking women should serve as leaders in the church. In *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church*, Jack Rogers, a white American evangelical leader in the Presbyterian Church (USA), recounts how he changed his mind from thinking same-sex sexuality is a sin to thinking same-sex sexuality is not a sin.

To employ these sources in a discussion of race is not to imply that the issues of women in leadership and same-sex sexuality are parallel to the issue of race. Instead, it is to regard these sources as case studies for learning how to change the minds of white evangelicals in general, so that ideas gleaned from them can be applied to the specific homiletic task of changing white evangelical minds about race. The foregoing sources suggest that changing the minds of white evangelicals encompasses three components: biblical reasoning, affective appeal, and the facilitation of transformative personal experiences.

Biblical Reasoning

Since the Bible is the integrating center of white evangelical thought, preachers can change the minds of white evangelicals by offering fresh biblical perspectives. Noll notes that evangelical attachment to the Bible can be more reverential than intellectual, yet evangelical minds can be renewed through serious reconsideration of scripture.⁴⁹ The white evangelical tendency toward anti-intellectualism and over-simplification of intricate issues can be subverted through deep, detailed engagement with the Bible.

When contemplating ethical or social issues, white evangelicals seldom accede to philosophical, scientific, or historical arguments that they cannot justify biblically. Consider, for example, how white evangelical Alice Mathews approached the question of women in leadership: “Feminist theologians often use women’s experience as the starting point for their theological work. As an orthodox Christian anchored in the Bible, I cannot use my or other women’s experience as my starting point. Scripture must always be my starting point.”⁵⁰ The single most effective way for preachers to change the minds of white evangelical congregants is through persuasive biblical reasoning.

The stories in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership* read more like stories about “how I changed my mind about what the Bible says about women in leadership.” Contributor after contributor relates how in-depth Bible study changed his or her mind. For example, Gilbert Bilezikian reports that he changed his mind following

⁴⁹ Noll, 250.

⁵⁰ Alice Mathews, “How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals*, ed. Alan F. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 162.

“a long process of arduous and reverent study of Scripture.”⁵¹ Bill Hybels says he changed his mind after he and his church’s elders completed “an intensive, eighteen-month scriptural study of the issue of women in leadership.”⁵²

Contributors cite myriad biblical texts that facilitated their change of mind, including Gn 1:27, Ex 15:20, Nm 12:2, Proverbs 31, Jl 2:28-29, Lk 8:1-2, Lk 10:38-42, Acts 2:17, Acts 18:24-26, Romans 16, 1 Cor 7:4, 1 Cor 11:11-12, Gal 3:28, Eph 5:21, and Phil 4:2-3.⁵³ Several argue on the basis of Rom 12:6-8, 1 Cor 12:7-11, and Eph 4:11-13 that the Holy Spirit dispenses “spiritual gifts” without regard to gender, and therefore women with gifts of preaching and leadership should be empowered to employ them in service of the church.⁵⁴ Women leaders in the Bible such as Deborah, Esther, and Abigail proved inspirational as well.⁵⁵

This is not to suggest, however, that preachers can change the minds of white evangelicals through a mere exercise in proof-texting. Several contributors explain how nuanced interpretation of certain passages yielded new perspectives. For example, multiple contributors revised their interpretation of the pronouncement to Eve in Gn 3:16: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Instead of viewing this arrangement as God’s desire, they began to view it as a result of humanity’s fall into

⁵¹ Gilbert Bilezikian, “Renouncing the Love of Power for the Power of Love,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 49.

⁵² Lynne and Bill Hybels, “Evangelicals and Gender Equality,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 108.

⁵³ Consult, for example, Stanley N. Gundry, “From *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers to Woman Be Free: My Story*,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 96.

⁵⁴ Consult, for example, Mathews, 161.

⁵⁵ Ruth Haley Barton, “How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 43.

sin, indicating that patriarchy reflects the sinful state of humanity.⁵⁶ Additionally, multiple contributors note that the Greek word κεφαλή translated “head” in 1 Cor 11:3 and Eph 5:23 can also be translated “source,” as in the head of a river. Therefore, they read these texts not as commendations of patriarchy but as echoes of the creation story in Genesis 2 where the woman came from the man.⁵⁷

For several contributors, biblical study of the issue of women in leadership involved not only nuanced interpretations of certain passages but also overarching hermeneutic maneuvers. By “hermeneutic,” I mean a method of interpreting scripture as a whole. For example, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. interprets “the female subordination texts” and the “slave subordination texts” as parallel and rejects them both on the basis of “the spirit of the Bible.”⁵⁸ Stanley Gundry recounts how he came to understand the Bible “less atomistically and more wholistically...a shift that would profoundly affect how [he] understood the texts related to the women’s issue.”⁵⁹

Hermeneutic maneuvers allowed many contributors to change their minds about 1 Tm 2:12, which prohibits women to exercise authority over men, and 1 Cor 14:34-35, which commands women to be silent in church. They now regard these texts not as timeless, universal principles but as reflecting particular local situations in which the

⁵⁶ For example, consult John and Nancy Ortberg, “Beyond Gender Stereotypes,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 180.

⁵⁷ For example, consult Bonnie Wurzbacher, “Women in Leadership—A High Calling Indeed,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 263.

⁵⁸ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “How I Changed My Mind about Women in Church Leadership,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 192. Plantinga prioritizes broad patterns in the Bible over smaller, localized commands.

⁵⁹ Gundry, 98-99. Consult also I. Howard Marshall, “The Gospel Does Not Change But Our Perception of It May Need Revision,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 146-147.

leadership of certain women was causing a problem.⁶⁰ For example, Jim Plueddemann states, “The Bible is filled with universal moral and ethical principles. Yet where Scripture seems to contradict itself—as in the command for women to be silent and also to prophesy with covered head—the principle must not be universal but instead must be intended for a specific or cultural situation.”⁶¹

In *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*, Rogers relates that his change of mind about same-sex sexuality resulted mainly from Bible study. He declares, “Studying [same-sex sexuality] in depth for the first time brought me to a new understanding of the biblical texts...I wasn’t swayed by the culture or pressured by academic colleagues. I changed my mind initially by going back to the Bible and taking seriously its central message for our lives.”⁶² Rogers indicates that his change of mind involved a hermeneutic bent toward the “central message” of the Bible rather than the “supporting material.”⁶³ He also embraced nuanced interpretations of certain biblical passages dealing with same-sex sexuality, such as Rom 1:18-32.⁶⁴

This is not to imply that biblical reasoning is the sole factor in changing evangelical minds. Other factors are involved. For example, Ronald Sider and Alan Johnson cite biblical feminism in the nineteenth century evangelical movement as part of

⁶⁰ For example, consult Marshall, 145 and Ronald J. Sider, “From Soft Patriarchy to Mutual Submission,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 229.

⁶¹ Carol and James Plueddemann, “How I Changed My Mind about Women in Church Leadership: Transforming Moments in Our Pilgrimage,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 205.

⁶² Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 15.

⁶³ Rogers, *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*, 62.

⁶⁴ Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*, 66-87.

their inspiration for affirming women in ecclesiastical leadership.⁶⁵ Additionally, many contributors cite personal experiences with impressive female Christian leaders as an important factor in their change of mind, a theme to which I return below. The contributors are clear, however, that without biblical warrant for women in leadership, their minds would not have been changed. Johnson, for example, clarifies that he changed his mind about women in leadership “without any Scripture twisting or abandoning of biblical authority.”⁶⁶ Robert Fryling explains that his altered perspective on women in leadership “made biblical sense.”⁶⁷

Perhaps the most important homiletic insight for changing white evangelical minds about race is: *the preacher’s approach to race must make biblical sense*. Insights on race from critical race theory, sociology, and history will mean little to white evangelicals without biblical warrant for racial justice and reconciliation. Even theological perspectives on race may be unpersuasive if not grounded in the Bible. In approaching race via biblical reasoning, it may be effective for preachers to enumerate verses throughout the breadth of scripture that support racial justice and reconciliation. However, preachers should also offer nuanced interpretations of biblical passages that speak to issues of race. Preachers must also adopt a hermeneutic bent toward racial justice and reconciliation. By employing this hermeneutic consistently, preachers can slowly impart it to the congregation so that laypersons learn to read the Bible with racial justice in mind.

⁶⁵ Sider, 224, 228-231.

⁶⁶ Alan F. Johnson, “My Journey from ‘Male Only Leadership’ to ‘Biblical Gender Equality,’” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 123.

⁶⁷ Robert and Alice Fryling, “Joy in Partnership,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 85.

Affective Appeal

A second factor in changing the minds of white evangelicals is affective appeal. In many ways, white evangelicalism is more a religion of the heart than a religion of the mind. In keeping with revivalist heritage, many white evangelical churches still hold emotionally charged worship services that end with a stirring “altar call” or “invitation to discipleship.” Throughout white evangelical history, the preacher’s emotional appeal, or *pathos*, has been a critical component of homiletic persuasion.

White evangelical testimonials confirm that emotion remains an important component in changing white evangelical minds. For example, Ruth Haley Barton’s biblical investigation of women in church leadership impacted her affectively as well as mentally. She reports that her “heart was stirred by women in the Bible such as Abigail, Deborah, Huldah, Esther, and Priscilla, who made an impact for God’s kingdom as they acted in courageous ways that even now strike us as outside the normal ‘woman’s role.’”⁶⁸ Additionally, Fryling describes his change of mind in terms of a “change of heart.” As he began to view God’s call to leadership as a call to humility, he began to accept women in leadership roles as well.⁶⁹ Similarly, Rogers says his change of mind on same-sex sexuality involved a “change of heart.”⁷⁰

John Stackhouse indicates that his “conversion” to gender egalitarianism could not have happened on the basis of reason alone. He declares, “I needed to *feel* something of the *pain* of patriarchy.” According to Stackhouse, men need to hear from women what it feels like to be ignored, demeaned, or interrupted by men. He summons men to seek

⁶⁸ Barton, 40.

⁶⁹ Robert and Alice Fryling, 86-87.

⁷⁰ Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*, 15.

deep empathy with women who suffer daily under patriarchal oppression, for only when men *feel* how important gender egalitarianism is will we be compelled to “undergo the strain of actually changing our minds.”⁷¹

These case studies suggest that preachers can change evangelical minds about race by stirring evangelical hearts about race. While avoiding emotional manipulation or coercion of listeners, preachers can offer appropriate affective appeal that corresponds to the emotionally laden nature of race. Specifically, preachers can help white evangelicals empathize with the psychological, social, and physical pain that people of color have experienced throughout American history and continue to experience today. Preachers’ biblical reasoning about race can also appeal to listeners’ affective as well as mental faculties. Preachers could proliferate rational arguments about race, but only when white evangelicals *feel* the devastating effects of racism and the urgent necessity of racial equality and racial reconciliation will they be compelled to alter their mindsets and lifestyles accordingly.

Facilitating Transformative Personal Experiences

A third component in changing the minds of white evangelicals is the facilitation of transformative personal experiences. Personal experiences are formative for all people, and white evangelicals are no exception. Although white evangelicals theoretically de-emphasize personal experience as a theological authority, white evangelical testimonials suggest that transformative personal experiences play a significant role in changing white evangelical minds.

⁷¹ John G. Stackhouse, Jr., “How to Produce an Egalitarian Man,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 240-241 (emphasis in the original).

Some contributors to *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership* recount personal experiences with female Christian leaders—from mothers to Sunday school teachers—that inspired their search for a deeper biblical understanding of women’s roles in the church and in the home.⁷² For example, Roger Nicole recounts how a talented female pastor with an effective ministry impacted his views.⁷³ John Ortberg recounts an experience in graduate school with a remarkable female teacher named Roberta Hestenes that led him to question the idea that women should not teach or exercise authority over men.⁷⁴ Stackhouse reports that long before he sought arguments against patriarchy, he encountered “female Christians who were the spiritual equal of men.”⁷⁵

For other contributors, personal experiences ministering alongside female Christian leaders confirmed their previously determined biblical egalitarianism. For example, Howard Marshall asserts that his “experience of working with godly women in ministry, teaching, and leadership has been ample confirmation that to exclude them from these roles is indefensible.”⁷⁶ Fryling states that his biblical egalitarian views were validated by his experiences working with women in Christian ministry.⁷⁷

⁷² Alan F. Johnson, “Introduction,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 16. John H. Armstrong, “Lessons My Mother Taught Me without Trying,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 23.

⁷³ Roger Nicole, “How the Bible Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership,” in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, 165-166.

⁷⁴ John and Nancy Ortberg, 178.

⁷⁵ Stackhouse, 238.

⁷⁶ Marshall, 146.

⁷⁷ Robert and Alice Fryling, 85.

Similarly, Rogers recounts personal experiences with gay and lesbian couples that influenced his perspective on same-sex sexuality. For example, he tells about attending a dinner party with several gay and lesbian couples, many of which had enjoyed monogamous relationships for over twenty years. He commends their remarkable commitment to a single partner “despite all of the roadblocks that society and the church put in their way.” He also tells of a gay couple that adopted special-needs children whom many heterosexual couples had overlooked when pursuing adoption.⁷⁸ While Rogers insists that the Bible was the main force in changing his mind about same-sex sexuality, his personal experiences with gay and lesbian couples clearly contributed to his altered mindset.

These case studies suggest that preachers who seek to change white evangelical minds about race can facilitate potentially transformative experiences with people of color. They can encourage white evangelicals to racially integrate their daily lives, warning them of the dangers of the transparency phenomenon. They can set an example by building personal and collegial relationships with clergy of different races. Preachers can also facilitate transformative personal experiences by arranging joint gatherings between white evangelical churches and churches of other races for the purpose of nurturing mutual understanding and equitable, harmonious interracial relationships. Building relationships with people of color will not solve the problem of racism, but it can aid in changing the hearts and minds of white evangelicals on the subject of race.

⁷⁸ Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*, 102.

What Preachers Can Expect After Changing Their Minds about Race

For white evangelical preachers, changing one's mind about race marks a profound shift in personal identity and outlook. When white evangelical preachers commit to seeking racial equality and reconciliation, they can expect to undergo both personal and vocational transitions. Following the homiletic scholarship of John McClure, I suggest that white evangelical preachers who change their minds about race will likely undergo a process involving risk, disorientation, and renewal.⁷⁹ They may also incite controversy when preaching to the same congregation as before.

First, white evangelical commitment to racial equality and reconciliation involves *risk*. Preachers will feel the presence of people of color in their lives and in society and will respond with a “decisive, existential caring.” Gripped by a sense of obligation to pursue racial justice, preachers will sense the perils of subverting the racist status quo. The attempt to disavow white privilege will feel particularly precarious because white privilege affords many benefits, and rejecting it can attract criticism. Preachers may even feel traitorous given the racialization process that has subconsciously persuaded whites to maintain allegiance to the white race. During this phase of the transformation process, preachers may be tempted to disavow their newfound convictions about race.

Second, white evangelical commitment to racial equality and reconciliation involves *disorientation*. The preacher will probably notice that his or her theology, biblical interpretation, historical perspective, political reflection, and personal habits of speech and action require revision. The preacher may feel that his or her identity is being compromised for the benefit of people of color. This is what McClure describes as the

⁷⁹ McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 133-135 and “Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence,” 111-112.

feeling of being “under erasure.”⁸⁰ Additionally, preachers may find that acute awareness of unconscious racism, unintentional racism, and social structural racism makes them feel more racist than before. In this phase of the transformation process, it is helpful for preachers to find an ally in the struggle against racism who can provide encouragement, accountability, and stability amid such an intense reordering of self.

Third, white evangelical commitment to racial equality and reconciliation involves *renewal*. The preacher will assemble a new identity as an antiracist white person amid a society and ecclesiastical culture permeated by unconscious racism. He or she will find new language, new theological emphases, new biblical interpretations, and new habits of life and ministry that accord with the ideals of racial equality and reconciliation. Developing meaningful personal and professional relationships with people of color will be a high priority. Furthering one’s education on race will be another. Ultimately, the antiracist white evangelical preacher will find new ways to understand his- or herself in relation to people of color and in relation to other whites.

When white American evangelical preachers change their minds about race and pursue racial equality and reconciliation, they may also encounter significant vocational challenges in leading the same congregation as before. Rah once preached to a group of evangelical students at Wheaton College. He spoke about white privilege, the dangers of colonialism in Christian missions, and the need for white Christian missionaries to have nonwhite mentors. In response, one student created a website that referred to the sermon as “some insanity at Wheaton College.” He posted a picture of Karl Marx and put Rah’s name beneath it, and whenever someone clicked on the picture of Marx, excerpts of

⁸⁰ McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 22. He borrows the term from French philosopher Jacques Derrida.

Rah’s sermon played while the Russian national anthem sounded in the background.⁸¹

White evangelical preachers who change their minds about race and preach their newfound convictions may also face ridicule and political criticism.

More likely, however, they will face blank stares of baffled disapproval. In the 1990s, Bill McCartney, founder of Promise Keepers, toured white evangelical churches across the United States, calling for racial reconciliation. At the end of each presentation, he reports, “there was no response—nothing. No applause. No smiles. In city after city, in church after church, it was the same story—wild enthusiasm while I was being introduced, followed by a morgue-like chill as I stepped away from the microphone. It was as if God had commissioned me to single-handedly burst everyone’s bubble.”⁸² McCartney supposes that a major reason for the subsequent decline in attendance at Promise Keepers stadium events was their teachings about race.⁸³

White evangelical preachers who change their minds about race may also garner “morgue-like” responses from their congregations. They may feel at times that their preaching ministry is “bursting the bubble” of white superiority and privilege, which are fiercely cherished in white evangelical churches, even if subconsciously. But as the preacher preaches with persuasive biblical reasoning and appropriate affective appeal, working to facilitate transformative personal encounters between white evangelicals and people of color, there is hope for personal and social transformation toward racial equality and reconciliation.

⁸¹ Rah, 163.

⁸² Bill McCartney, with David Halbrook, *Sold Out: Becoming Man Enough to Make a Difference* (Waco: Word Publishing, 1997), 135. Quoted in Emerson, 190.

⁸³ McCartney, 136.

In the following chapters, I will pick up once again these key threads regarding changing the minds of white evangelicals. In particular, I hope to build a persuasive biblical argument that incorporates race into the atoning work of Christ. I also hope to establish a homiletical model within white evangelical congregational life that incorporates both affective appeals and genuine transformative encounters between victims and perpetrators of racism in order to facilitate racial reconciliation.

Chapter III

A Theology of Racial Reconciliation: Racial Atonement in Ephesians 2:11-22

Chapter one employed critical race theory to describe the racial context of preaching. Chapter two discussed white American evangelicalism in relation to race. This chapter employs the Bible to establish a theology for preaching about race. The goal of the dissertation is to equip white American evangelical preachers with a homiletic for racial reconciliation. In order for such preachers to counter racism, it is crucial to develop an authoritative biblical norm for racial reconciliation to which preachers can appeal.

Biblical and expository methods of preaching, including verse-by-verse and *lectio continua*, are prominent in the white evangelical tradition because white evangelicals hold high views of biblical authority. Such views are often expressed in terms of “inerrancy” or “infallibility.” In accordance with this tradition, I assume an approach to the Bible that is infallibilist in orientation yet incorporates modern forms of biblical criticism, including the historical critical method.¹ According to Ted Peters, to affirm biblical infallibility means that we trust scripture “to keep us on the track of truth, that the Bible will not ultimately mislead us. [It] by no means commits us to affirming that every sentence or proposition or allusion is error-free. Rather, in the very act of employing the

¹ For more on evangelical doctrines of biblical authority, consult *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority, and Hermeneutics*, eds. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004); *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*, eds. Jack B. Rogers and Donald McKim (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999).

scripture in a criterial role we are implicitly affirming that we trust its reliability to impart the truth of the gospel.”²

Another hallmark of white American evangelicalism is a focus on salvation. Evangelical soteriology affirms that Jesus Christ died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Evangelical preachers often highlight Jesus’ atoning death and invite congregants to respond with repentance and faith in order to receive salvation. This theological emphasis is dramatized in the “invitation to discipleship” or “altar call” which follows the sermon in many evangelical liturgies.

A homiletic geared toward white American evangelical churches should account for a high view of biblical authority and a soteriology focused on Jesus’ death as atoning sacrifice. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the intersection of biblical interpretation, race, and theology through a detailed homiletic exegesis of Eph 2:11-22. This pericope is suitable for preaching about race in white evangelical congregations because it associates racial reconciliation with Christ’s atoning death. I will argue that Eph 2:11-22—where atonement is both vertical (i.e., God-to-human) and horizontal (i.e., human-to-human)—summons preachers to elucidate the interracial dimensions of Christ’s atonement.

This chapter will proceed in the following manner. First, it will propose a method of biblical interpretation for the homiletic task. Second, it will argue that race is an appropriate concept for analyzing differences between social groups in the New Testament. Third, it will discuss some pitfalls and possibilities of preaching Christ’s atonement. Fourth, it will present a homiletic interpretation of Eph 2:11-22. Finally, it

² Ted Peters, *God—The World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 67.

will explain the implications of adopting Eph 2:11-22 as a theological paradigm for preaching racial reconciliation.

Biblical Hermeneutics for Preaching

Since the dissertation aims to inform and improve preaching, it must employ a methodology of biblical interpretation appropriate to the preaching task. Boykin Sanders observes how developments in biblical studies have shaped and even dictated many homiletic discussions, often to the detriment of preaching. He argues that in many quarters preaching has come to “signify duties and strategies unrelated to the gospel, thanks to critical-historical scholarship.”³ Sanders highlights the importance of theological biblical interpretation in preaching. Theological biblical interpretation is not necessarily opposed to historical or literary approaches, but it moves beyond them. Brian Daley insists that “modern historical criticism—including the criticism of biblical texts—is *methodologically* atheistic.”⁴ As theologians, preachers must involve God in the process of determining what scripture has to say to today’s Christian communities.⁵

In this vein, Sandra Schneiders proposes an integrative approach to scripture that employs historical and literary exegesis but culminates in a theological act of interpretation. Schneiders maintains that scripture is a locus of modern-day divine

³ Boykin Sanders, “Biblical Criticism and the Art of Preaching: What in the World is Preaching the Gospel?” in *Born to Preach: Essays in Honor of the Ministry of Henry and Ella Mitchell*, ed. Samuel K. Roberts (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2000), 10.

⁴ Brian E. Daley, S.J., “Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?” in *The Art of Interpreting Scripture*, eds. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 72 (emphasis in the original).

⁵ According to Amy-Jill Levine, “To suggest that the text cannot take on new meanings but must be interpreted only in the context of its original setting dooms both the church and the synagogue, because this argument precludes people from finding their own meaning in the text. Theologically speaking, a fully historical focus threatens to put the Holy Spirit out of business.” Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 116.

revelation through which God discloses God's word for the contemporary situation. According to Schneiders, historical critical exegesis is necessary but insufficient for theological interpretation, and piety is helpful, not hazardous.⁶ The interpreter looks behind the text, within the text, and in front of the text in order to appropriate "the meaning that the text projects" for the purpose of transforming lives.

The ultimate step in Schneiders's hermeneutic is "critical existential interpretation," a process of spiritually integrating the text into daily life.⁷ Here, there is room for the creative forms of biblical interpretation often advocated in African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American homiletics. For example, in James Harris's African American homiletic, imagination is an "interpretative tool" for expanding the meaning of the biblical text beyond the author's intent.⁸ In Eunjoo Kim's Asian American homiletic, biblical interpretation is an art of meditation that seeks metaphors for linking scripture with the congregation's experience.⁹ In Justo and Catherine González's Hispanic American homiletic, typological biblical interpretation is employed to link the congregation's experiences with the experiences of God's people in the biblical record.¹⁰ Following Schneiders, this chapter will offer historical and literary analysis of Eph 2:11-22 en route to an integrative theological interpretation that places Eph 2:11-22 in the context of twenty-first century life in the United States.

⁶ Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 3, 42, 60-61.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 157, 172ff.

⁸ James Henry Harris, *The Word Made Plain: The Power and Promise of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 106-107.

⁹ Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), 98.

¹⁰ Justo L. González and Catherine G. González, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994), 101.

Race and the New Testament

Eph 2:11-22 addresses differences between Jews and Gentiles.¹¹ Historians often assume that social groups such as these should be called ethnic groups rather than races. Using the modern concept of race to analyze first century social groups is widely regarded as anachronistic. According to Denise Buell, “The arguments against using race rely on a definition of race as clear, immutable, grounded in biology, and especially indicated by skin color.”¹²

Buell contends, on the other hand, that the concept of race is inexact, malleable, socially constructed, and indicated not only by skin color but also by cultural factors. She asserts that neither race nor ethnicity has an exact analogue in antiquity, so the concepts are equally anachronistic. She also observes that definitions of “race” and “ethnicity” change in different contexts, revealing these concepts to be social creations rather than timeless realities.¹³ Buell therefore asserts that “early Christian texts used culturally available understandings of human difference” which we can examine in terms of modern concepts including race.¹⁴

Buell is rightly suspicious of how ethnicity and religion, which are modern concepts, are often viewed as unproblematic for analysis of the first century, while the modern category of race has become “off-limits.”¹⁵ Considering race “off-limits” is

¹¹ Consult Matt Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

¹² Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

especially questionable in light of Gay Byron's research, which has shown that early Christians used "blackness" and "Ethiopia/Ethiopians" as symbols for sin and evil.¹⁶ Modern interpretations of early Christianity often assume that race and ethnicity connote a fixed aspect of identity, while religion is considered voluntary. However, perceiving race and ethnicity as fluid concepts permits a different understanding of the relationship between religion and race/ethnicity in the New Testament.¹⁷ The value of employing any modern category, such as race, ethnicity, or religion, "lies in the modern context for and consequences of historical interpretation."¹⁸ Concern for the modern context of racism motivates preachers and homileticians to utilize the concept of race in interpreting ancient scriptures.

Moreover, in terms of theological anthropology, racism is a key manifestation of the tragically structured human condition. According to Edward Farley, human reality exists in multiple spheres wherein the circumstances of wellbeing are always intertwined with circumstances of limitation, suffering, competition, and frustration.¹⁹ The "interhuman sphere" is the deepest, most basic level of human reality, which Farley defines as "the sphere of face-to-face relation."²⁰ Since human beings have different needs, aims, and desires that are intrinsically incompatible, interhuman relations involve

¹⁶ Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5. According to Byron, "Numerous negative references in ancient Christian writings associate Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Blacks with sin, demons, sexual vices, and heresies."

¹⁷ Buell, 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹ Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

“benign alienations.” While this structure is not intrinsically evil, it provides occasion for human evil and suffering.

In the “social sphere” of human reality, benign alienations become “sedimented into enduring social structures, are symbolized in culture, and are carried by institutions.”²¹ Individuals with competing aims form groups with competing aims, such as blue-collar workers and professionals, adolescents and senior citizens, recent immigrants and longstanding residents, whites and blacks. Each group works on behalf of its own survival and wellbeing, resulting in potential conflicts such as classism, ageism, racism, and so on.²²

Although the writer of Ephesians addresses social tension between Jews and Gentiles in the first century, theologically he is addressing all forms of tragically structured, potentially malignant relations between social groups. Since race is a critical aspect of the social sphere in the United States, and since the tension in Ephesians between Jews and Gentiles is similar to modern-day racism, the dissertation will use the terminology of race when discussing human differences in Eph 2:11-22, and will encourage white American evangelical preachers to do the same.

Preaching on Atonement: Pitfalls and Possibilities

Eph 2:11-22 addresses a human condition fraught with contested and tragically structured interhuman relations, and thus, at the social level, *race*. This human condition is addressed in this text in terms of what would later be called “atonement.” James

²¹ Ibid., 58.

²² Farley notes racism as one social manifestation of the tragically structured human condition. Ibid., 50.

McClendon observes that when the word atonement was coined in the sixteenth century it connoted “unification—neighbor with neighbor, or God with us.”²³ By atonement, I mean the doctrine describing how Christ reconciles humans to God and humans to humans, especially through his death on the cross. Atonement has been a prominent and controversial subject throughout the history of Christianity. Preaching on atonement is a delicate task requiring theological finesse and ethical sensitivity. In preparation for studying atonement in Eph 2:11-22, I discuss some of the pitfalls and possibilities of preaching on atonement. For the purposes of this discussion, it will be helpful to delineate some basic categories of atonement doctrine.

Major Categories of Atonement Doctrine

In his magisterial *Christus Victor* Gustav Aulén surveyed the history of atonement theology and divided atonement ideas into three broad categories: Christus Victor models, satisfaction or substitution models, and moral exemplar models. In Christus Victor models, Christ dies to win a cosmic victory over inimical powers, including death, evil, sin, and the devil. Aulén associates Christus Victor models with the early church fathers and Martin Luther. In satisfaction models, Christ dies as a sacrifice to satisfy God’s judgment against humanity’s sin. Aulén associates satisfaction models with Anselm of Canterbury and Protestant orthodoxy. In exemplar models, Christ dies as the supreme example who inspires responsive love in human beings. Aulén associates

²³ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Vol. 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 199.

exemplar models with Peter Abelard and Friedrich Schleiermacher.²⁴ Since the publication of *Christus Victor*, theologians have often worked with Aulén’s categories, though atonement has remained a subject of intense debate.²⁵

Womanist and Feminist Criticisms of Atonement

Over the past few decades, womanist and feminist theologians have censured atonement theology and questioned the validity of all three traditional atonement models.²⁶ Womanists have criticized atonement theology for its negative effects on African Americans. For example, Delores Williams rejects substitution and satisfaction theories in light of African American women’s surrogate experiences in “nurturance, field labor, and sexuality.” According to Williams, if Jesus died as a surrogate for sinful human beings, then surrogacy becomes sacred, and atonement theology could lead black women passively to “accept the exploitation surrogacy brings.”²⁷ JoAnne Terrell analyzes the “hermeneutics of sacrifice” associated with Christ’s atonement. She recounts how white slaveholders preached the Christian ethic of self-sacrifice to enslaved African Americans in order to keep them subjugated. She concludes that the

²⁴ Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: A Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1931), 56, 82, 96.

²⁵ Consult, for example, *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement*, eds. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

²⁶ *Mujerista* theologians also level important critiques of traditional christological doctrines. For example, consult Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Christ in *Mujerista* Theology,” in *Thinking of Christ*, ed. Tatha Wiley (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2003), 157-176.

²⁷ Delores S. Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption,” in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 20, 28.

hermeneutics of sacrifice has been used as an ideological tool “to impose the cross of slavery.”²⁸

While many womanists reject satisfaction models of atonement, some womanists embrace them. For example, Prathia Hall was a self-identified womanist and one of the most celebrated African American preachers of the twentieth century. According to Donna Allen, Hall’s sermons declared that Jesus died for sinners as a substitutionary sacrifice.²⁹ Furthermore, Terrell notes that some black women, such as gospel singer Helen Baylor, have found deliverance through Christ’s death. According to Terrell, Baylor’s testimony declares that “there *is* power in the blood” of Jesus.³⁰

Feminists criticize atonement theology for sanctioning violence against women and children. For example, Rebecca Parker relates the story of a woman named Lucia whose husband regularly beat her, even to the point of breaking her arm. Lucia passively endured her husband’s violence for twenty years because her priest had instructed her to receive the beatings as Jesus bore the cross.³¹ On the basis of Lucia’s story and other evidence from personal and pastoral experience, Parker rejects atonement theology. She argues that it supports domestic violence by teaching that personal sacrifice is redemptive. Rita Brock repudiates the belief that Jesus the Son died in loving obedience

²⁸ Terrell, 34.

²⁹ Donna E. Allen, “Toward a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker, and Emancipatory Proclamation” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2005), 50, 83-84.

³⁰ Terrell, 125 (emphasis in the original).

³¹ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 20-21.

to God the Father in order to save humanity from sin. She characterizes this theology as “cosmic child abuse,” arguing that it sanctions physical and sexual abuse of children.³²

Although many feminists criticize traditional atonement doctrines, some feminists defend them.³³ For example, Flora Keshgegian denies that Anselm’s satisfaction model implies an abusive God. She contends that many feminists have not treated Anselm’s thought with appropriate nuance. According to Keshgegian’s reading of Anselm, God cannot forgive human beings without requiring satisfaction for sin because this would compromise human responsibility. Anselm’s God is not an abusive, bloodthirsty tyrant, but rather a responsible Creator who holds humans accountable to the beautiful order of creation. Keshgegian also insists that Anselm’s Jesus is not forced by God to suffer and die but instead has freedom to choose. Therefore, it is inaccurate to say that Anselm depicts Jesus as an impotent victim.³⁴

Lou Ann Trost advocates a Trinitarian approach to atonement. According to Trost, viewing atonement as an accomplishment of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can prevent us from reducing Jesus to a mere human model for us. She observes that neither before nor after Jesus’ crucifixion have males needed “Jewish or Christian idea[s] of sacrifice or suffering in order to keep women submissive.” Therefore, Trost argues,

³² Ibid., 155-157.

³³ Unfortunately, some feminist literature gives the impression that all feminists uniformly oppose certain atonement theories. For example, Elizabeth Johnson states, “Feminist theology repudiates an interpretation of the death of Jesus as required by God in repayment for sin. Such a view today is virtually inseparable from an underlying image of God as an angry, bloodthirsty, violent and sadistic father, reflecting the very worst kind of male behavior.” Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 64.

³⁴ Flora A. Keshgegian, “The Scandal of the Cross: Revisiting Anselm and His Feminist Critics,” *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 475-492. Homiletician Sally Brown adds, “If we understand the satisfaction model clearly, instead of seeming to sacralize violence, it excludes violence.” Sally A. Brown, *Cross Talk: Preaching Redemption Here and Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 90.

general cultural patterns of male domination are probably the main factors shaping women's acceptance of abuse.³⁵

Responding to Womanist and Feminist Concerns

In light of how atonement theology has been used to exploit women, children, and people of color, preachers must resolve never to use atonement theology to keep the powerless “in a place of suffering, or to lead them to accept needless suffering or death at the hands of violent people.”³⁶ Womanist and feminist critiques of atonement compel preachers to nuance traditional atonement theology in ethical ways, especially with regard to racial and gender power dynamics.³⁷ However, according to Leeann Van Dyk, “Admitting that Christian theology in general and atonement theology in particular have at times, even at many times, been used abusively does not lead to the inevitable conclusion that Christian theology in general and atonement theology in particular are always abusive or necessarily abusive.”³⁸

Homiletician Sally Brown offers vital insight for preaching atonement responsibly. According to Brown, no single atonement theory should undergird all preaching on the cross. Brown observes that the New Testament's reflections on the cross are diverse, imaginative, unsystematic, and often pastorally driven. Taking this as a

³⁵ Lou Ann Trost, “On Suffering, Violence, and Power,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 21, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 36-38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39. For practical and theoretical wisdom on preaching about domestic violence, consult *Telling the Truth*.

³⁷ Unfortunately, much white evangelical literature on the cross does not sufficiently account for womanist and feminist criticisms of atonement. One example in homiletic literature, which is an otherwise insightful book, is Peter K. Stevenson and Stephen I. Wright, *Preaching the Atonement* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005).

³⁸ Leeann Van Dyk, “Do Theories of Atonement Foster Abuse?” *Dialog* 35, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 24.

homiletic clue, she suggests that preachers employ a variety of scriptural metaphors for atonement in order to address particular situations in a pastoral way. Brown envisions preachers as “poets of the cross” who approach atonement in terms of pastoral metaphors rather than comprehensive abstractions.³⁹

Brown’s guidelines for preaching atonement are helpful. First, she says, we can “construct sermons that rely on metaphor rather than theory.” Second, we can focus more on exploring atonement images than explaining atonement theories. Third, we can connect atonement metaphors with the pressing dilemmas facing our congregation and reveal how God’s redemptive power is at work in particular situations. Fourth, we can use multiple atonement metaphors to address multiple constituencies and situations within the congregation.⁴⁰ Additionally, we can refute “cross talk gone wrong,” such as the interpretation of Lucia’s priest and other interpretations of atonement that sanction the passive suffering of the oppressed.⁴¹

One reason traditional atonement theology has been complicit in sanctioning oppression and violence is because preachers often present atonement as a single, comprehensive, abstract theory.⁴² Thus, when parishioners view a particular situation in life in light of the cross, they have little interpretative wiggle room in which to operate. For example, if the only atonement idea operative in a given church is that Jesus died as a human sacrifice to appease the wrath of God, when congregants experience abuse or

³⁹ Brown, 5-6.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 46-47.

⁴¹ Ibid., 49-70.

⁴² According to Brown, “No metaphor was meant to ‘explain’ the efficacy of the cross in an exhaustive way; each metaphor could illuminate only some aspects of what God was doing in the death and resurrection of Jesus in relation to some situations.” Ibid., 31.

oppression, self-sacrifice may be the only “Christian” response they can conceive. Indeed, they may imagine their unjust suffering to be holy or divinely sanctioned. Brown points the way out of this bind, not by advocating a new theory of atonement or by leveling dismissive criticism of traditional atonement images, but by elevating the New Testament as a homiletic paradigm. Understanding New Testament images of atonement as diverse, unsystematic, pastoral metaphors to be interpreted in light of concrete situations can provide the interpretative options necessary to guard against the sacralization of suffering in situations of domestic violence and social oppression.⁴³

Opportunities in Ephesians

In dealing with atonement in Ephesians there are ample opportunities to avoid the ethical pitfalls linked to atonement doctrine. First, womanists and feminists often argue that atonement theology valorizes the passive suffering of the oppressed by depicting Jesus as a passive victim.⁴⁴ Yet, Eph 5:2 states, “And walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself over for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” According to Peter O’Brien, “The verb ‘gave over’ together with the reflexive pronoun ‘himself,’ indicates that Christ took the initiative in handing himself over to death. He went to the cross as the willing victim, and this he did on behalf of believers (‘for us’),

⁴³ Practically speaking, when addressing atonement, preachers can utilize what David Buttrick calls the “contrapuntal,” a short segment of a sermon that predicts and disarms probable exceptions and objections to the sermon’s message. For example, statements such as “The powerful should not preach self-sacrifice to the oppressed” or “God does not call anyone to be a doormat for injustice” can guard against dangerous misunderstandings of atonement. David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 47-48. Consult also John S. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 17-18.

⁴⁴ Marit Trelstad, “Introduction,” in *Cross Examinations*, 7.

language which at least indicates representation, even substitution.”⁴⁵ Ephesians pictures atonement as a substitutionary sacrifice without any indication that God coerced Christ to suffer passively. To the contrary, Christ’s atoning death was his own free initiative. Ephesians rules out any interpretation of atonement that encourages victims to suffer passively in coercive, oppressive, abusive, or exploitative circumstances. Ephesians affirms only active forms of self-sacrifice born of free personal initiative for the sake of redemptive love.

Second, Ephesians provides a clue to negotiating the hermeneutics of sacrifice. The household code in Eph 5:21-6:9 commands husbands to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself over for her” (5:25). While this code features problematic instructions to wives (they are told to submit to their husbands) and slaves (they are told to obey their masters), it applies the hermeneutics of sacrifice to husbands. This is noteworthy because the general cultural standard of patriarchal family relations, although not necessarily intending that wives sacrifice personhood, permitted abuses of power that could result in inappropriate self-sacrifice. According to Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, “The legal and social power of the father over wife, children, slaves, and property was extensive in all ancient Mediterranean societies known to us.”⁴⁶ For example, the Roman law of *patria potestas* stipulated that the paterfamilias held legal authority over all other members of the household.⁴⁷ In admonishing only the husband to

⁴⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 354-355.

⁴⁶ Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 56.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

imitate Christ's self-sacrificial love, the Ephesians household code assigns the hermeneutics of sacrifice to the most powerful position in the household.

Therefore, Eph 5:25 indicates that those in powerful positions, not the oppressed, bear the primary responsibility for imitating Christ's loving sacrifice. Many ethical problems could be avoided if preachers followed this trajectory in Ephesians.⁴⁸ Preachers would instruct men to love women in self-sacrificial ways that empower them as individuals and in community, the wealthy to love the impoverished in self-sacrificial ways that give them access to tools and structures to overcome poverty, and whites to love persons of color in self-sacrificial ways that give up aspects of white privilege that destroy black personhood.

Third, the charge of divine child abuse assumes a low christology, but Ephesians depicts Christ as a cosmic figure in whom all things are summarized (Eph 1:10). The Christ of Ephesians sits at God's right hand above all other powers (Eph 1:20-23). He has co-ownership of God's kingdom (Eph 5:5), which indicates mutuality between God and Christ. In Trinitarian terminology, the Christ of Ephesians is not only the Son of God

⁴⁸ Sandra Polaski recommends reading New Testament household codes "for where they *point*. This way follows their *trajectories*... While it is undoubtedly true that the metaphors spun by these texts have elements that reinforce subordination, they may also be read for their emancipative elements..." Sandra Hack Polaski, *A Feminist Introduction to Paul* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 101 (emphasis in the original). Consult also Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be: Biblical Feminism for Today*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 146-156.

Similarly, Ella Pearson Mitchell observes a "breakthrough principle" in the Ephesians household code. According to Mitchell, Paul "was concerned about the treatment of children, women, and slaves—all of whom we recognize as powerless people. And in each case Paul's comments start with phrases that gained the ears of his audience by solidly affirming what those in power most wanted to hear. He said, 'Children, obey your parents,' and having thus established attention and interest, he moved to the new breakthrough principle: even though children are powerless, 'Parents, provoke not your children to wrath.' He said to wives, 'Obey; submit to your husbands,' and then he came to the breakthrough principle; 'But husbands, love your wives and give yourselves to them completely, even as Christ gave himself for the church.' He continued on, saying to the slaves, 'Slaves obey your masters.' After getting the masters' ears, he said what most defenders of slavery leave out or forget: 'Remember, masters, you slothful rascals, there is but one Master and that is *God*.'" Ella Pearson Mitchell, "Introduction: Women in the Ministry," in *Those Preachin' Women: Sermons By Black Women Preachers*, ed. Ella Pearson Mitchell (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985), 17-18 (emphasis in the original).

but also God the Son. This language is appropriate in light of Eph 2:18, which pictures atonement in proto-trinitarian terms: “Through [Christ] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”⁴⁹ A Trinitarian understanding of atonement defuses the charge of divine child abuse because it suggests that “God exhibits in God’s own inner Trinitarian relations mutual cooperation and purpose.”⁵⁰

Fourth, Ephesians presents multiple images of atonement. For example, Christus Victor theorists cite “redemption” through Christ’s blood in Eph 1:7 as evidence that Christ’s death ransoms us from hostile powers. Exemplar theorists cite Eph 5:1-2, where Christ’s love for us induces us to “walk in love.” Satisfaction theorists cite both foregoing passages because Eph 1:7 links the blood of Christ to forgiveness of trespasses and Eph 5:2 casts Christ’s death as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Although the atonement theology of Ephesians is associated with traditional atonement categories, it should not be pigeonholed into any one of them.

The coexistence of multiple atonement images provides preachers with a variety of emphases for use in various situations.⁵¹ For example, in addressing spousal abuse, preachers can apply a Christus Victor image (Eph 1:7). Since Christ died to redeem us from evil powers, we are no longer to be bound by evil. Therefore, the abused spouse can seek intervention and separation from the abusive partner. As John McClure suggests, “Forgiveness of interpersonal violence is the *last* step, not the first step, in a process in which protection, accountability, restitution, and vindication are first

⁴⁹ I elaborate on this verse below. While a detailed doctrine of the Holy Trinity was not developed until post-biblical times, the raw materials of Trinitarian orthodoxy are evident in New Testament passages such as Mt 28:19, Mk 1:9-11, 2 Cor 13:13, and Eph 2:18.

⁵⁰ Van Dyk, 24.

⁵¹ As Brown indicates, atonement speech can display a “case-by-case particularity.” Brown, 30.

required.”⁵² On the other hand, in addressing privilege, preachers can apply the hermeneutics of sacrifice based on a satisfaction image (Eph 5:2). The privileged are to exhibit self-sacrificial love for the oppressed. Various atonement images are complementary in Ephesians, although modern theological texts often treat them as mutually exclusive. Preachers can follow Ephesians by disallowing any single atonement image to absorb or rule out other biblical images of atonement.

Even a single atonement image can be appropriated in different ways. This is especially important with regard to the image of sacrifice because it is the most prominent image of atonement in the New Testament, it pervades the theological imagination of the church, especially the white evangelical church, and it has often been interpreted to sanction oppression.⁵³ Mark Heim demonstrates how Christ’s self-sacrifice can be turned into a positive example for our imitation (e.g., Eph 5:2). In addressing the underprivileged or the oppressed, Christ’s self-sacrifice might be taught as “the end of sacrifice, the final sacrifice.”⁵⁴ The emphasis on Christ’s death as the final sacrifice is especially pronounced in Hebrews, but the “once and for all” view may be applied to any New Testament text that portrays Christ’s death as a sacrifice for sins (e.g., Eph 1:7). Interpreted correctly, this atonement theology repudiates rather than sanctions the exploitation of the oppressed. Women, children, and persons of color should not sacrifice

⁵² John S. McClure, “Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence,” in *Telling the Truth*, 113 (emphasis in the original).

⁵³ Brown states, “For preachers, the issue may not be so much whether to speak of Jesus’ death in relation to sacrifice, but how. Sacrifice language occupies such a prominent place in the biblical tradition and in centuries of Christian interpretation of Jesus’ death that it is difficult to imagine how preachers can completely ignore this web of metaphors.” Brown, 112. Susan Bond adds, “We preach to people whose religious language and identity is dominated by variations on the sacrificial theme.” L. Susan Bond, *Trouble with Jesus: Women, Christology, and Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 72.

⁵⁴ S. Mark Heim, “Saved by What Shouldn’t Happen: The Anti-Sacrificial Meaning of the Cross,” in *Cross Examinations*, 212.

themselves under exploitative circumstances, because Christ already made the final sacrifice. As Bond states, “God sacrifices for us on the cross, not vice versa.”⁵⁵

Preaching the Ethic of Self-Sacrificial Love

While renouncing unethical appropriations of atonement theology, preachers can affirm the atonement ethic of self-sacrificial love, especially in privileged white churches. Feminist Darby Ray concedes that “self-sacrifice is at times a healthy and appropriate posture,” particularly for those in positions of power.⁵⁶ Not only is self-sacrifice sometimes healthy; it is often necessary in pursuit of social justice.⁵⁷

One recent example of this is the Exodus Foundation, a ministry that aims to stop the flow of African Americans to prison and helps incarcerated and formerly incarcerated African Americans reintegrate into society through education and mentoring. The founder and leader of the Exodus Foundation is womanist biblical scholar Madeline McClenney-Sadler. In explaining her ministry to a practical theology seminar at Vanderbilt University, McClenney-Sadler acknowledged that working with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated persons is sometimes frightening. Therefore, one rule of the Exodus Foundation is, “Fear of harm is no excuse for failure to serve.” When asked how this rule relates to womanist critiques of self-sacrifice, specifically Terrell’s critique of atonement and the hermeneutics of sacrifice, McClenney-Sadler drew a distinction

⁵⁵ Bond, *Trouble with Jesus*, 64.

⁵⁶ Darby Kathleen Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 60-62.

⁵⁷ Bond declares, “The only suffering or servanthood that is legitimate is suffering that pursues justice, suffering that is in solidarity with the disenfranchised, and suffering that willingly risks safety to enhance life.” Bond, *Trouble with Jesus*, 141. Since womanists and feminists reason from anecdotes and personal experience in their criticisms of atonement, I now defend atonement and self-sacrifice by reasoning from anecdotes and personal experience.

between redemptive suffering and non-redemptive suffering. She implied that suffering while mentoring a formerly incarcerated person could be redemptive suffering.⁵⁸

Although the Christian ethic of self-sacrifice has been used to fortify racism, the Exodus Foundation uses it to advance the cause of racial justice.

Furthermore, while the hermeneutics of sacrifice has been misappropriated against children, it can also be employed to liberate children.⁵⁹ Consider the following story that B. Herbert Martin, Pastor of Chicago's Progressive Community Center, The People's Church, related in the same practical theology seminar at Vanderbilt. Several years ago in inner city Chicago, rival gangs were warring against each other in two particular housing projects. An elementary school was located between the two projects, and one day some students were shot and killed in the crossfire. After the tragic shooting, the gunfire continued, and children were afraid to go to school. School attendance dropped to twenty percent. Politicians were not motivated to help with this problem in the projects, so the nearby Progressive Community Center, The People's Church decided to take action. Volunteers from the church became "walking school buses." They met children at their homes each morning and walked them to school, shielding them with their bodies. These Christians risked physical harm so that neighborhood children could receive an education. Their efforts were so effective that

⁵⁸ Madeline McClenney-Sadler, "The Interdisciplinary Study of Preaching and Worship" [lecture, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, Spring, 2006]. Consult <http://www.exodusfoundation.org> [accessed September 14, 2010].

⁵⁹ For an example of how atonement doctrine has been misused in abusing children, consult Trost, 35.

the school's attendance rate gradually rose from twenty percent to ninety-eight percent.⁶⁰ In this case, an embodied ethic of self-sacrifice provided justice for children.

The witness of Progressive Community Center, The People's Church exemplifies the power of communal self-sacrifice as opposed to individual self-sacrifice. According to Bond, "Sacrifice is not primarily an individual spiritual discipline, but it is the communal orientation of the church toward the world."⁶¹ Sometimes, it is not the individual Christian but the body of Christ that most faithfully and powerfully emulates Christ's self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

The Violence of the Cross and the Ethic of Non-Violence

Since atonement theology sacralizes Jesus' crucifixion, a violent event by all accounts, some might argue that atonement theology endorses violence no matter how we nuance the ethics of self-sacrifice. However, the Pauline tradition celebrates the crucifixion of Christ and simultaneously espouses an ethic of nonviolence. In Romans, for example, Paul exalts Christ's blood sacrifice (Rom 3:25; 5:9) and exhorts believers not to avenge themselves but to "make space for God's wrath" (Rom 12:19). Theologian Miroslav Volf similarly argues that eschatological confidence in God's wrath enables an ethic of nonviolence amid a violent world. Christians can practice nonviolence because we trust that if anyone deserves violence, God will execute it righteously on Judgment Day. Volf also explains that the violence of Jesus' cross actually undermines violence:

[Jesus] broke the vicious cycle of violence by absorbing it [on the cross]...Jesus' kind of option for nonviolence had nothing to do with the self-abnegation in

⁶⁰ B. Herbert Martin, "The Interdisciplinary Study of Preaching and Worship" [lecture, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, Spring, 2006].

⁶¹ Bond, *Trouble with Jesus*, 138.

which I completely place myself at the disposal of others to do with me as they please; it had much to do with the kind of self-assertion in which I refuse to be ensnared in the dumb redoubling of my enemies' violent gestures and be reshaped into their mirror image. No, the crucified Messiah is not a concealed legitimation of the system of terror, but its radical critique. Far from enthroning violence, the sacralization of him as victim subverts violence.⁶²

Although the doctrine of atonement has sometimes been used to sanction domestic violence and social oppression, Michael Gorman insists that “the abuse of the cross by some cannot become an excuse for watered-down versions of Christianity in which there is no place for suffering love.”⁶³ In the real world context of evil and violence, suffering love is sometimes the only love. Moreover, it is sometimes the only route to justice. Preachers can discourage passive forms of suffering that perpetuate injustice and encourage active forms of self-sacrifice born of free personal initiative that foster justice and peace.⁶⁴ Admittedly, atonement theology will “remain a source of danger even after we have set up all the necessary safeguards against misuse.”⁶⁵ Although the cross is inescapably scandalous, it is central to Christian faith and represents our best hope for preaching racial reconciliation in white American evangelical churches.

⁶² Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 291-292.

⁶³ Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 379.

⁶⁴ William C. Placher, “Christ Takes Our Place: Rethinking Atonement,” *Interpretation* 53, no. 1 (January 1999): 16.

⁶⁵ Volf, 26-27.

Racial Atonement in Eph 2:11-22: A Homiletic Interpretation

We now turn our attention to Eph 2:11-22. My primary objective is to explore this text as a theological paradigm for Christian proclamation about race relations. Eph 2:11-22 is no obscure passage. Markus Barth calls it “the key and high point” of Ephesians,⁶⁶ and many other commentators view it as “the theological center of the letter.”⁶⁷ I will focus on 2:14-18, the centerpiece of the centerpiece of Ephesians.

Many scholars posit that 2:14-18 represents a hymn or part of a hymn sung in early Christian worship. Hymn-like aspects of the passage include repetition (e.g., the term “peace”), parallelism (e.g., “peace” versus “hostility” in vv. 14-16), cosmic language, and frequent use of participles.⁶⁸ Scholars have tried assiduously to reconstruct the “original version” of the ostensible Christ-hymn. However, Tet-Lim Yee suggests,

Previous scholarship has been substantially hampered by its attempt to “discover” a preformed material in Eph 2:14-18, failing to recognize the discussion in Eph 2:11-13 which sets the parameters for understanding Eph 2:14-22. Rather than a “parenthesis” or “digression,” which is tangential to the primary design of the author’s argument, I suggested that vv. 14-18 cannot be fully understood in isolation from vv. 11-13.⁶⁹

Yee is right. Even if 2:14-18 represents a preformed hymn of early Christianity, the author has employed it, and perhaps molded it, to serve a crucial rhetorical function in

⁶⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), 275.

⁶⁷ William Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1978), 246. Consult also Tet-Lim N. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles, and Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul’s Jewish Identity and Ephesians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7; O’Brien, 22.

⁶⁸ James E. Howard, “The Wall Broken: An Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22,” in *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practices; Studies in Honor of Jack Pearl Lewis*, eds. F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, and Timothy D. Hadley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 298. Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 243.

⁶⁹ Yee, 217.

the overall argument of Ephesians. Eph 2:14-18 is no “christological excursus.”⁷⁰ Christ is never an excursus in the Pauline school of thought.⁷¹ Moreover, Eph 2:14-18 contains the only explicit reference to “the cross” in Ephesians,⁷² and in Pauline theology the cross is essential (e.g., 1 Cor 1:18ff.). Eph 2:14-18 is central to the overall discussion in Ephesians and closely related to the topics addressed in vv. 11-13 and vv. 19-22.⁷³ Thus, I will begin the analysis with v. 11.

Eph 2:11-13: Gentiles Brought Near

Verses 11-12: Therefore, remember that once you Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “the uncircumcision” by the ones called “the circumcision”—a circumcision made in the flesh by hand—that you were at that time without Christ, having been alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers of the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

The term “therefore” links Eph 2:11-22 to the foregoing material in Eph 2:1-10, which explains that God has saved us by the grace of Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ Eph 2:8-9 is a key text in white evangelical churches because it encapsulates the cherished doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. “Therefore” indicates that Eph 2:11-22 explains the social effects of Christ’s saving grace, namely, that Christians of different races are reconciled to one another. If white evangelical preachers were to honor the “therefore” in

⁷⁰ Against Rudolph Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 111.

⁷¹ Paul’s foremost conviction was: “The Christ event is central for understanding God’s plan for the world.” Brad R. Braxton, *Preaching Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 50.

⁷² Pheme Perkins, *Ephesians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 70.

⁷³ O’Brien, 192.

⁷⁴ MacDonald, 241.

verse 11, we would connect the grace of Christ to racial reconciliation and proclaim racial reconciliation as emphatically as we proclaim salvation by grace through faith.

The author of Ephesians appears to be a Jew writing to Gentiles (“Gentiles in the flesh”).⁷⁵ He commands them to “remember” how they were once far from God, accentuating their great distance from God with the terms “having been alienated,” “strangers,” “having no hope,” and the Greek word ἄθεοι (“without God”). Thus, “there are four ‘strikes’ against the uncircumcised Gentile.”⁷⁶

In recounting the former disadvantages of Gentiles, the author elucidates the privileges that were given to Jews. At the same time, v. 11 appears to be a critique of circumcision. The phrase “in the flesh” accentuates the physicality of circumcision as opposed to the true circumcision of the heart commanded by Dt 10:16 and Jer 4:4. Moreover, the Greek term translated “made by hand” is χειροποιήτος, a term utilized in the Septuagint to describe idols (e.g., Lv 26:1; Is 2:18).⁷⁷ The contrast between the critique of circumcision in v. 11 and the acknowledgement of Jewish privileges in v. 12 is reminiscent of Romans. In Rom 2:25-29 and 4:9-12, Paul relativizes physical circumcision, but in Rom 9:4ff. Paul highlights Jewish advantages.⁷⁸ Eph 2:11-12 seems to critique Jews who are not circumcised in heart as well as Gentiles who are distant from God.

⁷⁵ “That the recipients of Ephesians are Gentiles (or constitute a Gentile majority) is stated explicitly for the first time in v. 11. Scholars who believe...that Ephesians is deutero-Pauline are virtually unanimous in holding that the author of Ephesians was a Jewish Christian.” Ibid., 251-252. On the authorship of Ephesians, consult *ibid.*, 15-17.

⁷⁶ Bonnie Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 108.

⁷⁷ MacDonald, 241; O’Brien, 186.

⁷⁸ Schnackenburg, 108.

The comment about “the circumcision” calling Gentiles “the uncircumcision” indicates tension between Jews and Gentiles. Strained relations between first century Jews and Gentiles are well documented. According to Louis Feldman, Gentile masses resented Jews for their wealth as well as their privileged status and influence. Gentiles also regarded Jews as unpatriotic because they refused to worship the gods of the Roman Empire.⁷⁹ At the same time, some Gentiles were attracted to Judaism and converted, which exacerbated the friction between Jews and Gentiles. Popular prejudice against Jews served to reinforce cohesion in Jewish communities, and “the loyalty of Jews to one another...provoked the charge that they hated every other people.”⁸⁰ In 38 C. E. and again in 66 C. E., animosity against Jews smoldered into violent attacks on Jews in the city of Alexandria.⁸¹ Although we do not know the exact nature of the relationships between Jews and Gentiles in Asia Minor, Eph 2:14 confirms that the text addresses some sort of enmity between the two groups.⁸²

Verse 13: But now in Christ Jesus, you, the ones being far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Just when the Gentiles could scarcely be farther from God, v. 13 declares that they have been brought near to God.⁸³ In this verse, “the blood of Christ signifies his

⁷⁹ Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 109-114.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 425.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 113-120.

⁸² Relationships between Jews and Gentiles in Asia Minor may not have been strictly contentious. For instance, “inscriptions and other documents show that Jews and Gentiles exchanged benefactions.” Perkins, 68.

⁸³ “Far away” and “brought near” represent “the language of Is 57:19 combined with Is 52:9 which had already been adapted in Judaism to apply to proselytes.” M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People’s New Testament Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 601.

violently taken life and stands for his atoning death.”⁸⁴ Presumably, Christ’s blood offers Gentiles proximity to God by bringing redemption and forgiveness of trespasses, for this is what the blood of Christ signals in Eph 1:7. The term “redemption” (ἀπολύτρωσις) suggests being released from bondage. The term “forgiveness” (ἄφεσις) suggests being rescued from God’s judgment on trespasses, that is, violations of the Jewish Law.⁸⁵ Thus, a Christus Victor image and a satisfaction image are both in play.

Eph 2:13 envisions Christ’s death as a sacrifice for sins comparable to the sin-offerings found in Leviticus 4-5.⁸⁶ These chapters stipulate animal sacrifices that bring about forgiveness of sins (Lv 4:20, 26, 31, 35) by paying the penalty for sins (Lv 5:6-7). According to James Dunn, “the sacrificial animal in some way represented the guilty or sinful person...and...the animal’s death served in place of the destructive effects of the offerer’s being out of relation with God, or indeed destroyed the corrupting sin itself.”⁸⁷ Similarly, as many evangelical Christians have believed, following Anselm, Christ died as a representative of sinful human beings to put us at peace with God. Christ’s death was substitutionary in that he absorbed the consequences of our sin for us. He paid the penalty that brought about our forgiveness.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 28.

⁸⁵ O’Brien, 105-106; MacDonald, 200; Barth, 83. On the link between “trespass” and the Jewish Law, consider Rom 4:15: “Where there is no law there is no transgression.”

⁸⁶ Yee, 119. James D. G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 79-80. According to Markus Barth, “By speaking of Christ’s ‘blood’ rather than of his death, the author qualifies Christ’s death in an important way in that references to the ‘blood’ of the messiah, i.e. of Jesus (Christ) reveal a sacrificial understanding of Christ’s death...Blood is the means of making atonement and of receiving forgiveness.” Barth, 299.

⁸⁷ Dunn, 80.

⁸⁸ The theology in Eph 2:13 is similar to Rom 5:6-9, where Christ’s death is understood as a sacrifice that “paid the penalty for all human sin.” Levine, 67.

Other references to the atonement occur in Eph 2:14 (“in his flesh”) and 2:16 (“through the cross”).⁸⁹ Moreover, 2:18 speaks about Christ granting “access” (προσαγωγήν) to God. The imagery of “access” also evokes the Old Testament sacrificial system where persons entering God’s presence brought gifts and sought atonement (cf., Lv 1:3-4).⁹⁰ Therefore, Eph 2:11-18 is concerned with atonement throughout. This passage deals with an important aspect of the Pauline gospel: Jesus’ death on the cross for us, which reconciles us to God.⁹¹

Eph 2:14: Racial Atonement Accomplished and the Wall of Racism Destroyed

Verse 14: For he himself is our peace, having made the two into one in his flesh, and having destroyed the middle wall of the hedge, that is, the enmity between us.

The conjunction “for” ties this section to the preceding claims in 2:11-13, thereby demonstrating the interdependence of 2:11-13 and 2:14-18. The phrase, “for he himself is our peace,” stands like a title to the material in vv. 14-18 and introduces the crucial theme of peace.⁹² The Old Testament anticipated that the Messiah would be the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6). But in v. 14, Christ does not make peace but rather *is* peace.

The term “peace” (εἰρήνη) carried theological and political meaning.

Theologically, it refers to *shalom*, the Old Testament concept connoting the absence of

⁸⁹ James T. Cleland, “Someone There Is Who Doesn’t Love a Wall: From Text to Sermon on Ephesians 2:11-22,” *Interpretation* 21, no. 2 (April 1967): 150.

⁹⁰ O’Brien, 209.

⁹¹ For the scholarly debate concerning the core of Paul’s theology, consult Jouette M. Bassler, ed., *Pauline Theology: Vol. 1; Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); David M. Hay, ed., *Pauline Theology: Vol. 2; 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology: Vol. 3; Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology: Vol. 4; Looking Back, Pressing On* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); J. Christiaan Beker, *The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul’s Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

⁹² O’Brien, 192-193.

strife and also overall wellbeing in God's covenantal care. Politically, it challenges the *Pax Romana*, the "peace" provided by Caesar.⁹³ Thus, if Christ is peace, he is "the fulfillment of *shalom* for Israel and the true alternative to the so-called *Pax Romana*."⁹⁴

The "peace" referred to in 2:14 is not a mystical, individual serenity of the soul; it is a spiritual, social, and political event.⁹⁵ Specifically here, Christ is peace between two groups: "the circumcision" and "the uncircumcision" (v. 11). Barth argues that the two groups are non-Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles.⁹⁶ However, the letter is addressed to the "faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph 1:1), so "the circumcision" and "the uncircumcision" are probably Jews and Gentiles within the body of Christ. Therefore, the peace declared in v. 14 is interracial peace in the body of Christ.

The "middle wall" which Christ has "destroyed" has been interpreted in various ways. The Greek phrase in v. 14 (τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ) means literally "the middle wall of the hedge." Since this wall is a salient feature of the text, I now summarize the most prominent interpretations of it.

(1) The wall refers to the balustrade in the Jerusalem Temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews.⁹⁷ In this theory, v. 14 refers to a literal, historical wall that divided Jews and Gentiles in Temple worship. This interpretation is plausible, given the "temple" language in Eph 2:21. On the other hand, we may question

⁹³ For a study of the political aspects of peace in Ephesians, consult Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 76-156.

⁹⁴ John Muddiman, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Continuum, 2001), 125.

⁹⁵ Howard, 305.

⁹⁶ Barth, 255.

⁹⁷ Bruce W. Fong, "Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation according to the Principles of Eph. 2:11-22," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 4 (December 1995): 572.

whether Gentile Christians in Asia Minor would have understood such an allusion.⁹⁸ We may also note that extant Jewish writings of the period did not use the term φραγμος to reference the Temple balustrade, which adds to the doubtfulness of this interpretation.⁹⁹

(2) The wall refers to the veil or curtain that demarcated the Holy of Holies within the Jerusalem Temple.¹⁰⁰ Mk 15:38 declares that this curtain was torn in two at Jesus' death. Some interpreters think that Eph 2:13-14 similarly links Jesus' death to the destruction of the Temple curtain. The temple language in 2:21 supports this view in the same way it supports interpretation 1 above (i.e., the writer had the Temple in mind). However, the term in verse 14 is "wall," not "veil" or "curtain." If the writer wanted to refer to the Temple curtain, he likely would have used that term explicitly. Furthermore, the wall in 2:14 separates people from people, while the Temple curtain separated people from God. Therefore, this interpretation is tenuous.

(3) "The Sayings of the Fathers (*Pirke Avot*), a [third century] rabbinical document containing elements taught at Paul's time, includes the commandment to 'build a fence around the law.'"¹⁰¹ Thus, the "fence" reference in v. 14 (φραγμος) combined with the annulment of the Law in v. 15 leads some to suppose that the "middle wall" means the Jewish Law.¹⁰² However, Bruce Fong notes that the rabbinic teaching about building a fence referred to protecting the Law rather than the hostility highlighted in v.

⁹⁸ Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1991), 35.

⁹⁹ Josephus, for example, uses the term δρυφακτος to refer to the Temple balustrade. MacDonald, 244.

¹⁰⁰ Fong, 572.

¹⁰¹ Barth, 284.

¹⁰² Perkins, 71.

14.¹⁰³ Furthermore, v. 15 does not clearly link the Law with the wall in v. 14. This interpretation is not unfounded, but it is unconvincing.

(4) Heinrich Schlier insists that the wall refers to a cosmic barrier that separated the upper world from the lower world in some Gnostic thought. However, F. F. Bruce rightly rejects this idea because “the barrier between Jews and Gentiles was not a horizontal barrier, separating those above from those below, but rather a vertical barrier.”¹⁰⁴ Schlier’s interpretation is untenable.

(5) The wall represents the evil human “flesh,” or enmity against God.¹⁰⁵ This view was held by some early church fathers, but is unpersuasive because the wall in v. 14 represents interpersonal enmity.

(6) The wall is an ordinary metaphor describing social enmity between Jews and Gentiles.¹⁰⁶ In this interpretation, the wall does not refer to a single, literal partition, but rather is “constituted by all the expressions of social enmity, familiar to any Jew or Gentile in the Hellenistic world, the differences in place of residence, manner of worship, food and dress, politics and ethics, and above all the blank wall of mutual incomprehension, fear and contempt between the two groups.”¹⁰⁷ Greco-Roman literature commonly employed the image of a “wall” to communicate ideas ranging from

¹⁰³ Fong, 572-573.

¹⁰⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 296-297.

¹⁰⁵ Barth, 285.

¹⁰⁶ Ernest Best, *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 102-103. Fong, 573.

¹⁰⁷ Muddiman, 128.

sacrilege to exclusion.¹⁰⁸ While Gentile readers in Asia Minor may not have understood the “wall” as an allusion to the balustrade in the Jerusalem Temple, they likely would have understood the “wall” as a common literary metaphor of the day. Of all the exegetical options, I prefer this interpretation.

Exegetically, interpretations 1, 3, and 6 are strongest. Yet homiletically, we should not identify the wall as either the Jewish Law or the balustrade in the Temple that divided the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews.¹⁰⁹ Interpreting the wall in either of these ways locates racial enmity in the distant past instead of the present.¹¹⁰ While Ephesians has in its purview Jews and Gentiles, the pulpit demands that we explore how scripture transcends its ancient historical referents in an effort to examine scripture’s current historical referents.¹¹¹ Therefore, preachers should understand the middle wall metaphorically to include tragically structured interhuman, social, and in our case racial tension in every time and place. Said simply, the middle wall is racism, and Christ died so that it might crumble. When the cross of Christ is lifted, the wall of racism falls.

Eph 2:15-16: The Two Groups Become One Body

Verses 15-16: He annulled the law of the commandments expressed in decrees in order that he might create in himself one new human from the two, making peace,

¹⁰⁸ Yee, 150.

¹⁰⁹ As argued above, the theological demands of homiletical exegesis push us beyond historical critical readings of scripture. Preachers should allow “the text to make effective connections with God, other biblical texts, church doctrine, and the congregation.” Paul Scott Wilson, *God Sense: Reading the Bible for Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 7.

¹¹⁰ These interpretations also reinforce anti-Judaism, a concern I address below.

¹¹¹ MacDonald, 254.

and that he might reconcile the two in one body to God through the cross, having killed the enmity by it.

Scholars debate whether the “law” which is annulled in v. 15 is the entire Jewish Law or certain elements of it. The author seems to have in mind the entire Law.¹¹² However, in contradistinction to this deutero-Pauline abolishment of the Law stands Paul’s conviction that Christian faith does not abrogate the Law: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Rom 3:31). The tensions concerning the Law in Pauline and deutero-Pauline texts pose serious challenges to Christian preachers in a Post-Shoah world. Without theological and cultural finesse, contemporary proclamation about the Law can easily become a manifestation of anti-Judaism. It is possible to claim the distinctive aspects of Christian faith in our proclamation without disparaging other religious traditions in general and Judaism in particular.¹¹³ Preachers must interpret v. 15 in light of Rom 3:31 and Jesus’ own declaration in Mt 5:17 that he came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.

The second half of v. 15 speaks about Christ creating “in himself one new human from the two.” This seems to say with Gal 3:28 that “there is no longer Jew or Greek...for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Scholars debate how Paul understands the relationship between racial identity and Christian unity. Since this question is crucial to the interpretation of Eph 2:11-22, I now briefly review four scholarly perspectives.

¹¹² “There is very little support for the idea of the Law being divisible in Jewish texts...Moreover, the long expression, literally ‘the law of the commandment [expressed] in regulations,’ strengthens the impression that the whole Law is intended.” MacDonald, 245.

¹¹³ Several homiletic resources can help preachers avoid anti-Judaism. Consult, for example, Ronald J. Allen and Clark M. Williamson, *Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews: A Lectionary Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Marilyn J. Salmon, *Preaching without Contempt: Overcoming Unintended Anti-Judaism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006); George M. Smiga, *The Gospel of John Set Free: Preaching without Anti-Judaism* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008); Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free: Preaching without Anti-Judaism* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009).

(1) Love Sechrest argues that Paul viewed Christians as a new race. She contends that in Second Temple Judaism racial identity was understood as a dialectic encompassing social, physical, and religious aspects. Adopting this ancient view of race for her analysis of Paul, she perceives race largely in terms of religion. Sechrest concludes that, “for Paul, adoption of Christian belief amounted to a change in racial identity.”¹¹⁴ Whether born as Jews or Gentiles, believers in Christ receive a “new and separate ethno-racial identity” that is prioritized over their birth race.¹¹⁵ In applying her proposal to the modern world, Sechrest enjoins both blacks and whites to become “blood traitors” in allegiance to their new Christian race.¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, encouraging white Christians to view themselves as members of the Christian race rather than the white race enables the denial of whiteness and its privileges, thereby fueling the transparency phenomenon. Moreover, by positing a Christian race that is “separate from” other racial identities, Sechrest’s proposal could facilitate the absorption of various racial cultures into the dominant racial culture. Sechrest’s decision to adopt an ancient understanding of race in interpreting Paul results in downplaying the significance of the modern concept of race.

(2) Daniel Boyarin argues that Paul eliminated race in the body of Christ. Boyarin finds in Paul’s letters a brand of Platonic dualism that privileges the unseen spiritual aspect of human beings over the bodily and visible aspect. He reads Paul through the lens of Gal 3:28, which he interprets as “the baptismal declaration of the new

¹¹⁴ Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 228-229.

humanity of no difference.”¹¹⁷ He believes that Paul identified equality with sameness and strived to achieve a single, unified humanity that erased all cultural specificities, beginning with Judaism. The problem with this ideal, says Boyarin, is that all cultural specificities would merge into the dominant culture, which indicts Pauline universalism as a form of racism. Boyarin’s analysis focuses too much on Gal 3:28 and understands this verse in the Hellenistic context rather than in the context of Paul’s apostolic ministry. If Paul had desired for all Christians to have an undifferentiated identity, it would have made more sense for him to preach a gospel of circumcision to the Gentiles instead of a circumcision-free gospel.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Boyarin does not adequately account for 1 Cor 7:17-20, where Paul advocates racial distinctions within Christian community.

(3) Brad Braxton, on the other hand, argues that Paul upheld racial distinctions in the body of Christ. He emphasizes 1 Cor 7:17-20, where Paul instructs Gentiles to remain Gentiles in Christ (in other words, to avoid circumcision) and Jews to remain Jews in Christ (in other words, to retain circumcision).¹¹⁹ Braxton contends that Paul intentionally aimed to create multiracial communities that followed Christ. He interprets Gal 3:28 in the context of Paul’s apostolic ministry and reaches the opposite conclusion of Boyarin:

Paul’s entire evangelistic campaign was designed to bring the Gentiles into the Church as Gentiles. In other words, Paul preached a law-free gospel among the Gentiles in order to insure ethnic diversity in the Church. Why, then, would he assert that in Christ the very ethnic diversity for which he had toiled was obliterated in the name of an undifferentiated identity? When Paul says, ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male and

¹¹⁷ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 5.

¹¹⁸ Braxton, *No Longer Slaves*, 115.

¹¹⁹ Brad Ronnell Braxton, *The Tyranny of Resolution: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

female,' he is not asserting the obliteration of difference, but rather the obliteration of dominance.¹²⁰

Braxton seems to view racial identity and Christian identity as equally important, which could potentially leave room for racial differences to surmount religious commonalities. However, in Braxton's understanding of Paul, Christian unity and racial diversity are complementary.¹²¹ Braxton's interpretation has the merits of affirming multiculturalism and racial egalitarianism in the body of Christ.

(4) Carolyn Hodge argues that Paul upheld hierarchical racial distinctions within the body of Christ. Embracing Lloyd Gaston and John Gager's two-covenant understanding of Paul, Hodge states that since the beginning of Christianity "certain aspects of Jewish culture [have been] normative for Christians."¹²² On this basis, Hodge contends that Paul privileged Jewish identity over Gentile identity in Christ.

One merit of this proposal is that it combats anti-Judaism in Pauline scholarship. Another is Hodge's model of "multiple identities," which is helpful in interpreting the complexities of Christian identity and Christian unity. But her claim that Paul favored the Jewish race over the Gentile race is not persuasive. Her argument depends on the assertion that Paul wrote strictly to Gentiles, a claim that is called into question by multiple passages in Romans where Paul appears to address Jews (e.g., Rom 2:17ff.). Her argument also depends on the two-covenant hypothesis that Paul viewed Christ as the source of righteousness for Gentiles but not Jews. While this interpretation seems to clarify some obscure passages in Romans, it fails to account for Phil 3:9, where Paul

¹²⁰ Braxton, *No Longer Slaves*, 94.

¹²¹ Braxton, *Preaching Paul*, 57.

¹²² Carolyn Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

“includes himself among those whose righteousness comes from Christ *instead of Torah*.”¹²³ Furthermore, it would appear that Gal 3:28 eliminates either racial diversity or racial hierarchy in the body of Christ, yet Hodge contends that it maintains both. Finally, Hodge’s vision of hierarchical racial identities within the body of Christ seems particularly prone to racially unjust appropriations today.

Of the foregoing proposals, I find number 3 the most convincing. Not only does Braxton’s case make the most sense within the context of Paul’s life and ministry, it also has the most promise for informing preaching about race today. Therefore, I will interpret Eph 2:15 in light of Braxton’s proposal, yet I will also incorporate aspects of Hodge’s model of “multiple identities.”

In Eph 2:15, the “one new human” indicates the removal of racial enmity, not racial distinctiveness. The point is to repudiate the view that racial differences are “grounds for estrangement and discrimination.”¹²⁴ Admittedly, when verse 15 says Christ annulled the Jewish Law in order to create unity between Jews and Gentiles, it seems to imply that Christian unity requires eliminating certain racial distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. However, the text is explicitly addressed to Gentile Christians, so the thrust of v. 15 is that the Jewish Law is not binding for Gentile Christians. Their identity as “strangers” and “aliens” (Eph 2:12) does not have to be absorbed into Jewish racial identity in order for them to be incorporated into the Christian community. They can remain Gentiles by race while becoming Christians by religion.

According to Hodge, Paul and other early Christians negotiated multiple identities. For example, Paul enumerates several of his identities in Phil 3:5-6, including

¹²³ Sechrest, 218 (emphasis in the original).

¹²⁴ Yee, 166.

Israelite, Benjaminite, Hebrew, and Pharisee, a list to which he added his identity “in Christ.” Moreover, Hodge notes that in 1 Cor 1:22-24, Paul describes both Jews and Greeks as “called,” so that Christian identity cuts across racial identities rather than erasing them.¹²⁵ In light of Rom 3:31, where the Jewish Law is upheld in Christ, it appears that Jews in the body of Christ could continue to abide by aspects of the Law and still direct their ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Gentile Christians could continue in their uncircumcised flesh.

Eph 2:11 instructs Gentile Christians to recall their Gentile background. The text encourages racial groups not to forget their distinct histories. Since the identity of both Jews and Gentiles depends on remembering their history, this confirms that they do not simply lose their identities in the body of Christ.¹²⁶ Rather, their racial identities are relativized in Christ to the extent that racial enmity and racial hierarchy are forfeited. While unity is paramount in the body of Christ, racial-cultural heritage is an important identity marker that should not be ignored. Christians are to uphold their various racial identities while also upholding their common identity in Christ. The ecclesial goal is solidarity without sameness.

In v. 16, Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God through the cross. Here, we encounter the vertical atonement that many white evangelical preachers stress. However, v. 14 declares peace between Jews and Gentiles before v. 16 proclaims peace between both groups and God. Horizontal atonement appears in the text prior to vertical atonement. Some interpreters overvalue this point, arguing that the text conveys “the

¹²⁵ Hodge, 126.

¹²⁶ Rader, 248.

primacy of ecclesiology over soteriology.”¹²⁷ Others undervalue the point, arguing that “the peace proclaimed is not primarily that Jews and Gentiles are now reconciled to each other, but that God’s act has reconciled *both* to God, i.e., it is primarily ‘vertical’ and *then* ‘horizontal.’”¹²⁸

Alternatively, I maintain that the horizontal atonement and the vertical atonement in Eph 2:14-16 do not occur sequentially but simultaneously. The reconciling of Jews and Gentiles and the reconciling of both groups to God are interdependent, synchronized reconciliations. Ernest Best has it right: “Not only do Jew and Gentile move towards one another; both move towards God. Neither movement may be said to be prior to the other or regarded as its basis...Here the reconciliations are as inseparable as the two great commandments of love.”¹²⁹

The homiletic implications are significant. If becoming one with people of different races is part of becoming one with God, there is significant theological ground from which to encourage white evangelical preachers to preach about race in order to bring listeners closer to God. Preaching racial reconciliation is not only a social responsibility. It is also an evangelical-theological necessity—if *salvation* is to be complete. Evangelical theology, as it is preached, cannot focus simply and exclusively on a “personal relationship with God.” Eph 2:14-18 reminds us that our personal relationship with God is interpersonal, even interracial. Interracial enmity is a significant part of the hostility between God and humanity. But v. 16 says this hostility was overcome on the cross. Christ died to rid the world of racism.

¹²⁷ This position is briefly summarized in O’Brien, 202.

¹²⁸ Boring and Craddock, 602 (emphasis in the original).

¹²⁹ Best, 107. Consult Mt 22:37-40.

It is significant that the “redemption” of the Christus Victor image and the “forgiveness” of the satisfaction image are both in play. Redemption indicates that Christ’s death liberates us from captivity to racism, which appears to be one of the “cosmic powers” or “spiritual forces of evil” that assails Christians (Eph 6:12). These powers are both invisible and visible, both heavenly and earthly (Col 1:16). They include “human agents, social structures and systems, and divine powers.”¹³⁰ Yee claims that the powers in Ephesians “could become a means of dividing human groups, establishing the differences between them, suggesting wherein their ‘otherness’ lies.”¹³¹ This is certainly the case for Christians in the United States, where the spiritual and social structural power of racism has exerted tremendous influence for centuries. According to the writer of Ephesians, however, Christ’s death has released believers from the powers that fuse racial identity with racial enmity.

Forgiveness indicates that Christ’s death has brought about God’s forgiveness for the personal sin of racism. Christians are forgiven for exhibiting prejudice toward people of other races. While forgiveness is reassuring, it is also challenging. Forgiveness implies that Christians have a personal responsibility to withstand the power of racism and disavow racist attitudes and actions. Disallowing racism to dictate our personal lives is part of what it means to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his power” (Eph 6:10).

¹³⁰ Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 11.

¹³¹ Yee, 227.

Eph 2:17-18: Preaching Peace and Mutual Access

Verses 17-18: And having come, he preached peace to you the far away and peace to the near, that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Verse 17 alludes to Is 57:19—“Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord”—and implies that Christ fulfills this prophecy. Scholars debate when and how Christ proclaimed peace between Jews and Gentiles. Conjecture abounds: (1) Christ preached this prior to the incarnation. (2) The incarnation was itself a preaching of peace. (3) Christ’s earthly life constituted this preaching. (4) The resurrection was Christ’s declaration of peace. (5) This preaching happens in the coming of the Spirit after Jesus’ ascension. (6) “Christ preaches in that he instructs and inspires those who then proclaim the Gospel to Jew and Gentile...Part of the task of missionaries will be the bringing of peace (Mt 10:13) and when missionaries are received it is as if Christ were received (Mt 10:40).”¹³² (7) Christ’s atoning death on the cross was his preaching of peace.¹³³ (8) Christ’s preaching of peace is constituted by the entirety of his saving work.¹³⁴

The multitude of interpretations reflects the ambiguity of the verse, and ambiguity invites homileticians to employ the “sanctified imagination.”¹³⁵ Of the foregoing interpretations, I am especially convinced, as a homiletician, by number six—Christ proclaims peace as his disciples proclaim his peace.¹³⁶ From this perspective, Christ

¹³² Best, 112.

¹³³ O’Brien, 206 (emphasis in the original). This was John Calvin’s interpretation.

¹³⁴ MacDonald, 247.

¹³⁵ Harris, 106-109.

¹³⁶ O’Brien and Schnackenburg support this interpretation. O’Brien, 207; Schnackenburg, 118.

preaches through us when we proclaim interracial peace. When we broach the topic of racial reconciliation in the pulpit, Christ says to us as he said to his disciples of old, “Whoever listens to you listens to me” (Lk 10:16). Therefore, we can address the controversial topic of race with boldness (Eph 6:18).

As stated above, the “access” to God in v. 18 is atonement language that echoes cultic traditions of the Old Testament. While the Greek term *προσαγωγή* can refer to an audience with the emperor, here it is associated with Jewish sacrificial traditions. “Access” suggests free and full entry into God’s presence, and this is provided through the Holy Spirit.

In God’s Spirit, Jews and Gentiles have equal standing before God. “Access for one group does not mean exclusion for others.”¹³⁷ The ethical implication is that Christians of different races should seek equality with one another and exhibit a harmonious spirit toward one another. As Eph 4:3 states, they are to display “unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

Noteworthy is the proto-trinitarian language in v. 18: Christ grants access to the Father through the Holy Spirit. From the standpoint of post-biblical Trinitarian theology, this verse shows that all three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in racial reconciliation. It also suggests that cooperation among the three persons of the Godhead is a model for cooperation among members of the multiracial Christian community. The three persons of the Trinity are distinct yet unified, as are Christians of various races. The three persons of the Trinity relate communally but non-hierarchically, as should

¹³⁷ Perkins, 74.

Christians of different races.¹³⁸ Grounding ecclesiology in the doctrine of the Trinity, Volf states, “Like the divine persons, so also ecclesial persons cannot live in isolation from one another.”¹³⁹ In light of Eph 2:18, we might specify that ecclesial persons cannot live in isolation from the racial other. This does not necessitate that every local church become an interracial church, but that every local church and every individual Christian seek just and harmonious interracial relationships.

Eph 2:19-22: Ecclesiological Implications of Racial Atonement

Verses 19-20: Therefore then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

The phrase “therefore then” begins an explanation of the consequences of racial atonement. Verse 19 echoes verse 12, showing that Gentiles who were once outsiders have become insiders. Those who were “strangers [ξένοι] to the covenants” in v. 12 are no longer “strangers [ξένοι]” in v. 19. Additionally, “the term ‘fellow-citizen’

¹³⁸ Here, I embrace a version of “social trinitarianism.” In suggesting that unity among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the basis for unity in the church, I am reminded of Jesus’ prayer that his disciples “may be one” as he and the Father are one (Jn 17:22). In interpreting the proto-trinitarian language in Eph 2:18 non-hierarchically, I follow Jürgen Moltmann’s understanding of perichoretic relations among the three persons of the Trinity. He states, “Through the concept of perichoresis, all subordinationism in the Trinity is avoided...Here the three persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.” Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 175-176. In grounding ecclesiology in a social interpretation of the Trinity, I follow Volf, who asserts, “The correspondence between Trinitarian and ecclesial communion...is grounded in Christian baptism. Through baptism ‘in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,’ the Spirit of God leads believers simultaneously into both Trinitarian and ecclesial communion...If Christian initiation is a Trinitarian event, then the church must speak of the Trinity as its determining reality...The relations between the many in the church must reflect the mutual love of the divine persons.” Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 195-196.

¹³⁹ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 206.

(συμπολίτες) [in v. 19] is a cognate of the term ‘commonwealth’ (πολιτεία)” in v. 12.¹⁴⁰

The juxtaposition of aliens and citizens constitutes “one of the most significant features in the ancient world serving as *signals and emblems of difference*.”¹⁴¹ Both Jewish and Gentile readers would have understood this political language of inclusion that breaks down conventional “us-them” dichotomies.¹⁴² If the church is a city, then Gentiles are full citizens alongside Jews. If the church is a household, then Gentiles are members of the family with equal access to the Father (v. 18).¹⁴³

Verse 20 implies that those who speak the gospel are foundational to the church, whose cornerstone is Christ. The “prophets” are probably New Testament preachers rather than Old Testament preachers since the term is listed after the New Testament term “apostles.” More to the point, Eph 3:5 and 4:11 mention “apostles and prophets” as leaders of the nascent church. Some scholars hold that the Greek term ἀκρογωνιαίος refers not to a cornerstone but a capstone. Yet v. 21 undercuts this interpretation since it describes the building as growing.¹⁴⁴

The incompleteness of the building signals that the project of racial reconciliation is ongoing, and so preachers are to continue constructive work on it today. If Christ is the cornerstone and apostles and prophets are the foundation, we might say the basis of the building is “the proclaimed Christ.” Apostles and prophets are not the foundation “in

¹⁴⁰ MacDonald, 248.

¹⁴¹ Yee, 192 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁴² Ibid., 211.

¹⁴³ Bruce, 302-303.

¹⁴⁴ Additional arguments in favor of the cornerstone translation include: “the use of the term in LXX Is 28:16, the foundational role given to Christ in 1 Cor 3:10-11, and the fact that it is difficult to make sense of the role of the prophets and apostles if Christ is not the base for the foundation.” MacDonald, 249.

their persons; rather, they fulfill their role in the exercise of their function as official bearers of the revelation of Christ.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, the church’s foundation is the homiletic interpretation of Jesus Christ. Verse 20 therefore accentuates the importance of preaching, especially in building interracial community.

Verses: 21-22: In him all the building is fitted together and grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord, in whom you also are built together into a temple of God in the Spirit.

Jews and Gentiles grow into a “temple” in Christ. The temple symbolism “enables the author to transpose the Gentiles from the periphery to the center of the Jewish symbolic world while sustaining the traditional notion that the ‘temple’ is still the holy space of God’s presence.”¹⁴⁶ The phrase “all the building” connotes the universal church, a construction site juxtaposed with the demolition site where the wall of racial enmity lies in ruins (v. 14). O’Brien contends, “According to Old Testament prophecy the temple at Jerusalem was to be the place where all nations at the end time would come to worship and pray to the living God (Is 66:18-20; cf., Is 2:1-5; Mi 4:1-5). The temple imagery here is to be understood in fulfillment of these promises.”¹⁴⁷

The Greek term *συνοικοδομέω* literally means “built together with the others.”¹⁴⁸ Without Christians of multiple races, the church cannot be built into the structure Christ intends. The ecclesiology of Ephesians is deeply concerned with the amelioration of malignant interhuman conflict at a social level, and thus it is emphatically multiracial, and the metaphor of the building signifies “the mutual coordination and support of the

¹⁴⁵ Martin, 38.

¹⁴⁶ Yee, 211.

¹⁴⁷ O’Brien, 220.

¹⁴⁸ Thurston, 111.

reconciled Jews and Gentiles.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, preachers can exhort Christians of different races to cultivate relationships with one another characterized by mutual edification.

Eph 2:11-22 as a Theological Paradigm for Preaching about Race

Embracing Eph 2:11-22 as a theological paradigm for preaching racial reconciliation offers white evangelical preachers several opportunities. First, we can preach race relations as a central element of the gospel witnessed to in scripture, rather than simply a social issue to which we can apply the gospel. If racism is presented as a social issue that is marginally related to scripture, white evangelical congregants may suspect that the preacher is merely trying to be politically correct. On the other hand, by utilizing Eph 2:11-22, preachers can demonstrate to white evangelicals, who hold fast to a sacrificial view of the atonement, that Jesus died specifically for the sake of racial reconciliation.

In Eph 2:11-22, to speak about the peace of Christ is to speak about interracial peace; to speak about Christ’s atonement is to speak about interracial atonement; and to “lift high the cross” is to bring down the wall of racism. If racial reconciliation is connected to the cross of Christ, then preaching about race will carry considerable theological force in white evangelical churches. Preachers can help congregants understand that racial reconciliation is tied to the heart of the gospel: Christ, the cross, and atonement.

Second, we can preach about race consistently. One “race relations Sunday” per year is not adequate, nor is an annual “pulpit swap” with a preacher of another race.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Barth, 273.

Instead, preachers can regularly challenge congregants toward righteous race relations because, as Eph 2:11-22 demonstrates, ushering people closer to God involves ushering them toward the “racial other.” Christ’s atonement is incomplete without racial atonement, and so is the gospel. In order to cultivate racial peace, preachers can “disturb the peace” of our quiet, unconsciously racist Sunday mornings.

Third, we can proclaim racial reconciliation as a direct outgrowth of Christ’s saving grace. The doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Eph 2:8-9 is related to the racial atonement in Eph 2:11-22. In connecting the doctrine of grace to racial reconciliation, preachers should be careful not to imply that the idea of God’s grace was foreign to Judaism. Jews had trusted God’s grace long before Jesus died on the cross.¹⁵¹ Too often, evangelical preachers stereotype Judaism in terms of “works righteousness” in order to create a negative foil for the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace. The Christian doctrine of salvation by grace can and should stand on its own.

Fourth, we can link racial reconciliation with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. White evangelical congregations affirm the Reformation ideal of *sola scriptura*, yet almost always ascribe to the Trinitarian orthodoxy of Nicea (325 C.E.). Although the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not explicitly outlined in the Bible, Trinitarian doctrine is a non-negotiable in many white evangelical churches. Preachers can utilize Eph 2:18 to illuminate how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cooperate to establish racial equality and racial reconciliation. This verse disproves the longstanding criticism that Trinitarian

¹⁵⁰ For example, Allen and Thomas suggest including “a significant discussion of an issue related to race at least once a month.” Allen and Thomas, 175.

¹⁵¹ Myriad Old Testament texts affirm God’s grace, including Gn 39:21, Ex 34:6-7, Dt 13:17, 1 Sm 20:14, 2 Sm 24:14, Jb 10:12, Ps 25:6, Ps 40:11, Ps 136:1-26, Is 54:8, Jer 9:24, and Jer 31:3. The Jewish covenant with God is based on God’s grace. Thus, Boyarin remarks, “Jews had always had a notion and powerful sense of God’s grace...and of the necessity of grace in life and for salvation.” Boyarin, 41.

doctrine has no practical value, for preachers can appeal to it as a basis for interracial unity in the church.¹⁵²

Fifth, in our context, we can identify the wall of racial enmity as unconscious racism and white privilege. The primary barrier to racial reconciliation in twenty-first century America is not openly racist hostility or blatantly racist policies such as slavery or segregation. Rather, critical race theory reveals that the greatest obstacle to racial reconciliation is unconscious racism that upholds white privilege. According to Eph 2:11-22, no racial group is to have more privileges than another. Rather, people of all races have equal access to God and equal standing in the body of Christ (Eph 2:18). In order to concretize the ideal of racial equality, whites must be challenged to forfeit our racism-based privileges. Whites have the primary responsibility to embody the demolition of the wall of racist privilege.

Sixth, we can depict racism as a power from which Christ's death redeems us and as a personal sin for which Christ's death provides forgiveness. If racism is presented as anything less than both an evil power and a personal sin, then preachers have not adequately addressed racism. If atonement is presented as anything less than redemption from the power of sin and forgiveness of personal sins, then preachers have not adequately addressed atonement.

Seventh, we can proclaim an interracial ecclesiology. Preachers do not need to insist that every local church become multiracial, but that every church and every Christian seek interracial relationships characterized by justice and peace. Some churches may have the gift of multiracial and multicultural worship, while others may

¹⁵² Consult Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006).

not. Even racially homogeneous churches can make strides toward racial reconciliation, such as reaching out to neighbors of different races, employing multicultural hymnody in worship, and celebrating saints of various racial identities (e.g., Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero, Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, and Takashi Nagai).¹⁵³

Eighth, according to Amy Pauw, “the claim that Christ is our peace will have to find articulation not only within the Christian community (the focus of Ephesians) but in Christian relations with non-Christian Jews as well.”¹⁵⁴ Preachers can reject anti-Judaism and strive toward inter-faith peace in our preaching about interracial peace. For example, Amy-Jill Levine offers valuable insight for avoiding anti-Judaism in Christian preaching. (1) Preachers should not stereotype Judaism in creating a “negative foil” for Christ in which “whatever Jesus stands for, Judaism isn’t” and “whatever Jesus is against, Judaism epitomizes [it].”¹⁵⁵ (2) Preachers should acknowledge the diversity of Jewish beliefs rather than stereotyping Jews with blanket statements. For example, not all Jews in the first century were expecting a warrior Messiah. (3) Preachers should avoid the following claims that perpetuate hatred toward Jews:

The view that the Jewish law was impossible to follow, a burden no one could bear...The proclamation that Jesus was a feminist in a woman-hating Jewish culture...The conclusion that Jews were obsessed with keeping themselves pure from the contamination of outsiders...The insistence that first-century Judaism was marked by a Temple domination system that oppressed the poor and women and that promoted social division between insiders and outcasts...The assertion that Jews are narrow, clannish, particularistic, and xenophobic, whereas Jesus and the church are engaged in universal outreach.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Consult Kathy Black, *Culturally-Conscious Worship* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

¹⁵⁴ Amy Plantinga Pauw, “Theological Meditations on Ephesians 2:11-22,” *Theology Today* 62, no. 1 (2005): 80.

¹⁵⁵ Levine, 19.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

(4) Preachers should practice “holy envy” by offering a generous and even complimentary construal of Judaism.¹⁵⁷ Finally, preachers should explain why Jesus died, because a linchpin in the history of anti-Judaism has been blaming Jews for the death of Christ.¹⁵⁸ While preachers could cite historical Jesus scholarship that finds the Romans responsible for Jesus’ death, white evangelical preachers might accentuate a favorite doctrine at this point: the sacrificial death of Christ. Christ died sacrificially, resisting Roman imperial forces of dehumanization. Likewise, when we perpetuate dehumanization through racism or anti-Judaism, we, like that Roman system, place Jesus on the cross again. Preachers can use this theological interpretation of Eph 2:11-22 to counter the claims in 1 Thes 2:14-16 and Mt 27:25 that seem to blame Jews for the death of Jesus and have fueled centuries of hatred against Jews as ostensible “Christ killers.”¹⁵⁹

Eph 2:11-22 is a dynamic paradigm for preaching about race and racial reconciliation. In this passage, Christ destroys the barrier of racism between social groups. The cross unites Christians of different races. Atonement redeems us from the power of racism and forgives us of the sin of racism. The Holy Trinity provides equal access to God for people of different races. And the church is a community of racial solidarity without racial sameness.

One shortcoming of Eph 2:11-22, however, is that it offers no model for racial reparations. Critical race theory insists that reparations are indispensable for racial

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 226.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 222. For more insight on how Christian preachers can repudiate anti-Judaism, consult *ibid.*, 215-226.

¹⁵⁹ Consult *ibid.*, 95-102.

reconciliation in modern-day America. Therefore, the next chapter will propose a model of racial reparations.

Chapter IV

A Critical Correlation of Critical Race Theory and Ephesians 2:11-22: Ecclesial Reparations and Critical Race Theology

In chapters one and two, critical race theory illuminated racial problems in American society and white evangelicalism. In chapter three, Eph 2:11-22 provided a theological paradigm of racial reconciliation for preachers in white American evangelical churches. This chapter correlates critical race theory and Eph 2:11-22 by placing them in a critical dialogue that ultimately privileges the biblical tradition. It argues two main points.

First, critical race theory reveals that Eph 2:11-22 lacks a model of reparations. Whereas white people have a tendency to rush to reconciliation without first attending to racial justice, critical race theorists advocate reparations to redress past racial injustices such as slavery and Jim Crow, to address modern economic inequities related to race, and to guard against cheap reconciliation. This chapter argues that racial reparations are also theologically important in light of the biblical call to justice. According to Walter Brueggemann, “Justice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them.”¹ I observe this vision of justice in the Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25 and the story of Zacchaeus in Lk 19:1-10.

However, since the dissertation focuses on the Pauline tradition, I highlight the Apostle Paul’s Jerusalem collection as an important example of justice and interpret the collection as a model of racial reparations for white American evangelical churches.

¹ Walter Brueggemann, “Voices of the Night—Against Justice,” in Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, and Thomas H. Groome, *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An Agenda for Ministers* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 5.

Because African Americans have suffered extensively through slavery, segregation, and their enduring effects, and because the United States government has never paid reparations to African Americans as a group, I focus on black reparations.² Since I am Southern Baptist by heritage, and since Southern Baptists have a distinctly racist history, I specifically encourage Southern Baptist churches to provide black reparations.

Second, Eph 2:11-22 suggests that theological reflection can bolster critical race theory. According to Eph 2:11-22, racism is a theological problem that can be ameliorated theologically. This chapter argues that critical race theory could benefit from theological reflection in its analyses of race since racism has been theologically legitimated throughout American history. My argument builds on W. E. B. Dubois's work, specifically his copious use of biblical language to undermine racism and his theological analysis of whiteness. According to Terrance MacMullan, Du Bois recognized that since American racism emerged in a Christian context, it could be countered only through a reconstruction of Christian language.³ Correspondingly, I suggest that the racial atonement in Eph 2:11-22 and its paradigm of Christ's self-sacrifice can be helpful in persuading whites to sacrifice race-granted privileges.

Critical Race Theory on Reparations

Critical race theory maintains that reparation is integral to racial reconciliation. The foundational argument for reparations in critical race theory is Mari Matsuda's essay

² According to Randall Robinson, "No race, no ethnic or religious group, has suffered so much over so long a span as blacks have, and do still, at the hands of those who benefited, with the connivance of the United States government, from slavery and the century of legalized American racial hostility that followed it." Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York: Plume, 2001), 8.

³ Terrance MacMullan, *Habits of Whiteness: A Pragmatist Reconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 19.

“Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations.” When first published in 1987, this essay marked the arrival of critical race theory and established reparations as a key item on its agenda. The essay also contributed to making reparations discourse more academically respectable.⁴

Matsuda presents reparations as a concept arising from the experience of people of color.⁵ While some object to reparations because it is too difficult to identify individual perpetrators and victims, Matsuda reframes the issue in terms of group rights. While some object to reparations because the past act of injustice is so distant from the present claim for justice, Matsuda contends that there is often a recognizable “victim class that continues to suffer a stigmatized position enhanced or promoted by the wrongful act in question.”⁶ While some object that a fair damage assessment and precise distribution of damages would be impossible, Matsuda observes that courts routinely calculate non-quantifiable damages and the inexact distribution of damages goes unquestioned in other legal circumstances. In the end, she argues, approximate justice is better than no justice at all.

According to Matsuda, reparations signal the contrition of the powerful. Thus, reparations can ease the bitterness of victims. Reparations also serve as an important acknowledgement of personhood. Matsuda states, “Lack of legal redress for racist acts is an injury often more serious than the acts themselves, because it signifies the political nonpersonhood of victims. The grant of reparations declares: ‘You exist. Your experience of deprivation is real. You are entitled to compensation for that

⁴ Alfred L. Brophy, *Reparations: Pro and Con* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 63-65.

⁵ Matsuda, “Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations,” 67.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

deprivation.”⁷ Therefore, the symbolic value of reparations advances racial justice regardless of whether reparations close the economic gap between races.

Eric Yamamoto is another critical race theorist who advocates reparations. He claims reparation is essential to interracial justice because it addresses unjust material realities and guards against cheap reconciliation.⁸ According to Yamamoto, reparation involves both material and psychological dimensions, and only reparation that is costly can actually repair. Reparations require change, specifically, “the loss of some social advantages by those more powerful. For these reasons, those responsible for repairing the harms always resist initially.” Nonetheless, reparation paired with apology can facilitate the reconciliation of estranged racial groups.⁹

Other critical race theorists join Matsuda and Yamamoto in calling for reparations. Derrick Bell suggests that reparations could be the next main focus of racial activism after affirmative action. He supports racial reparations as a way to bring economic justice to those whose forebears were denied justice following the Civil War.¹⁰ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic propose reparations for Native Americans, blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans.¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁸ Eric K. Yamamoto, *Interracial Justice: Conflict and Reconciliation in Post-Civil Rights America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 175.

⁹ Ibid., 203-205.

¹⁰ Derrick Bell, “The Chronicle of the Black Reparations Foundation,” in *The Derrick Bell Reader*, 411-416.

¹¹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 134. Consult also Richard Delgado, “The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 49-50. Gary Peller also supports reparations in contradicting integrationist approaches to race. Gary Peller, “Race-Consciousness,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 150-151.

The Reparations Debate

The case for black reparations is straightforward. Enslaved African Americans labored for 246 years without remuneration, which deprived their descendants of an inheritance. The descendants of slave owners, on the other hand, inherited profits wrongfully gained from slave labor. In 1865, the U.S. government promised to give forty acres and a mule to freed slaves but then reneged. After slavery was abolished, a century of systematic racial oppression, especially Jim Crow, kept African Americans from sharing the prosperity of our growing nation. Therefore, the United States is economically and morally indebted to African Americans.¹²

The payment of reparations in numerous other national and international circumstances constitutes precedent for the payment of black reparations. For example, in 1952, Germany paid \$822 million to survivors of the Holocaust; in 1971, the United States paid \$1 billion and 44 million acres of land to Alaska Natives; in 1985, the United States paid \$105 million to the Lakota of South Dakota; in 1986, the United States paid \$32 million to the Ottawas of Michigan; in 1988, Canada paid \$230 million to Japanese Canadians; and in 1990, the United States paid \$1.2 billion to Japanese Americans. While no dollar amount could compensate for the racist evils perpetrated against African Americans, the United States could provide reparations to African Americans as concrete remorse for slavery and as a motion toward economic justice.¹³

¹² An even terser summary of this argument is offered by Roy Brooks: “First, slavery and the slavlike conditions under which free blacks lived denied these blacks life and liberty (basic capital), plus an estate (financial, human, and social capital) to bequeath to their heirs. Second, Jim Crow forced their descendants, who had little capital to begin with, into the worst jobs, the worst housing, and the worst educational system, the effects of which are very much in evidence today.” Roy L. Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 2-3.

¹³ Derrick Bell, “The Role of Fortuity in Racial Policy-Making,” 43. Raymond A. Winbush, “Introduction,” in *Should America Pay? Slavery and the Raging Debate on Reparations*, ed. Raymond A.

Opponents of reparations respond with several arguments. (1) Today's taxpayers are not culpable for injustices of the distant past and therefore should not have to pay reparations. (2) Reparations have already been paid through social programs such as welfare. (3) Reparations are practically and politically impossible to implement. (4) Reparations would divide races instead of uniting them. (5) Reparations would solidify a victim mentality among African Americans. (6) Slavery ultimately has benefited descendants of the enslaved because today African Americans are better off than Africans.¹⁴

Each of the above points is fiercely contested. Number 1 is contested on the grounds that the government is culpable for slavery and segregation and should pay reparations regardless of taxpayers' culpability. Number 2 is contested on the grounds that welfare is not race-based and therefore cannot compensate for the race-based crimes of slavery and Jim Crow. Number 3 is contested because reparations have been implemented for Native Americans and Japanese Americans and the legal system does not always require exactness when assigning damages. Number 4 is contested because historical race consciousness is needed to combat the subtle racism that currently divides races. Number 5 is contested because reparations might inspire self-determination among blacks.¹⁵ Number 6 is contested because it compares the current state of African

Winbush (New York: Amistad, 2003), xxii. Ronald Waters asserts, "In light of the compensation made to other groups, one is struck by how far outside the realm of legitimacy reparations to Black people are judged to be by the American government and white public. In fact, that judgment itself may be considered a manifestation of racism: Africans are boldly rejected despite a just claim and despite efforts to deliver reparations to other groups." Ronald W. Waters, *The Price of Racial Reconciliation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 15.

¹⁴ Brophy, xvi. Consult also Brophy, 75-94.

¹⁵ Waters describes reparations as "a major step toward racial reconciliation through the power of Black self-determination." Waters, 188.

Americans to that of certain economically impoverished Africans—made so in large measure by racist colonial practices that followed in the wake of Transatlantic slavery—rather than that of white Americans.

Admittedly, reparation is an untidy subject encompassing many economic and political complexities. This is the case largely because slavery happened so long ago. Nevertheless, reparation is crucial because the economic and political effects of slavery persist today.

Reparations advocates suggest a variety of concrete proposals, including apologies, truth commissions, land grants, health care, more legal rights for victims of racism, a trust fund for African Americans, cash payments to victims of slavery and their families, and slavery museums in Washington D. C. and state capitals.¹⁶ Of these, I especially favor apology, slavery museums, and an educational trust fund for African Americans. The apology would at long last express the federal government's official remorse for slavery and segregation. Slavery museums would acknowledge both the horrors of slavery and the vast contributions enslaved African Americans made to the United States. The trust fund would begin to rectify the economic injustice African Americans have suffered and empower them for the future. Though I think the United States government should provide the foregoing reparations, I suggest an ecclesial approach to reparations.

¹⁶ Brophy, 167-179. Molefi Kete Asante, "The African American Warrant for Reparations," in *Should America Pay?* 12. Brooks, 157-159.

Ecclesial Reparations

Much reparations discourse has focused on the federal government's responsibility to rectify the evils of slavery and Jim Crow, but there is a strand in the history of the reparations movement that calls for churches to provide reparation. In 1969, James Forman interrupted Sunday morning worship at The Riverside Church in New York City and read aloud "The Black Manifesto." It demanded that white churches and synagogues pay \$500 million in black reparations, which amounted to approximately fifteen dollars per black person in the United States. These funds were demanded merely to start the process of providing the vast reparations owed to African Americans. The \$500 million was to be spent on several initiatives, including black publishing houses, black television networks, a National Black Labor Strike and Defense Fund, a black university in the South, and a Southern Land Bank to assist African Americans with real estate.¹⁷

Forman's demand for reparations was directed toward the white church because it was a center of power in the Western world and was culpable for supporting slavery and Jim Crow.¹⁸ Additionally, the white church had both the moral capacity and the financial resources to make reparations viable.¹⁹ According to Arnold Schuchter, "Forman used church institutions as a surrogate for the nation. The choice was appropriate insofar as churches are supposed to embody the nation's conscience, at least symbolically."²⁰ The

¹⁷ "Part 1: Black Manifesto," in Arnold Schuchter, *Reparations: The Black Manifesto and Its Challenge to White America* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 196-198.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 201-202.

¹⁹ Schuchter, x.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

Manifesto hoped that reparations from the church might inspire other racist institutions, especially the United States government, to provide black reparations.²¹

The Riverside Church was only one of Forman's stops. He also confronted the Episcopal Church and the Lutheran Church in America with the Manifesto's demand for black reparations. Though disapproving of Forman's tactics and revolutionary rhetoric, the churches responded with verbal support for black reparations. Unfortunately, little financial commitment followed.²²

I build on Forman's assumption that the church is a key locus for reparation. I share the Black Manifesto's hope that ecclesial reparations might challenge the United States government and other institutions to provide black reparations. However, I take a different approach to moving churches toward ecclesial reparations. Given the conservative political orientation of many white American evangelicals, their ahistorical and anti-structuralist approach to race, and their focus on biblical authority over all other forms of authority, I think it is unlikely that historical or sociological reasoning alone will persuade white evangelicals to support black reparations. Statistically, reparations are unpopular among whites. While two-thirds of African Americans support reparations, only five percent of whites do.²³ Simply mentioning reparations often elicits

²¹ "Our objective in issuing this Manifesto is to force the racist white Christian church to begin the payment of reparations which are due to all black people, not only by the Church but also by private business and the U.S. Government." "Part 1: Black Manifesto," 202.

²² Schuchter, 17. According to Schuchter, "The churches thanked God for the challenge and then went about business as usual." Schuchter, 62.

²³ Brophy, xiv.

uncomfortable silence from whites, even quite progressive whites.²⁴ Therefore, I suggest that a biblical-theological approach to reparations is necessary in white evangelical churches. Such an approach begins with a biblical theology of justice.

A Biblical Theology of Justice

A biblical theology of justice is grounded in the affirmation that God is a “God of justice” (Is 30:18). Because God is just, God calls humanity to pursue justice. For example, Mi 6:8 is often regarded as an apt summary of Old Testament prophetic literature: “[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” In light of this text, a key aspect of the Christian vocation is to “do justice.”

Reflecting on Mi 6:8, Walter Brueggemann offers the following definition of biblical justice:

Justice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them. Such an understanding implies that there is a right distribution of goods and access to the sources of life. There are certain entitlements which cannot be mocked. Yet through the uneven workings of the historical process, some come to have access to or control of what belongs to others. If we control what belongs to others long enough, we come to think of it as rightly ours, and to forget it belonged to someone else. So the work of liberation, redemption, salvation, is the work of *giving things back*.²⁵

Economics is central to this vision of justice. In Mi 2:1-2, for example, the prophet criticizes those who “covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance.” Brueggemann states that

²⁴ Robinson, *The Debt*, 203. Brad R. Braxton, “Paul and Racial Reconciliation: A Postcolonial Approach to 2 Corinthians 3:12-18,” in *Scripture and Traditions: Essays on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Carl R. Holladay*, eds. Patrick Gray and Gail R. O’Day, (Boston: Brill, 2008), 418.

²⁵ Brueggemann, “Voices of the Night—Against Justice,” 5 (emphasis in the original).

most people in modern American society possess “a disproportion of social goods and social power. And we fear the loss of our disproportion. We do not ask how we got it or what it does to others.”²⁶ If white Americans were to ask how we gained disproportionate social goods, and what this does to others economically, we would face the long history of white sins against people of color that continue to benefit whites.

Another text that demands justice is the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25. This passage states that every fiftieth year, all the Israelites were to return to their property and their family (Lv 25:10). According to Maria Harris, “the particular meaning of justice that Jubilee stresses is the notion of ‘return,’ not in the Jubilee journey sense of a return home but return as relinquishing, giving back, and handing over what is not ours to God and to those crying for justice throughout the whole, round earth.”²⁷ One of the most radical aspects of Jubilee justice is the return of land every fifty years: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land” (Lv 25:23-24). Harris reminds us that when the Jubilee was first declared, “what the modern world refers to as ‘capital’ was equivalent to land.”²⁸ The call, therefore, is to return capital to those from whom it was taken over time, to give back material goods in order to redress inequality.²⁹ A Jubilee perspective provokes whites to consider returning the capital that has been unjustly taken from African Americans throughout American history.

²⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁷ Maria Harris, *Proclaim Jubilee! A Spirituality for the Twenty-first Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 79.

²⁸ Ibid., 80.

²⁹ Ibid., 87.

The story of Zacchaeus in Lk 19:1-10 also illustrates the biblical theme of justice. In this familiar story, Jesus encounters a rich tax collector named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus says to Jesus, “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I pay back four times as much” (Lk 19:8). Jesus replies, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:9-10). This story is a favorite in many white evangelical churches where it is commonly taught to children. Emphasis is placed on Zacchaeus’s repentance and salvation, yet often without attention to the economic justice Zacchaeus embodied.³⁰ Zacchaeus provided surplus compensation to anyone he had economically exploited. Because this story endorses financial reparations to compensate for economic wrongdoing, it has been used to suggest that whites should provide reparations to African Americans for the economic injustice perpetrated against them.³¹

In the Jubilee legislation and the story of Zacchaeus, justice implies economic repair. In the American context, white people have enjoyed a disproportion of social goods at the expense of African Americans and have forgotten that much of what we currently have does not belong to us. Even though slavery and Jim Crow were policies of

³⁰ Scholars debate whether the Greek present indicative in verse 8 is to be taken in a futuristic sense or an iterative sense. In the former, which is the traditional interpretation, Zacchaeus would be announcing his repentance, while in the latter he would be announcing his routine. White evangelicals usually assume the traditional interpretation. For the purposes of our discussion, this debate is beside the point. Either way, Zacchaeus decided to repay those he had economically exploited and Jesus commended him for it. For an argument that Zacchaeus was announcing his routine, consult Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 285-286. For an argument that Zacchaeus was announcing his repentance, consult R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 358.

³¹ Tisdale recounts how Ernest Campbell, former pastor of The Riverside Church, once preached a sermon entitled “The Case for Reparations” based on Lk 19:1-10. The sermon was a response to James Forman’s challenge. Campbell “drew an analogy between Zacchaeus’s actions and the church’s need to make reparations for the injustices meted out to African Americans at their hand.” Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 38, 96-97.

the distant past, whites today benefit from capital gained from 246 years of unpaid slave labor. A biblical understanding of justice provokes whites to begin to return this capital for the sake of racial justice and reconciliation.

Since the dissertation focuses on the Pauline tradition, I lift up the Jerusalem collection as an important example of justice. The collection aimed to foster economic equality and racial reconciliation via monetary exchange between Christians of different races. Underlying the collection was a profound concern for justice.

I offer a homiletic interpretation of the Jerusalem collection as a model for reparations in white American evangelical churches. This interpretation employs analogues that do not always carry a direct, one-to-one correspondence. It incorporates elements of creativity that resonate with white evangelical devotional interpretation of the Bible as well as the imaginative and typological forms of biblical interpretation common in African American, Hispanic, and Asian American homiletics. I present the following interpretation in accordance with Schneiders' hermeneutic as outlined in chapter three, a hermeneutic that calls for historical and literary exegesis but culminates in "critical existential interpretation," or spiritually integrating the text into modern life.

The Jerusalem Collection: A Homiletic Interpretation

Paul's letters reveal that he gathered monetary collections from his Gentile congregations to deliver to the church in Jerusalem. The most prodigious of these collections, the so-called Jerusalem collection, was a major aspect of Paul's ministry. Three points indicate its profound importance for Paul. First, Paul discusses the

collection in 1 Cor 16:1-4, Rom 15:25-33, and 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15.³² These passages indicate that Paul devoted a great deal of time and energy to the collection.³³ Second, delivering the collection was a priority in Paul's missionary itinerary. He hoped to visit Rome on a journey to Spain, but first he wanted to deliver the collection to Jerusalem (Rom 15:22-28). Third, it appears that Paul was willing to risk his life in order to deliver the collection (Rom 15:31).³⁴

Although the Jerusalem collection was crucial for Paul, it has garnered a relatively modest amount of scholarly attention. The collection's implications for contemporary life, in particular, remain underdeveloped. The Jerusalem collection, however, abounds with modern-day implications.

Major Interpretations of the Collection

The parameters of the dissertation do not allow a thorough exegesis of each biblical text dealing with the Jerusalem collection. Therefore, I will summarize New Testament scholarship on the collection and offer pertinent exegetical arguments of my own. According to David Downs, scholars have interpreted the Jerusalem collection in four main ways, and he adds a fifth.³⁵ Some of these interpretations are mutually exclusive while others are complementary.

³² I explain below why Gal 2:10 is not included in this list.

³³ David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 1.

³⁴ Sze-kar Wan, "Collection for the Saints as Anticolonial Act," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, ed. Richard Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 192, 195.

³⁵ Downs, 3-26.

(1) The collection was an eschatologically motivated project. In this view, Paul gathered the Jerusalem collection so that representatives of his Gentile churches could carry it to Jerusalem, thereby fulfilling Old Testament prophecies about Gentiles streaming to Zion in the last days (e.g., Is 2:2; Mi 4:1).³⁶ This symbolic act would “revive in Jewish eyes the old concept of the eschatological pilgrimage of the peoples” and provoke the Jews to jealousy so that they might receive the gospel (Rom 11:11-16).³⁷ In this interpretation, the collection is more about the act of delivery than the money itself.

Though many have embraced this eschatological interpretation, it is doubtful for at least three reasons. First, the notion of fulfilling eschatological prophecies by creating a Gentile pilgrimage to Jerusalem is absent from Paul’s discourse about the collection. Second, the idea that the delivery of the collection would signal the consummation of all things seems to conflict with Paul’s plan to begin a mission to Spain after delivering the collection (Rom 15:22-28).³⁸ Third, in Rom 15:25-32, Paul appears to place the burden of delivering the collection on his own shoulders. If a parade of Gentiles were necessary

³⁶ Proponents of this interpretation view Paul’s comments about the collection in Rom 15:25-33 in light of the previous discussion in Romans 9-11.

³⁷ Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul’s Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 119; consult also 100-101. Keith Nickle argues similarly: “The witness of the Gentile delegates to the reality of their reception of redemption would, by provoking jealousy among the Jews, revitalize the hitherto ineffectual mission to Israel and prompt their acceptance of the gospel.” Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul’s Strategy* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1966), 136.

³⁸ David Horrell, “Paul’s Collection: Resources for a Materialist Theology,” *Epworth Review* 22, no. 2 (1995): 76.

for Paul's vision for the collection, he probably "would have commented on the role of this party in the delivery of the gift to Jerusalem in Rom 15:25-32."³⁹

(2) The collection was an obligation foisted on Paul by Jerusalem church leaders. In 1921, Karl Holl made this argument based on Gal 2:10: "They asked only that we remember the poor, which was the very thing I also was eager to do." Holl claimed that "the poor" (τῶν πτωχῶν) was a spiritual appellation referring to the entire Jerusalem church. He inferred that Paul's Gentile churches were obligated to offer financial support to the "mother church" of the early Christian movement. More recently, Stephan Joubert has proposed a version of this thesis that emphasizes the concept of reciprocal "benefit exchange" in ancient Mediterranean cultures. According to Joubert, since the Jerusalem church leaders had recognized Paul's Law-free gospel, Paul was indebted to them, and he engineered the Jerusalem collection in order to reciprocate.⁴⁰

Downs questions this longstanding interpretation. He argues that Gal 2:10 refers to a different collection Paul gathered for the Jerusalem saints long before the collection mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8-9, and Romans 15.⁴¹ Three points substantiate Downs' thesis. First, it is difficult to explain Paul's fear about how the

³⁹ Moreover, Downs contends, "The claim that Paul's trip to Jerusalem with an assembly of Gentiles would have been interpreted by the Jews of that city as a symbolic act reminiscent of eschatological prophetic traditions seems implausible. In the biblical passages where reference is made to the wealth of the nations flowing into Jerusalem in the last days, the destination of the Gentile gifts and offerings is almost always the temple of the Lord (Is 56:6-8; Is 60:1-14; cf., Is 2:1-4; 66:18-20). Yet there is no evidence in Paul's letters that the collection was intended for the Jerusalem temple.... Even if the collection had been delivered to the temple, it would not necessarily have been controversial, since Gentile offerings to the Jerusalem temple were by no means uncommon during the first century... If unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem had taken any notice of the monetary gift that Paul and his Gentile companions were delivering to the Jewish-Christian community in that city, it is hardly likely that they would have been provoked to jealousy by the supposedly inflammatory nature of the gesture." Downs, 8.

⁴⁰ Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul's Collection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 6.

⁴¹ According to Downs, this previous collection is also referenced in Acts 11:27-30. Downs, 162.

Jerusalem collection would be received (Rom 15:30-31) if he were simply delivering an offering that had been requested. Second, nowhere in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8-9, or Romans 15 does Paul suggest that the Jerusalem collection is a prearranged agreement between him and Jerusalem church leaders.⁴² Third, “there is no evidence in the New Testament or other early Christian literature to suggest that the Aramaic-speaking church in Jerusalem referred to itself as ‘the poor.’”⁴³ “The poor” was probably a socioeconomic designation for certain impoverished members of the Jerusalem church (cf., Rom 15:26).

(3) The collection was an effort to provide financial assistance to poor Christians in Jerusalem. Proponents of this view accentuate the obvious economic aspects of the collection, which have sometimes been obscured by the theory that “the poor” is a spiritual designation. Regardless of how one interprets “the poor” in Gal 2:10, “the poor” clearly functions as a socioeconomic description in Rom 15:26: “For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.”⁴⁴ The phrase “the poor among the saints” (τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῶν ἁγίων) confirms that one purpose of the collection was to bring material relief to a destitute segment of the Jerusalem church.

Since assisting the poor was a key feature of both Jewish and Christian piety (e.g., Prov 28:27; Mt 25:31-46), Paul naturally advocated it. Yet, the point of the collection

⁴² Ibid., 33-39.

⁴³ Ibid., 20. Leander Keck’s work on “the poor” has been influential. Consult Leander E. Keck, “The Poor Among the Saints in the New Testament,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 56 (1965): 100-129.

⁴⁴ Although Georgi and Nickle embrace the spiritual interpretation of “the poor” in Gal 2:10, they concede that the same phrase functions as a socioeconomic description in Rom 15:26. Georgi, 34, 114; Nickle, 138-139.

was not almsgiving but economic justice. In 2 Cor 8:13-14, Paul explains: “This is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality—at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality.”

Furthermore, in 2 Cor 8:9, Paul suggests that to contribute to the collection was to comport with the pattern of Christ, who was rich but became poor to make believers rich. Here, the poverty of Christ signals his self-emptying descent from heaven to earth (ἐκένωσεν) and his death on the cross (Phil 2:6-11), which impart salvation to believers.⁴⁵ Paul indicates that Christ’s self-sacrifice in his incarnation and death inspires Christians to offer financial sacrifices to the collection.

(4) The collection was a means of fostering unity in the nascent church. This interpretation builds on Paul’s general concern for Jew-Gentile unity in the body of Christ (e.g., Gal 3:28). By gathering money from Gentile churches to benefit the largely Jewish church in Jerusalem, Paul aimed to forge solidarity between Jews and Gentiles in the incipient church.⁴⁶ In other words, we might say that Paul undertook the collection to nurture interracial harmony in the body of Christ.

⁴⁵ “The pattern used often by Paul for expressing the Christ-event is descent-ascent: The preexistent Christ humbles himself, is killed, and is exalted in triumph over all created beings in the universe. This is the basic pattern of 2 Cor 8:9, although not as fully stated here as elsewhere... ‘Became poor’ means the same as ‘emptied himself’ (Phil 2:7). In fact, the Greek words translated ‘poor’ and ‘empty’ are so similar in meaning that they are on occasion used interchangeably.” Fred B. Craddock, “The Poverty of Christ: An Investigation of 2 Corinthians 8:9,” *Interpretation* 22, no. 2 (April, 1968): 166. Many New Testament scholars interpret 2 Cor 8:9 in light of Phil 2:6-11, including Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 80; Jan Lambrecht, S.J., *Second Corinthians* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 142-143; Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 191; and J. Paul Sampley, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 123.

⁴⁶ R. H. Stein, “Jerusalem,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 473.

Paul's use of the term "fellowship" (κοινωνία) to refer to the collection signals the goal of racial reconciliation (2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; Rom 15:26). In Rom 15:26-27, for example, this term describes a financial contribution offered by "the Gentiles" (τὰ ἔθνη) to the Jews within the body of Christ. The collection served as a concrete symbol of partnership between the two groups. To build up the collection was to tear down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:14).

(5) The collection was an act of worship.⁴⁷ This is Downs's thesis, and he finds support for it in 1 Cor 16:1-2: "Now about the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you do likewise. Every Sunday each of you individually set something aside, storing up whatever you have prospered, so that there will be no need for collections when I come." It appears that giving to the collection was to be part of corporate worship each Sunday in Corinth and Galatia. Thus, the actual gathering of the money took place in a liturgical context.⁴⁸ Verse 1 features the Greek term λογεία, which generally connoted monetary offerings for a god or a temple. Paul uses this term to depict the collection as "a religious offering consecrated to God."⁴⁹

Furthermore, in 2 Cor 9:12, Paul describes the collection as "the ministry of this service" (ἡ διακονία τῆς λειτουργίας ταύτης), a phrase conjuring images of priestly service. The same verse says the collection overflowed with "many thanksgivings to God" (πολλῶν εὐχαριστιῶν τῷ θεῷ). The term "thanksgiving" (εὐχαριστῶ) bears liturgical overtones and the thanksgivings are directed toward God rather than human

⁴⁷ Downs, 121.

⁴⁸ "It is difficult to explain why Paul names Sunday...as the day for the occasion of this contribution, if a Christian gathering is not in mind." Ibid., 128.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 128-131; here, 131.

benefactors. Although the collection was gathered to assist human beings, it was fundamentally an act of worship undertaken to bring glory to God.⁵⁰

In conclusion, Paul's own comments about the Jerusalem collection indicate that it was a multifaceted project. The collection was an act of worship intended to provide economic justice for poor Christians in Jerusalem and to foster racial solidarity between Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. The collection places theological, economic, and racial concerns together in a single offering plate.

The Economics of Reconciliation

A key feature of the Jerusalem collection is a correlation between monetary exchange and racial reconciliation. Paul discusses some specifics of this correlation in Rom 15:26-27: "For Macedonia and Achaia thought it good to make some contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do this, and they are debtors of them; for if the Gentiles shared in their spiritual things, they ought also to give service to them in material things." As noted above, the Greek term translated "contribution" (κοινωνία) literally means "fellowship." The money offered from one racial group to another not only facilitated fellowship. It *was* fellowship.⁵¹ Because the Gentiles had come to share the spiritual blessings of the Jews, namely the gift of salvation

⁵⁰ Ibid., 143-145. Paul also uses the term λειτουργήσαι in reference to the collection in Rom 15:27.

⁵¹ "For Paul, κοινωνία is formed when κοινωνία is materially demonstrated..." Ibid., 17.

through Christ, the Gentiles were indebted to the Jews.⁵² They were to pay off their spiritual debt by giving money to the Jews, thereby establishing interracial fellowship.

Paul often conflates the material and the spiritual so that indebtedness in one dimension can be compensated in the other. In 1 Cor 9:11, he asks, “If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it a great thing if we will reap your material things?” Here, Paul defends the right of apostles to be remunerated for their ministry. In Phlm 18-19, Paul asserts, “But if he wronged you in anything or owes you, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay. I will not mention that you owe me even your own self.” Here, Paul offers to pay for damages that the slave Onesimus may have caused Philemon, if Philemon will welcome the returning Onesimus.⁵³ At the same time, Paul insinuates that Philemon should expect no payment for damages since he remains spiritually indebted to Paul, who converted him. Both Rom 15:26-27 and Phlm 18-19 imply that reconciliation sometimes requires money to change hands.

The Fate of the Collection

Many have wondered what happened to the Jerusalem collection. Some think Acts 21:17 reveals its fate: “And having arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us gladly.” Scot McKnight, for example, says this passage records “the trip and the period

⁵² Gentile Christians represent wild olives grafted onto the Jewish root of the tree of salvation (Rom 11:17-24). Consult Brendan Byrne, S.J., *Romans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 441-442.

⁵³ The verb ὀφείλει was “commonly employed in the language of commerce and finance and could leave open the possibility that some monetary debt could be owed to Philemon, if only from services lost in Onesimus’ absence.” Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2005), 248. Regarding Phlm 18-19, Allen Callahan states: “[Paul] shows that real wrongdoing calls for concrete reparations. Reconciliation does not come cheaply... To be an agent of reconciliation is to pick up the check, and Paul pledges to do so here. True reconciliation requires concrete reparations.” Allen Dwight Callahan, *Embassy of Onesimus* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997), 56.

during which the collection was handed over to the leaders,” and thus “we can probably infer from this that the collection was received with gratitude.”⁵⁴ However, Acts 21 does not mention a monetary collection. McKnight’s conjecture is therefore unconvincing.

Others suppose that Acts 24:17 narrates the collection’s delivery: “Now after many years I came bringing alms [ἐλεημοσύνας] to my nation and made sacrifices.” However, Paul never refers to the collection as alms (ἐλεημοσύνα) in his letters.⁵⁵ Furthermore, in its narrative context, Acts 24:17 “identifies Paul before his accusers as a faithful Jew whose individual piety is demonstrated by almsgiving and worship” in the temple.⁵⁶ The verse has nothing to do with the Jerusalem collection.

Though the Jerusalem collection was crucial in Paul’s mind, the New Testament does not reveal what happened to the money.⁵⁷ The status of the collection is indeterminate, for “our historical knowledge of the Pauline collection ends with the apostle’s comments about the project in Romans 15.”⁵⁸ I propose that preachers view the indeterminacy of the collection as an invitation to continue its work today.⁵⁹

The Collection’s Implications for Today

Some scholars have suggested modern implications of the Jerusalem collection. For example, Joubert proposes that in light of the Jerusalem collection modern-day

⁵⁴ Scot McKnight, “Collection for the Saints,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 146.

⁵⁵ Downs, 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 162, 67.

⁵⁷ Lambrecht, 152.

⁵⁸ Downs, 164.

⁵⁹ In many Jewish and African American traditions of biblical interpretation, textual enigmas are treated as invitations for expansion and homiletic gloss. Consult, for example, Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

churches should give charitably to the poor.⁶⁰ I would specify, however, that such financial giving should be undertaken not as almsgiving but as an effort toward economic justice, if it is to comply with the original intent of the Jerusalem collection (2 Cor 8:13-14). Joubert's suggestion appropriates Paul's aim to assist the impoverished but does not appropriate his concern for church unity.

In 1959, Oscar Cullmann suggested another way to implement the principles of the Jerusalem collection. He exhorted Protestants and Catholics to undertake a monetary collection project together. Even though unity between the two groups was improbable, the project could "at least demonstrate their mutual regard and concern."⁶¹ Cullmann appropriated the collection's goal of church unity but did not address the racial concerns intrinsic to the Jerusalem collection.

Since one of Paul's main reasons for gathering the Jerusalem collection was to foster racial reconciliation in the body of Christ, is it possible that the Jerusalem collection should be interpreted as a model for racial reconciliation through economic exchange today? For three reasons, based on the white church's triple indebtedness to African American churches, I propose that a modern appropriation of the Jerusalem collection could entail white churches gathering freewill offerings to hand over to African American churches.

First, the white church is spiritually indebted to the black church.⁶² Since its inception in the days of slavery, the African American church has consistently taught the

⁶⁰ Joubert, 218-219.

⁶¹ Horrell, 76.

⁶² While the term "black church" can be useful in discussions of race and Christianity, it is problematic because black Christianity is not monolithic but rather a complex phenomenon. For example, some black churches opposed the Civil Rights Movement. According to Anthony Pinn, "This term, 'Black

white church that sin is not only a personal reality but also a social reality.⁶³ For centuries, black preachers have fueled a theological discourse of freedom in the United States, railing against racist policies and applying homiletic “pressure to those who would not relent from racist beliefs and violence.”⁶⁴ The black church also spearheaded the Civil Rights Movement, which declared God’s desire for social justice and illuminated the sin of white racism in Christian communities and American social structures. For the most part, African American Christians recognized the sinfulness of white racism long before white American Christians. If not for the uncompromising moral courage of the black church, many white Christians may have remained unable to recognize the sinful nature of their racism.

The black church, therefore, gave the white church an extraordinary spiritual blessing. By revealing the white church’s sin of racism, the black church offered the white church an opportunity to repent and draw nearer to God. In the spirit of Rom

Church,’ is used to signify religious communities tied together through participation in a particular history of religious formation in the United States. And, the canon of such recognized congregations and communions is typically limited to the seven largest Black denominations (the AME church, the AMEZ Church, the CME Church, the Church of God in Christ, the National Baptist Convention USA, the National Baptist Convention of America, and the Progressive Baptist Convention). Even when the boundaries are pushed so as to consider smaller denominations and African Americans in historically White denominations (e.g., Roman Catholics), there remains in place a bias against smaller and more theologically creative modes of religious engagement such as Peoples Temple. This is an unfortunate development in that much of what is wrong with Black religious studies in general and the study of Black churches in particular can be corrected through the theoretical challenge provided by underexplored religious traditions and communities.” Anthony B. Pinn, *Understanding and Transforming the Black Church* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 37. On the complexities of the black church in history, consult Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002). On the varied ways that black churches approach public policy, consult R. Drew Smith, ed., *Long March Ahead: African American Churches and Public Policy in Post-Civil Rights America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). The term “white church” is also problematic because white Christianity is complex as well.

⁶³ Braxton, *No Longer Slaves*, 105. Consult Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 211-212.

⁶⁴ Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, eds., *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009), 24.

15:27, if white Christians have come to share in the spiritual blessings of black Christians, white Christians ought to serve black Christians in material things.

Second, the white church is economically indebted to the African American church. As chronicled above, the United States grew rich by expropriating black labor.⁶⁵ White ancestors built wealthy family estates on the backs of enslaved African Americans, who were uncompensated for their work. Yet today, as has always been the case, whites are the main beneficiaries of the American economy. To be sure, some black churches are sometimes more financially viable than white churches. Still, in the spirit of 2 Cor 8:13-14, white Christians should provide financial resources to black Christians for the sake of economic justice and equality.

Third, the white church is ethically indebted to the African American church. For the slavery of their ancestors, the segregation of their parents and grandparents, and the structures of oppression that daily greet their children, whites have incurred an immeasurable ethical debt. Put simply, white churches owe black churches justice. I suggest that monetary offerings, accompanied by offerings of apology and friendship, could authenticate white Christian efforts to be reconciled to black Christians.

According to Sze-kar Wan, Paul's collection challenged the Roman government by establishing economic patterns contrary to the patronage system.⁶⁶ Similarly, ecclesial reparations might challenge the American government today. If white evangelical churches gave black churches thousands of dollars, in part to repair wrongs committed

⁶⁵ Callahan, 59.

⁶⁶ Wan, 196, 210.

against them, this might challenge the American government to finally provide reparations to African Americans.⁶⁷

This is not to say, however, that ecclesial reparation is primarily a political enterprise. It is theological at heart. In 2 Cor 8:1, Paul identifies God's grace as the foundation of the collection because God's grace energized the Macedonian churches to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem. In 2 Cor 9:14-15, Paul indicates that generosity toward the collection derives from the grace of God. Thus, God's grace frames Paul's longest discussion of the collection. As Nils Dahl has noted, "Money becomes more than just money within the Christian church; it attains an almost sacramental significance: 'A visible sign of an invisible grace.'"⁶⁸ Present in Paul's offering plate were not only racial solidarity and economic justice but also the grace of God. In continuing the work of the Jerusalem collection today, white evangelical churches can embody and experience the grace of God in new and powerful ways.

Southern Baptist Reparations

I specifically encourage white churches in my own Southern Baptist tradition to gather freewill offerings to hand over to African American churches. There are two reasons why Southern Baptists are particularly suited for this project. First, the Southern Baptist Convention has a distinctly racist history. Second, ecclesial reparations could authenticate the 1995 Southern Baptist apology for racism.

⁶⁷ Callahan, 61.

⁶⁸ Nils Dahl, *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 31.

The Founding of the Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention was formed at a meeting held at the First Baptist Church of Augusta, Georgia in 1845. Leon McBeth lists three reasons for the southern Baptists' schism with northern Baptists.⁶⁹ First, Baptists in the south preferred to be organized as a convention with one meeting rather than as societies with multiple meetings, which was the northern Baptist way. Second, Baptists in the south thought that the Home Mission Society, a national Baptist organization, was treating them unfairly by appointing more missionaries to the north than the south. Third, Baptists in the south disagreed with Baptists in the north over slavery. Northern Baptists, who were largely anti-slavery, denied that slaveholders should be appointed as missionaries. Southern Baptists, who were mainly pro-slavery, affirmed the appointment of slaveholders as missionaries. Though multiple issues were in play, defense of slavery was the decisive factor leading to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.⁷⁰

In 1844, two major events hastened the schism. First, Georgia Baptists tested the Home Mission Society by nominating slaveholder James E. Reeve to be appointed as a missionary. The Home Mission Society rejected his candidacy. Second, the Baptist State Convention of Alabama bluntly asked the Board of the Triennial Convention, another national Baptist agency, whether slave owners could be appointed as missionaries. The

⁶⁹ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 381-391.

⁷⁰ McBeth states, "Slavery was the final and most decisive factor which led Southern Baptists to form their own convention." McBeth, 381. Bill Leonard concurs: "Divisions over the appointment of slaveholding missionaries led Baptists in the South to hold meetings that would lead to the formation of a new denomination... The question of human slavery was at the heart of the schism." Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 189. Jessie Fletcher asserts, "The Southern Baptist Convention walked on the stage of history burdened by its defense of a practice which subsequent history would condemn and which Southern Baptists themselves would one day condemn." Jessie C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 40. Consult also H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But...: Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 114-127.

Board responded, “We can never be a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation of slavery.” Shortly thereafter, the Southern Baptist Convention was formed so that Baptists in the south could be slaveholders and missionaries at the same time.⁷¹

To state the matter straightforwardly, the Southern Baptist Convention was founded largely on racism. Regrettably, Southern Baptist racism persisted during the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights Movement. Many Southern Baptists, including prominent leaders such as W. A. Criswell, opposed integration.⁷² Additionally, numerous Southern Baptist churches passed by-laws prohibiting African Americans from attending their worship services.⁷³

Though many ecclesial bodies in the United States are marred by racism in their respective histories, Southern Baptists have a distinctly racist history. Southern Baptists are clearly culpable for defending slavery and supporting segregation. In recognition of this, the Southern Baptist Convention has officially apologized for its racism.

The Southern Baptist Apology for Racism

In June of 1995, messengers to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta adopted a resolution entitled, “Resolution on Racial Reconciliation

⁷¹ McBeth, 386-387.

⁷² Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 412. Curtis W. Freeman, “‘Never Had I Been So Blind’: W. A. Criswell’s ‘Change’ on Racial Segregation,” *Journal of Southern Religion*, Vol. X (2007): 1-12. Years later, Criswell said he had changed his mind and decided to support integration.

⁷³ Gustav Niebuhr, “Baptist Group Votes to Repent Stand on Slaves,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/21/us/baptist-group-votes-to-repent-stand-on-slaves.html> [accessed August 20, 2010].

on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention.”⁷⁴ The resolution stated: “Our relationship with African Americans has been hindered from the beginning by the role that slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention...Many of our Southern Baptist forbears defended the right to own slaves, and either participated in, supported, or acquiesced in the particularly inhumane nature of American slavery.” The resolution also confessed Southern Baptist sins during Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement: “In later years, Southern Baptists failed, in many cases, to support, and in some cases opposed, legitimate initiatives to secure the civil rights of African Americans.” The resolution denounced all forms of racism as “deplorable sin” and tendered an apology:

Be it further resolved, that we lament and repudiate historic acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest, and we recognize that the racism which yet plagues our culture today is inextricably tied to the past; and be it further resolved, that we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously (Psalm 19:13) or unconsciously (Leviticus 4:27); and be it further resolved, that we ask forgiveness from our African American brothers and sisters, acknowledging that our own healing is at stake; and be it further resolved, that we hereby commit ourselves to eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry...

Reaction to the apology was mixed. Pastor Calvin O. Butts, III of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem commended the apology when it was first issued.⁷⁵ On the other hand, ethicist Robert Parham characterized it as an exercise in political correctness that “served a public-relations purpose more than the advancement of an ethics

⁷⁴ “Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention: June 1995,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=899> [accessed August 20, 2010].

⁷⁵ Niebuhr, “Baptist Group Votes to Repent Stand on Slaves.”

agenda.”⁷⁶ Pastor Arlee Griffin, Jr. of Berean Missionary Baptist Church in Brooklyn called the resolution a first step toward Southern Baptists overcoming a long legacy of racism. Griffin cautioned, “It is only when one’s request for forgiveness is reflected in a change of attitude and actions that the victim can then believe that the request for forgiveness is authentic.”⁷⁷ The apology was prone to such critique because it was not accompanied by concrete acts of repentance.

The resolution states that “the racism which yet plagues our culture today is inextricably tied to the past.” To acknowledge this without providing economic reparations is problematic. A diachronic perspective on racism must recognize its profound economic impact and move toward economic repair, because twenty-first century black poverty results largely from nineteenth century white plantations. Since Southern Baptists defended those very plantations where black bodies labored without compensation, Southern Baptists are morally obligated to provide black reparations.⁷⁸

According to Roy Brooks, “Once the perpetrator of an atrocity has apologized, it now has the burden of making its precious words believable. It must solidify its apology...A reparation can thus be defined as *the revelation and realization of apology*. It is the act that transforms the rhetoric of apology into a meaningful, material reality. Simply saying ‘I’m sorry’ is never enough when righting an atrocity.”⁷⁹ Today’s

⁷⁶ *Christian Century*, “Racism Beyond the Grave,” April 17, 1996.

⁷⁷ Niebuhr, “Baptist Group Votes to Repent Stand on Slaves.”

⁷⁸ In 1991, moderate Southern Baptists split from the increasingly conservative Southern Baptist Convention to form the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Many Baptist churches in the south today are dually aligned with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Southern Baptist Convention. I propose that Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches participate in the ecclesial reparation project because they too are successors of historical Southern Baptist racism.

⁷⁹ Brooks, 155 (emphasis in the original).

Southern Baptists have an opportunity to make the apology for racism more credible through a modern-day appropriation of the Jerusalem collection.

In this proposal, white Southern Baptist congregations would gather freewill offerings to hand over to African American churches. Since many believe that “reparations should concentrate on the less developed parts of the Black community,” and since the Jerusalem collection aimed to assist economically disadvantaged Christians, modern-day offerings from white churches could be directed specifically to black churches in low-income areas in hopes of making strides toward economic equality.⁸⁰

The pastor of the white church would meet with the pastor of the black church to express the white congregation’s intentions and to ask if the black congregation would be willing to receive the offering. Ideally, the two pastors and churches would have a previously established relationship. If the black church agreed to the project, the white church would gather voluntary contributions from individuals (2 Cor 9:7) intended to redress spiritual, economic, and ethical debt (Rom 15:26-27; 2 Cor 8:13-14).

Contributors would be encouraged to give generously in accordance with 2 Cor 9:6: “He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.” They would be encouraged to give sacrificially in accordance with the pattern of Christ (2 Cor 8:9). The offerings would be gathered in worship for twelve to fifteen months and then delivered humbly (1 Cor 16:2) at a joint worship service with the black congregation.⁸¹ The worship service would include rituals of reconciliation such as

⁸⁰ Waters, 177.

⁸¹ These verses about financial giving are familiar in white evangelical churches where they are often used to encourage tithing. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention has for years furnished its affiliated churches with bookmarks, pamphlets, and other paraphernalia that feature verses from Paul’s discussions of the Jerusalem collection—such as 1 Cor 16:2, 2 Cor 8:7, and 2 Cor 9:7—to promote general financial stewardship. While many scriptures at the center of the reparations project would be familiar to

confession of sin, extension of forgiveness, presentation of reparations, and reception of reparations. Black church leaders and white church leaders would work together to design the liturgy to suit the local context. Once the money was exchanged, the black congregation would use the money however it pleased.

The amount of the collection would hopefully mark progress toward economic equality between white Christians and black Christians (2 Cor 8:13-14). It should at least be enough to serve as a costly symbol of reparation.⁸² Because the white church would continue operating while gathering the collection, a reasonable goal for the collection might be twenty percent of the church's annual budget. At the very least, the white church should ensure that the collection amounts to ten percent of its annual budget.⁸³

Hopefully, the collection would represent an act of biblical justice, concrete repentance from racism, a repudiation of cheap reconciliation, and a stride toward economic justice for African Americans. Since the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in America, and since it is notoriously conservative, Southern Baptist reparations might provocatively challenge other institutions to provide black reparations.

white evangelical congregations, their application would be different, and more faithful to the original intent of the Jerusalem collection.

⁸² Determining an appropriate amount for black reparations is an angst-ridden dilemma, whether in discussions of government reparations or ecclesial reparations. Given the billions of dollars in labor for which enslaved African Americans were uncompensated, as well as the inestimable physical, psychological, and social damage inflicted by slavery and Jim Crow, no dollar amount could be high enough. The dissertation stresses the symbolic value of reparations, yet a paltry amount would render the collection a paltry symbol and could serve to undermine racial reconciliation rather than advance it. The amount needs to be costly in order for the collection to function as a valid symbol of reparation.

⁸³ The white church could repeat the project with a different church or the same church. Perhaps the white church would decide thenceforth to allot a tithe of its annual budget to ecclesial reparations.

Critical Race Theology

We now shift our attention to how Eph 2:11-22 can inform critical race theory. Eph 2:11-22 portrays racism as a theological problem that is ameliorated theologically. It therefore suggests that theological reflection might enhance critical race theory. In order to continue progress toward racial justice and reconciliation, critical race theory may have to expand its purview beyond the boundaries of legal theory and sociology into the realm of theology.

I will argue in this section that critical race theory needs more theological analysis of race since theological racism has been a major influence in American history. By theological racism, I mean racism grounded in theology. In short, critical race theory needs more critical race theology. First, I will survey existing theological work within critical race theory. Second, I will employ the work of W. E. B. Du Bois to show how biblical and theological appeals can bolster antiracist rhetoric, especially in countering theological racism. Third, I will suggest that Eph 2:11-22 and its paradigm of Christ's self-sacrifice can challenge whites to sacrifice racial privileges.

Theology in Critical Race Theory

Theology informs the work of some critical race theorists. For example, Derrick Bell was raised in the black church and self-identifies as a Christian. He suggests that the biblical injunctions to love God and neighbor (Mt 22:37-40) should inform ethics in America.⁸⁴ According to George Taylor, Bell's paradoxical doctrine of racial realism

⁸⁴ In a published interview transcript, Bell states, "God is within us to a certain extent, you know, and we have to justify the miracle of our existence not by driving the E class Mercedes...Our goal should be to justify our existence by loving God, by loving others, you see." Derrick Bell, "Professor Bell Discusses How to Live an Ethical Life," in *The Derrick Bell Reader*, 112.

also has religious underpinnings. Though racism is a permanent feature of American society, the struggle against racism is worthwhile because it brings spiritual triumph.⁸⁵

Charles Lawrence, III alludes to the Bible in his famous essay, “The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection Reckoning with Unconscious Racism.” He discusses the possibility of racists being converted: “When racism operates at a conscious level, opposing forces can attempt to prevail upon the rationality and moral sensibility of racism’s proponents; the self-professed racist may even find religion on the road to Damascus and correct his own ways.”⁸⁶ Lawrence alludes to the Apostle Paul’s conversion experience in Acts 9 in depicting conversion from racism as a religious event. In light of Eph 2:11-22, conversion to Christianity could indeed facilitate conversion from racism to antiracism.⁸⁷

Some critical race theorists note theological dimensions of racism. For example, James Campbell and James Oakes briefly note that English settlers in America regarded Africans as “heathens,” a theological designation used to legitimate slavery.⁸⁸ Dorothy Roberts observes that the biblical image “Jezebel” was widely used to portray female slaves as licentious and to legitimate “white men’s sexual abuse of black women.”⁸⁹ Thomas Ross traces the racist myth of white innocence to religious color symbolism:

⁸⁵ George Taylor, “Racism as Original Sin: Derrick Bell and Reinhold Niebuhr’s Theology,” in *The Derrick Bell Reader*, 440-443.

⁸⁶ Lawrence, 244.

⁸⁷ On the other hand, in light of the many ways the church has historically embraced racism and the many ways biblical texts have been used to legitimate racism, conversion to Christianity could possibly solidify one’s racism.

⁸⁸ James Campbell and James Oakes, “The Invention of Race: Rereading *White Over Black*,” in *Critical White Studies*, 146.

⁸⁹ Dorothy E. Roberts, “Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies: Women of Color, Equality, and the Right of Privacy,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 390. In 2 Kgs 9:30-33, Jezebel appears to dress like a prostitute just before she is killed; thus, her promiscuous reputation.

“The very contrast between the colors, white and black, is often a symbol for the contrast between innocence and defilement...Black or darkness has served as the symbol of evil for many Western cultures. Darkness is a symbol of the anti-God, Satan by any name.”⁹⁰

Robert Williams shows how the breach of treaties with Native Americans was justified theologically. He quotes George Gilmer, Governor of Georgia in 1830: “Treaties were expedients by which ignorant, intractable and savage people were induced without bloodshed to yield up what civilized peoples had a right to possess by virtue of that command of the Creator delivered to man upon his formation—be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it.”⁹¹

Anthony Cook: Critical Race Theologian

While some critical race theorists slightly incorporate theology, Anthony Cook stands out in his extensive use of Christian theology. In a seminal article entitled, “Beyond Critical Legal Studies: The Reconstructive Theology of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Cook argues that theoretical deconstruction of racist patterns should be accompanied by reconstructive proposals for correcting them. He sets forth King’s prophetic Christianity, especially his vision of the “Beloved Community,” as a basis for reconstructing a racially just American society.⁹²

⁹⁰ Thomas Ross, “White Innocence, Black Abstraction,” in *Critical White Studies*, 263.

⁹¹ Robert A. Williams, “Documents of Barbarism: The Contemporary Legacy of European Racism and Colonialism in the Narrative Traditions of Federal Indian Law,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 97. Williams also traces racist-imperial discourse to Puritan divines of the seventeenth century. Williams, 103.

⁹² Anthony E. Cook, “Beyond Critical Legal Studies: The Reconstructive Theology of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 85-90.

Cook recounts how enslaved African Americans took the conservative evangelicalism of their white masters, which was intended to subordinate them, and transformed it into “a manifesto of their God-given equality.”⁹³ He suggests that King comported with this tradition. King utilized experiential deconstruction not only to critique the racist overtones of dominant ideologies but also “to understand the liberating dimensions of legitimating ideologies such as liberalism and Christianity.”⁹⁴

Cook has also published *The Least of These: Race, Law, and Religion in American Culture*, a monograph that approaches critical race theory through the lens of Christian theology. Therein, he proposes that compassion for the least advantaged members of society should form the spiritual foundation of progressive politics. He appeals to Walter Rauschenbusch’s “Social Gospel,” which aimed to transform society into the Kingdom of God by bringing social realities into conformity with God’s will.

Cook again employs King’s vision of the “Beloved Community,” this time in greater detail, delineating its spiritual, social, and strategic dimensions. The spiritual dimension consists of individuals that love God, self, and others. The social dimension combines the Old Testament call to justice (e.g., Amos 5:24) with the New Testament emphasis on love (e.g., Jn 15:13) and concentrates on uplifting the least advantaged members of society. The strategic dimension synthesizes black nationalist approaches to race with integrationist approaches and aims to understand human universals through human particularities.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁵ Anthony E. Cook, *The Least of These: Race, Law, and Religion in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 97-136.

Cook seems to realize what many critical race theorists underestimate: the abiding influence of theological racism in America. He understands that while race is a social product that has been influenced by legal constructions, historically speaking, racism has been legitimated by theological reasoning. Therefore, he discusses religious influences on cultural racism.

He focuses on the “curse of Ham” in Gn 9:20-29. In this story, Noah becomes drunk and falls asleep naked in his tent. His son, Ham, enters the tent and sees the nakedness of his father. Noah awakens, knowing “what his youngest son had done to him.” He declares: “Cursed be Canaan [Ham’s son]; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers...Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.”

During American slavery, this story was frequently used to sanction white supremacy.⁹⁶ White slaveholders taught that African Americans were descendants of Canaan, their dark skin was the mark of God’s curse, and thus God had ordained their subservient status before whites. Cook remarks,

That this story survived so many centuries as a plausible account of why black people have been subjected to such oppression is a testimony to the power of religious ideology. While the curse quite clearly envisions the servitude of Canaan, there is no mention of skin color. Thus the curse may have just as logically or illogically condemned the nation of Canaan to a skin color lighter than the already-dark Noah...Second, the curse was put on only one of Ham’s children, Canaan. If one follows biblical genealogy and geography, most of Africa and all of West Africa were peopled by Ham’s remaining children, on whom no curse befell.⁹⁷

According to Cook, whites also used the curse of Ham to condemn the unfamiliar sexuality of African people. In the biblical story, a mysterious sexual impropriety prompts the curse. In white interpretation, black men were therefore burdened with large

⁹⁶ Ibid., 173-202.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 199.

penises and could not conceal their shame. Additionally, African American women were cursed with lasciviousness and lacked the ability to exercise sexual restraint.⁹⁸ Cook demonstrates that the sexual dimensions of racism, symbolized in the frequent castration of lynching victims, have theological underpinnings.

Cook's theological analysis of racism is insightful and crucial. Unfortunately, this type of sustained theological reflection is unusual in critical race theory literature. Critical race theory needs more critical race theology to counter the abiding influence of theological racism in America. The work of W. E. B. Du Bois points the way forward.

W. E. B. Du Bois: A Model of Critical Race Theology

Du Bois (1868-1963) was a key forerunner of critical race theory who underscored the vital connection between Christian theology and racism.⁹⁹ While Du Bois has long been renowned for ingenious sociological insight, Edward Blum and Jonathan Kahn have recently highlighted his use of religious metaphor.¹⁰⁰ Du Bois infused his writings with biblical allusions and theological appeals. His opposition to racism was frequently voiced in Christian language. He recognized that since American

⁹⁸ Ibid., 200.

⁹⁹ Du Bois's influence on critical race theory is evident, for example, in Derrick A. Bell, Jr., "Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 18; Gary Peller, "Race-Consciousness," 127-158; John O. Calmore, "Critical Race Theory, Archie Shepp, and Fire Music: Securing an Authentic Intellectual Life in a Multicultural World," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 326; Richard Delgado, "Rodrigo's Chronicle," in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 389; Alan D. Freeman, "Derrick Bell—Race and Class: The Dilemma of Liberal Reform," in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 575.

¹⁰⁰ Edward J. Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Jonathon S. Kahn, *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W.E. B. Du Bois* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

racism was born in a Christian context, it must be countered with biblical interpretation and theological arguments.

Du Bois's Personal Beliefs

There is considerable debate about Du Bois's personal religious beliefs because he appears Christian on some occasions and agnostic on others. On one hand, Du Bois was raised in the church, taught Sunday School classes, wrote poetic prayers, admired African American spirituals, infused his writings with theological language, and made confessional statements that sounded Christian. For example, he says, "I believe in God, who made of one blood all nations that on earth do dwell...I believe in the Prince of Peace."¹⁰¹ On the other hand, he constantly distanced himself from normative Christian faith. For example, he says the church "has built up a body of dogma and fairy tale, fantastic fables of sin and salvation, impossible creeds and impossible demands for ignorant unquestioning belief and obedience."¹⁰² He also clarifies that he attended an Episcopal church for family reasons, not by personal choice.¹⁰³

Du Bois disavowed religious dogma because he was skeptical of supernatural doctrines. Nevertheless, he utilized religion because he saw its potential to inspire ethical behavior and social justice. He did not adopt conventional Christianity as much as he

¹⁰¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Credo," in *Du Bois on Religion*, ed. Phil Zuckerman (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2000), 43-44. The brief "Credo" is Du Bois's most reprinted publication.

¹⁰² W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Revelation of Saint Orgne the Damned," in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 1058.

¹⁰³ "For four generations my family has belonged to this church and I belong to it, not by personal choice, not because I feel myself welcome within its portals, but simply because I refuse to be read outside of a church which is mine by inheritance and the service of my fathers." W. E. B. Du Bois, "Religion in the South," in *Du Bois on Religion*, 88.

adapted it for his own purposes.¹⁰⁴ In Du Bois's hands, religion was an "agitating agent," a resource for expressing spiritual indignation against racism.¹⁰⁵

Whatever his religious identity, it is clear that Du Bois did not employ abundant religious language to promote religion for religion's sake.¹⁰⁶ He countered racism with religious language because he saw that racism was formed and upheld by theological reasoning and biblical interpretation. He perceived theological racism at the heart of the American race problem.

Theological Racism and Slavery

Du Bois underscored the theological foundations of slavery. According to Du Bois, when whites justified the slave trade as a method to convert heathens into Christians, slavery became a great act of religion. He states, "The slaves were to be brought from heathenism to Christianity, and through slavery the benighted Indian and African were to find their passport to the kingdom of God. This theory of human slavery was held by Spaniards, French, and English."¹⁰⁷ When opposition to the slave trade

¹⁰⁴ Kahn, 24. Kahn describes Du Bois as a "pragmatic religious naturalist." Kahn, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁶ Most Du Bois scholars, including Pulitzer Prize winning Du Bois biographer David Levering Lewis, maintain that Du Bois was agnostic. According to Lewis, Du Bois identified himself as an agnostic but was virtually an atheist. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 65; David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 307. Cited in Blum, 24. Blum, however, views Du Bois as a religious man who held Christian ethical ideals while rejecting traditional Christian dogma.

¹⁰⁷ Du Bois, "Religion in the South," 70.

occasionally arose, it was “in nearly all cases stilled when it was continually stated that the slave-trade was simply a method of converting the heathen to Christianity.”¹⁰⁸

Scholars often point out that slavery preceded modern racism rather than vice versa. Modern racism was indeed manufactured to legitimate slavery. Du Bois stresses that if slavery was legitimated by racism, Christian theology aided and abetted the crime.¹⁰⁹ In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he declares,

Nothing suited [the slave condition] better than the doctrines of passive submission embodied in the newly learned Christianity. Slave masters early realized this, and cheerfully aided religious propaganda within certain bounds. The long system of repression and degradation of the Negro tended to emphasize the elements in his character which made him a valuable chattel: courtesy became humility, moral strength degenerated into submission, and the exquisite native appreciation of the beautiful became an infinite capacity for dumb suffering. The Negro, losing the joy of this world, eagerly seized upon the offered conceptions of the next; the avenging Spirit of the Lord enjoining patience in this world, under sorrow and tribulation until the Great Day when He should lead His dark children home—this became his comforting dream.¹¹⁰

The Bible’s role in slavery was not lost on Du Bois. He declares, “There must have been between 1619 and 1863 in the United States alone 10,000,000 sermons preached from the text, ‘Servants, obey your masters, for this is well pleasing in the sight of the Lord!’”¹¹¹ He also understood how the “curse of Ham” was used to legitimate racism. He criticized Europe for distorting Christianity to justify unholy aims: “If that

¹⁰⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Negro Church,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 114.

¹⁰⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Church and the Negro,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 99.

¹¹⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings*, 499-500.

¹¹¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Will the Church Remove the Color Line?” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 174-175.

end was murder, the ‘Son of God went forth to war!’ If that end was slavery, God thundered, ‘Cursed be Canaan,’ and Paul echoed ‘Servants obey your masters!’”¹¹²

Du Bois’s Use of the Bible

Although Du Bois understood the Bible’s role in fortifying slavery and segregation, he did not condemn the Bible. Instead, he unleashed it against racism. Du Bois used biblical references to demonstrate that racism is not only immoral but also impious.¹¹³

In 1911, Du Bois published an essay criticizing two white churches in Baltimore. Though “founded in the name of Him who ‘put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree,’” he says, these churches relocated after black people settled in the neighborhood. Du Bois quotes Lk 1:52 to illustrate the hypocrisy of their racist flight. Then he states, “Incontinently they have dropped their Bibles and gathered up their priestly robes and fled, after selling their property to colored people for \$125,000 in good, cold cash.”¹¹⁴ This criticism reveals one reason that Du Bois’s writings feature so many biblical references: to show that whites had “dropped their Bibles” on the issue of race. He challenges whites to pick up their Bibles again and apply their cherished scriptures to race relations.

Du Bois believed the Sermon on the Mount summarized Christian ethics, and he often quoted its third line: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Mt

¹¹² W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings*, 678.

¹¹³ Kahn, 126.

¹¹⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Jesus Christ in Baltimore,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 105.

5:5).¹¹⁵ He used this text to identify African Americans as the blessed meek and to criticize white Christianity for its lack of meekness. For example, he states, “The black man has brought to America a sense of meekness and humility which America never has recognized and perhaps never will. If there is anybody in this land who thoroughly believes that the meek shall inherit the earth they have not often let their presence be known.”¹¹⁶

Du Bois frequently cited Col 3:11: “There is no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeperson; but Christ is all things and in all things.” He quoted this scripture to show that white racism contradicts the Bible and to charge white Christians with hypocrisy. For example, he asserts, “When the church meets the Negro problem, it writes itself down as a deliberate hypocrite and systematic liar. It does not say, ‘Come unto me all ye that labor’; it does not ‘love its neighbor as itself’; it does not welcome ‘Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond, and free’; and yet it openly and blatantly professes all this.”¹¹⁷

Du Bois regularly referred to Jesus Christ as the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6). He cited this verse to criticize slavery.¹¹⁸ He also employed it to undermine European colonialism. For example, he remarks, “I believe in the Prince of Peace. I believe that

¹¹⁵ Blum, 160.

¹¹⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Gift of the Spirit,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 168. For another example of Du Bois’s use of this verse, consult W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Son of God,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 184.

¹¹⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Color Line and the Church,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 170. Mt 11:28, another of Du Bois’s favorite scriptures, is the first citation in this quotation. For another example of his use of Mt 11:28, consult “Credo,” 43. For other examples of his use of Col 3:11, consult “Religion in the South,” 88; and “Will the Church Remove the Color Line,” 178-179.

¹¹⁸ “We cannot forget that under the aegis and protection of the religion of the Prince of Peace—of a religion which was meant for the lowly and unfortunate—there arose in America one of the most stupendous institutions of human slavery that the world has seen.” Du Bois, “Will the Church Remove the Color Line,” 174. For another example of Du Bois’s use of this scripture, consult “The Son of God,” 185.

War is Murder... and I believe that the wicked conquest of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of that strength.”¹¹⁹

Du Bois often appealed to the Golden Rule: “Therefore, in all things treat others as you would want them to treat you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Mt 7:12). He used this scripture to exhort white Christians to treat blacks humanely.¹²⁰ He lamented that the white church “despised” and “rejected” the Golden Rule, again failing to embody its own religious principles.¹²¹

Du Bois alluded to Mt 7:21-23 as well: “Not all who say to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me you workers of lawlessness.’” He referenced this scripture to suggest that Jesus may reject white people for their mistreatment of African Americans. For example, in one of Du Bois’s short stories, a black Christ figure whispers to a white church rector, “I never knew you.”¹²²

Additionally, in an essay titled “Religion in the South,” Du Bois appeals for “a straightforward, honorable treatment of black men according to their desert and achievement.” He proclaims, “The nation that enslaved the Negro owes him this trial; the section that doggedly and unreasonably kept him in slavery owes him at least this chance; and the church which professes to follow Jesus Christ and does not insist on this

¹¹⁹ Du Bois, “Credo,” 44.

¹²⁰ Du Bois, “Religion in the South,” 87.

¹²¹ Du Bois, “The Church and the Negro,” 99-100.

¹²² W. E. B. Du Bois, “Jesus Christ in Georgia,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 94-95.

elemental act of justice merits the denial of the Master—“*I never knew you.*”¹²³ Here, Du Bois first challenges white Americans, then white Southerners, and finally white Christians to embody racial equality. The climactic challenge is for the church because he saw the church at the center of the race problem.¹²⁴ The climactic challenge is biblical because he was countering the Bible’s influence in supporting racism. The climactic challenge is theological because he was undermining the theological racism that legitimated slavery and segregation.

Du Bois on Sacrifice

Du Bois’s writings feature a substantial “discourse of sacrifice.”¹²⁵ He calls sacrifice the “greatest thing in life.”¹²⁶ He praises clergyman Alexander Crummell for being “steeled by sacrifice.”¹²⁷ He even refers to the “Gospel of Sacrifice.”¹²⁸ Du Bois regarded the self-sacrifice of Christ as central to Christianity and an important moral paradigm.¹²⁹

Kahn wonders why Du Bois did not repudiate sacrifice as “an American category thoroughly rooted in blood, abuse, and suffering and thus forever tainted and one that

¹²³ Du Bois, “Religion in the South,” 87 (emphasis in the original).

¹²⁴ “The American Church of Christ is Jim Crowed from top to bottom. No other institution in America is built so thoroughly or more absolutely on the color line.” Du Bois, “The Color Line and the Church,” 169.

¹²⁵ Kahn, 108.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹²⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 519.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 420.

¹²⁹ Blum, 160.

society is better off working to live without.”¹³⁰ This is an important question, especially given the many post-Civil Rights thinkers that have rejected sacrifice due to its historical ties to black oppression and white supremacy. It appears that Du Bois chose to counter America’s perversions of sacrifice with his own empowering conceptions of sacrifice.¹³¹ I will demonstrate that Du Bois retained the language of sacrifice to show that blacks, not whites, are like Christ, and to challenge whites to practice self-sacrifice in their relations with blacks.¹³²

According to Kahn, Du Bois writes about sacrifice in two main ways.¹³³ First, he writes fictional stories that depict black Christ-figures being lynched in America. In “The Gospel According to Mary Brown,” for example, a beautiful young black woman named Mary bears a child named Joshua whose skin is “black velvet.” Joshua sits with the deacons at church and asks questions such as, “Why are colored folk poor?” Joshua grows “in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man,” yet most white men do not trust him. In fact, they resent him for carrying himself like a man. Joshua teaches the people saying, “Blessed are the poor; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the meek; blessed are the merciful; blessed are they which are persecuted. All men are brothers and God is the Father of all.” White men accuse Joshua of teaching social equality. Joshua calls them hypocrites. A mob of whites seizes him, brings him before a judge, and yells,

¹³⁰ Kahn, 109.

¹³¹ Ibid., 110.

¹³² Kahn maintains, “Du Bois holds on to the language of sacrifice because he needs precisely that language to get white folks to see that they are violating their own sacred tenets.” Ibid., 115.

¹³³ Ibid., 108.

“Kill the nigger...Let him be crucified.” They strip him, spit on him, strike him on the head, and mock him. Finally, they lynch him.¹³⁴

Du Bois uses this story and several similar short stories to show that black people rather than white people are like Jesus Christ. This is a theological strategy for sanctifying blackness and questioning the sanctity of whiteness. Du Bois understood how whiteness is mistaken for godliness and was constantly disentangling the two. He further uses these stories to show that white people’s rejection of African Americans is tantamount to rejecting Jesus. To lynch a black man is to crucify Christ.¹³⁵

The second way Du Bois speaks of sacrifice is by commending the ethic of self-sacrifice. For example, he exhorts the black church to elevate spiritual leaders characterized by sacrifice and service.¹³⁶ He encourages black youth not to lose their forebears’ faith in “the fruitfulness of sacrifice.”¹³⁷

Yet, he also challenges whites to practice self-sacrifice. He says white Christians should “treat Negroes as they themselves would wish to be treated if they were colored. They should do this and teach this and, if need be, die for this creed.”¹³⁸ The implication is that whites should sacrifice themselves, as Jesus did, for the sake of racial equality. In “Religion in the South,” the notion of self-sacrifice underlies another challenge to whites: “The precepts of Jesus Christ cannot but mean that Christianity consists of an attitude of humility, of a desire for peace, of a disposition to treat our brothers as we would have our

¹³⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Gospel according to Mary Brown,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 143-146.

¹³⁵ Du Bois’s link between Jesus’ crucifixion and the lynching of African Americans anticipates James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011).

¹³⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Negro Church [Essay],” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 46.

¹³⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Problem of Amusement,” in *Du Bois on Religion*, 25.

¹³⁸ Du Bois, “The Church and the Negro,” 99.

brothers treat us, of mercy and charity toward our fellow men, of willingness to suffer persecution for right ideals and in general of love not only toward our friends but even toward our enemies.”¹³⁹

In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois typecasts a white pastor who preaches that “the Golden Rule of Christianity is to treat others as you want to be treated and that finally you should be willing to sacrifice your comfort, your convenience, your wealth and even your life for mankind; in other words, that Poverty is better than riches and that the meek shall inherit the earth.”¹⁴⁰ Du Bois laments that while the white minister preaches an ethic of self-sacrifice, white Christians settle for being mere “gentlemen” rather than embodying “the Christianity of the gospels.”¹⁴¹

The Religion of Whiteness

Du Bois is sometimes regarded as the founder of whiteness studies.¹⁴² His account of America’s race problem featured vast insight into whiteness. While Du Bois’s analysis of whiteness has been influential, the theological dimensions of whiteness he perceived are often overlooked.¹⁴³

Du Bois discerned a religious core of white identity. He fabricated a quintessential white man named Roger Van Dieman whose life was informed by a simple

¹³⁹ Du Bois, “Religion in the South,” 187.

¹⁴⁰ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 667.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 667-668.

¹⁴² Blum, 16.

¹⁴³ For example, critical race theorist Shannon Sullivan employs Du Bois’s work on whiteness but does not account for the theological dimensions of whiteness he perceived. Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

thesis: “The world is composed of Race superimposed on Race; classes superimposed on classes; beneath the whole thing is ‘Our Family’ in capitals, and under that is God.”¹⁴⁴ Not only did Du Bois see conceptions of God as foundational to whiteness, he also saw whiteness as a religion. According to Du Bois, whites had a fervent, spiritual type of devotion to their race. Its first effect was the strut of the Southerner. Then children were taught that everything good is white. Finally, when black people tried to swagger and seek privileges, whites became violent.¹⁴⁵

Part of the reason Du Bois spoke theologically to white Christians is because he saw whiteness as a religion. He used biblical appeals in an effort to convert white people from the religion of whiteness to the religion of the Prince of Peace. He emphasized sacrifice because racial equality requires whites to sacrifice race-based privileges.

According to Blum, “Du Bois’s attention to religion as fundamental to racial formation, perception, segregation, and violence indicates that the current state of critical race theory, especially whiteness studies, needs reevaluation.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the role of religion in racial formation is underdeveloped in critical race theory, perhaps because theological reflection is unfashionable in many academic quarters. Nevertheless, since theological racism has played and continues to play an influential role in American race relations, theological critiques of race and racism are essential. As practical theologians, preachers and homileticians are in a prime position to contribute to racial reconciliation.

¹⁴⁴ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 656.

¹⁴⁵ “Wave on wave, each with increasing virulence, is dashing this new religion of whiteness on the shores of our time.” W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings*, 924.

¹⁴⁶ Blum, 15-16.

Critical Race Theology: A Homiletic Example

The religion of whiteness that Du Bois described endures today. It is evident, for example, in the hymnody of the church. Consider *The Baptist Hymnal* published by Convention Press (1991), which is widely used in Southern Baptist churches. Several of its hymns associate righteousness with whiteness. The hymn “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” includes the petition: “Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now.”¹⁴⁷ The hymn “There Is Power in the Blood” says, “Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow? There’s power in the blood.”¹⁴⁸ The hymn “Nothing but the Blood” features the refrain, “Oh! Precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.”¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, the hymn “One Day” includes the line: “One day when sin was as black as could be.”¹⁵⁰ To associate righteousness with whiteness and sin with blackness is to confuse the religion of whiteness with Christianity.

A similar problem occurs with certain evangelistic methods. Many white evangelical groups use bracelets with colored beads as a tool for evangelism. Some churches call them “Power Bands.”¹⁵¹ They typically feature a black bead that symbolizes sin, a red bead that symbolizes Christ’s blood, a white bead that symbolizes being washed clean from sin, and a gold bead that symbolizes heaven. The message is supposed to be: you are a sinner, but if you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, his

¹⁴⁷ *The Baptist Hymnal*, 294.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 135. Notice that these examples do not depict white robes as righteous, as in Rv 6:11 and 7:9, but whiteness itself as righteous.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁵¹ Consult, for example, <http://www.christianbook.com/power-band-witness-bracelet/5103278715/pd/78715> [accessed September 30, 2010].

death on the cross will wash away your sins and he will welcome you into the kingdom of heaven. The actual color-coded message turns out to be: you are a sinner, but if you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, his death on the cross will wash your dirty black sin until you are clean and white and then you will be fit to enter the kingdom of heaven.¹⁵²

A bit of critical race theology could ameliorate these racial problems and carry on Du Bois's project of disentangling whiteness from godliness. The association of righteousness with whiteness and snow derives partly from Is 1:18: "Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."¹⁵³ This verse pictures the removal of sin in white images of snow and wool but depicts sin in shades of red, not black. The redness of sin recalls God's accusation against the people in verse 15: "Your hands are full of blood." According to verse 12, the people's sin is injustice. Thus, in verse 17, God exhorts them to "seek justice" and "rescue the oppressed"

Considering the literary context of Is 1:18, perhaps the bead symbolizing sin in modern America should be white. Historically speaking, whites have treated blacks unjustly. Whites' hands are covered with blood from slavery, Jim Crow, and lynching. The sins from which whites need to be cleansed are not black sins. They are white sins.

¹⁵² I imagine few white Christians are conscious of the racist nature of this evangelistic tool. Perhaps this is due in part to the transparency phenomenon. The racist nature of the bracelets became apparent to me only when I traveled to Brunswick, Georgia in 2002 on a church mission trip. Our group was almost all white and the people we tried to assist were almost all black. We wore power bands to facilitate our evangelistic efforts. For white people to tell black people that the black bead represents sin and the white bead represents righteousness finally occurred to me as racist.

¹⁵³ Consult also Ps 51:7.

According to verses 19-20, God is willing to wash them clean if believers faithfully heed God's call to social justice.¹⁵⁴

White evangelical preachers can use this biblical text to show that picturing sin as black and righteousness as white is more racist than biblical. They can also use it to identify white sins of oppression and injustice. As whites begin to associate whiteness with sin, they can achieve deeper racial awareness leading to repentance. White repentance involves the sacrifice of racial privileges.

White Self-Sacrifice in Imitation of Christ

Antiracist literature often insists that white people must relinquish race-based privileges for the sake of racial justice. A common theme is that white racism hurts whites as well as people of color, so whites should forsake white privilege for their own good. Joseph Barndt, for example, specifies that whites should change their racist ways for their own benefit and not as a sacrifice for others:

If we understand that we are damaged and destroyed by racism and that racism strips us individually and collectively of our humanity, then we might see how much we will benefit by the end of racism...Not only people of color, but also we who are white lose with racism. We lose our humanity, our authenticity, and our freedom. And with the end of racism we can gain back our humanity, our authenticity, and our freedom. Rather than losing power, we will gain the ability to use power rightly and to share power willingly.¹⁵⁵

Tim Wise takes a similar approach. He argues that whiteness has convinced working class whites to tolerate their poor economic status; that whiteness breeds an inability to cope with disappointed middle class expectations; and that various cultures of

¹⁵⁴ For a cosmic critique of racist color symbolism, consult Barbara A. Holmes, *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002).

¹⁵⁵ Barndt, 216-217.

light-skinned ethnic groups have been lost to whiteness.¹⁵⁶ Like Barndt, Wise tries to persuade whites that the costs of white privilege are greater than the benefits, and therefore whites should give up white privilege for whites' sake.

While I agree with these authors that whiteness hurts whites in some ways, I question their strategy for persuading whites to give up white privilege. The loss of humanity and culture that they attribute to whiteness can be hard for whites to grasp, while the material and social benefits of whiteness are obvious and difficult to relinquish. If whites are essentially encouraged to seek their own best interest, I think few whites will make a serious effort to relinquish white privilege.

Furthermore, it must be stressed that whiteness is not only a social and economic construction but also a theological construction. White privilege has been justified by appeals to the blessing of Shem that accompanied the curse of Canaan: "Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem, and let Canaan be his slave" (Gn 9:26). White privilege has also been justified by appeals to Paul's instructions for slaves to obey their masters (Eph 6:5; Col 3:22). As a result, the American subconscious has been socialized to presume that white privilege is divinely ordained.

Therefore, I suggest that a biblical-theological approach could be more effective in challenging whites, especially white evangelicals, to give up racial privilege. Preachers could frame the relinquishment of white privilege as an act of Christian self-sacrifice. More specifically, whites could sacrifice racial privilege to comport with the interracial peace Christ establishes through his atoning death in Eph 2:11-22. White sacrifice could exemplify the demolition of the wall of racial hostility in Eph 2:14. It could dramatize the death of racism in Eph 2:16. It could embody the equality among

¹⁵⁶ Wise, 147-171.

racism in Eph 2:18. It could advance racial solidarity while recognizing racial differences. It could demonstrate that those in positions of cultural power have the primary responsibility to embody Christ's self-sacrifice (Eph 5:25).

More concretely, white evangelicals could begin the process of racial sacrifice with the ecclesial reparation project outlined above. By offering ecclesial reparations, whites could sacrifice economic privilege for the sake of economic justice among races (2 Cor 8:13-14). They could become poor so that people of color might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). They could repent of white socioeconomic sins and pursue social and racial justice (Is 1:18-20).

I am aware of the racial dangers inherent in asking whites to imitate Christ's sacrifice. This model may seem to reinforce theological racism by making whites like Christ and therefore divine. But not if it is stressed, and it must be, that white sacrifice is fundamentally dissimilar to Christ's sacrifice. Christ sacrificed what was rightfully his—his life—whereas whites sacrifice what is wrongfully ours—racial privilege. Christ sacrificed *for* sinners while whites sacrifice *as* sinners. White sacrifice is not a sacrifice of charity but a sacrifice of justice, not a sacrifice of altruism but a sacrifice of reparation, not the bequeathing of a gift but the payment of a debt, not an act of rescue but an act of repentance.

Theological racism throughout American history has portrayed white privilege as divinely ordained. Preachers could use Eph 2:11-22 to argue instead that the sacrifice of white privilege is divinely ordained. And therefore, white Christians who do not sacrifice racial privilege have dropped their Bibles.

Chapter V

An Ethic for Preaching about Race: Re-scripting Racial Reality

Correlating critical race theory and Eph 2:11-22 moves us beyond reparations and critical race theology toward a reconsideration of homiletic ethics. By “homiletic ethic,” I mean an ethical vision of the preaching task. We need a homiletic ethic that accounts for critical race theory’s analyses of race and racism and the paradigm of racial reconciliation in Eph 2:11-22.

This chapter will employ Walter Brueggemann’s homiletic of “re-scripting” to suggest an ethical vision and homiletic approach for preaching about race in white American evangelical congregations. Specifically, it will argue that preachers can use Eph 2:11-22 to re-script racial reality in white evangelical churches. In Eph 2:11-22, racism is not only a personal sin but also a social structural sin, and racial ethics involve race consciousness rather than color-blindness. Preachers can help white evangelical congregations adopt and live into this alternative racial script.

In order to explore how such re-scripting can be accomplished, I will analyze the ethical proposals of four white homileticians in light of critical race theory and Eph 2:11-22. Though none of the proposals center on race, I will adapt them so that they function in relation to the specific task of preaching about race in white evangelical congregations. Specifically, I will argue via Charles Campbell’s work that preaching about race involves boldly exposing the powers of racism and envisioning God’s alternative realm of racial equality and reconciliation. I will argue via Sally Brown’s work that preaching about race involves discerning fresh pastoral metaphors for racial atonement that suit the white

evangelical context. I will argue via Lucy Rose's work that preaching about race is a long-term project that involves nurturing conversations about race and empowering laypersons to offer testimonies about race. I will argue via John McClure's work that preaching about race involves nurturing genealogical counter-memory, facilitating embodied encounters with people of color, and fostering collaborative conversations toward a shared commitment to providing racial reparations.

This chapter will also employ the work of African American ethicist Samuel Roberts to argue that there is a moral task inherent in preaching, namely, to quicken the will of listeners. In order to accomplish this moral task, preaching entails ethics of emotion and embodiment in sermon delivery. I will employ the scholarship of African American homiletician Henry Mitchell and white homiletician Randall Nichols to theorize the ethics of emotion and embodiment in sermon delivery, which are important in all preaching and especially in preaching about race. By embracing ethics of emotion and embodiment, preachers can stimulate the emotive consciousness of white evangelical congregations and quicken the wills of congregants to resist racism and seek racial reconciliation.

Re-scripting Racial Reality with Eph 2:11-22

Since preachers preach in a context of injustice, ethical preaching demands what Walter Brueggemann calls prophetic "counter" speech.¹ This type of speech asserts a biblical alternative to the dominant culture, which, according to critical race theory, is characterized by unconscious racism and white privilege. According to Brueggemann,

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 3-6.

preachers can facilitate human transformation by poetically re-scripting reality in light of the biblical text. The idea is for the preacher to help the congregation imagine a world shaped by the biblical text, which can guide congregational belief and behavior amid the dominant culture.²

In order to re-script racial reality in white evangelical congregations, preachers can imaginatively construe a world shaped by Eph 2:11-22. As Brueggemann notes, the dominant culture in America is marked by individualism.³ The culture of individualism has led to two racial problems in white evangelicalism that Eph 2:11-22 can ameliorate.

First, as discussed in chapter two, white evangelicals often understand racism strictly as personal prejudice based on race. According to Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, “For white evangelicals, the ‘race problem’ is not racial inequality, and it is not systematic, institutional injustice. Rather, white evangelicals view the race problem as prejudiced individuals, resulting in poor relationships and sin.” What is more, white evangelicals often claim that people try to make race a social structural issue when

² Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 27-30. My model is similar to Brueggemann’s except for two key differences. First, while Brueggemann highlights certain themes in the Bible, I focus on Eph 2:11-22. Second, while Brueggemann suggests a biblical alternative to secular culture, I suggest a biblical alternative to white evangelical culture because the individualistic understanding of racism in white evangelicalism reflects the broader culture of individualism in America. McClure worries about all the “counter” language in Brueggemann’s homiletic. He maintains that speaking against dominant culture paradoxically serves to reinforce it, because the center needs the margins in order to remain the center. The question becomes, then, how can preachers effectively preach the gospel alternative without being hyper-defensive toward dominant culture? McClure proposes a testimonial paradigm that creates a “non-defense-driven” use of language. His solution is a testimony of love in passive language. John S. McClure, “From Resistance to Jubilee: Prophetic Preaching and the Testimony of Love,” *Yale Institute of Sacred Music Colloquium: Music, Worship, Arts*, Vol. 2 (Autumn 2005): 79-82. I appreciate McClure’s emphasis on love, but I question the move to passive language because it would ultimately seem to tolerate the status quo. Instead, I suggest that preachers employ an active, positive form of speech that accentuates what we are for—racial equality and reconciliation—while firmly critiquing what we are against—racism.

³ Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 26-27.

in reality it is not.⁴ In Eph 2:11-22, however, racism is not only a personal sin that Christ forgives but also a social structural power that Christ overcomes. Therefore, Eph 2:11-22 can be used to re-script racism as both a personal and social structural sin.

Second, because white evangelicals often view racism as personal prejudice, they often assert that the Christian racial ethic is color-blindness. It is assumed that neither God nor Christians “see race,” and that ignoring race is crucial for healthy interracial relationships.⁵ As a result, white evangelicals are sometimes embarrassed to admit that they notice race at all. In Eph 2:11-22, however, Christians of various races are encouraged to keep their distinctive racial identities in mind. Therefore, Eph 2:11-22 can be used to re-script the Christian racial ethic in terms of race consciousness. Before moving into the specifics of re-scripting racial reality, a brief word on communication theory is in order.

Symbolic Convergence Theory

Symbolic convergence theory provides theoretical underpinnings for Brueggemann’s homiletic of re-scripting. According to communication theorist Ernest Bormann, symbolic convergence theory is a social theory of communication that explains group consciousness “in terms of socially shared narrations.”⁶ Sonja Foss identifies two basic assumptions of symbolic convergence theory. The first is that communication

⁴ Emerson and Smith, 116-117.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶ Ernest G. Bormann, “Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Communication Formulation,” *Journal of Communication* 35, no. 4 (October 1985): 128.

creates reality. The second is that “individuals’ meanings for symbols can converge to create a shared reality or community consciousness.”⁷

A basic unit of analysis in symbolic convergence theory is the “fantasy.” The term is used not in its popular sense to describe something imaginary but in a technical sense to connote the creative interpretation of historical events within a group. In other words, a fantasy is a narrative interpretation of some aspect of reality that individual members of a given group hold in common. Group consciousness develops as participants share fantasies and create social realities.⁸ In Brueggemann’s terms, this is how a “script” of reality emerges. Over time, various fantasies can swirl together to create a “rhetorical vision,” a coherent interpretation of reality.⁹

Symbolic convergence theory is often used to analyze group consciousness, but preachers can use it constructively to alter group consciousness in white evangelical congregations. Evangelical consciousness about race has been formed over time by certain fantasies—e.g., racism is personal prejudice based on skin color—that can be re-scripted by the strategic development of alternative fantasies—e.g., racism is manifest in social structures as well as personal prejudice. By re-scripting reality in light of Eph 2:11-22, preachers introduce alternative fantasies that can facilitate symbolic convergence in a white evangelical congregation’s understanding of race.

⁷ Sonja Foss, “Fantasy-Theme Criticism,” in Sonja Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, 2004), 109-110.

⁸ Bormann, 136.

⁹ Foss, 112.

But how, exactly, can preachers accomplish such re-scripting? What steps can preachers take to establish a new script of racial reality? What are the strategies for introducing alternative racial fantasies based on Eph 2:11-22?

An Analysis of White Homiletic Ethics

In order to address these questions, I now analyze the ethical proposals of four white homileticians: Charles Campbell, Sally Brown, Lucy Rose, and John McClure. I choose these authors because they represent diverse perspectives, including postliberal, feminist, and postmodern, each of which offers distinctive insight into the ethics of preaching. Analyzing white homiletic ethics in light of critical race theory and Eph 2:11-22 will reveal helpful ways to adapt white homiletic ethics for the purpose of preaching about race. I will glean from each proposal specific strategies for re-scripting racial reality in white evangelical congregations.

Charles Campbell's *The Word before the Powers: A Prophetic Model*

In *The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, Campbell situates preaching within the activity of the principalities and powers described in the New Testament. Following Walter Wink and William Stringfellow, he says the powers have spiritual and material manifestations, which can be observed in human institutions such as governments and corporations. The powers ensnare human beings with various strategies, including seduction, isolation, division, demoralization, and diversion. Jesus, however, overcame the powers through his life, death, and resurrection. In light of Jesus' example, Campbell says, preachers can embrace an ethic of non-violent resistance to the

powers. Specifically, preachers can adopt a homiletic rhythm of exposing the powers and envisioning God's alternative kingdom. In order for this type of preaching to have integrity, the preacher must live a life of non-violent resistance to the powers.

The inspiration for Campbell's book is the village of Le Chambon. During World War II, this Protestant village in France provided sanctuary for approximately five thousand Jews and rescued them from concentration camps. Some residents of Le Chambon suffered and died for resisting the Nazi regime. It is not difficult to see why this Christian community inspires Campbell toward an ethic of non-violent resistance to the powers.¹⁰

Critical race theory, however, places the American race problem front and center. This is important since racism has been a pernicious problem in North America as well as Europe. What if white American evangelical preachers viewed the powers largely through the power of white racism in America? What if they took as their inspiration the enslaved African Americans that preached against slavery and the African American prophets that led the Civil Rights Movement?¹¹

Campbell derives from Le Chambon three principles for homiletic ethics that could also be derived from the Montgomery Improvement Association: "First, the ethical context of preaching is the activity of the principalities and powers...Second, the preaching of the Word is a critical practice of resistance to the work of the principalities and powers...Third, the powers are engaged by a community of resistance, which is

¹⁰ Consult Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1979).

¹¹ This is the historical backdrop James Harris commends as he summons preachers to "make an axis through Africa and American slavery before endeavoring to preach the truth to the people... The preacher needs to understand the history and culture of both Africa and America as well as the impact of hundreds of years of American slavery upon our mind, body, and spirit." James H. Harris, *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 62.

shaped by a distinctive way of seeing the world and by peculiar practices and virtues.”¹²

The alternative historical backdrop would maintain the basic premises of Campbell’s ethic, but would suggest an ethic of resisting white racism in America.

Campbell’s interpretation of Ephesians also invites racial nuance. He grounds his understanding of the powers in Eph 6:12: “Our struggle is not against 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.” Campbell observes that in response to the activity of the powers, Ephesians says “the church takes up one offensive weapon: ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God’ (6:17). Preaching, in this view, involves a cosmic battle against the principalities and powers, which are actively at work in the preaching occasion.”¹³

Having established the ethical context of preaching, Campbell says, “Is there an ethic inherent in the practice of preaching? Ephesians 2:17 provides a good starting point for addressing this question: ‘He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.’”¹⁴ According to Campbell’s interpretation of the verse, Jesus chose preaching because it was a nonviolent form of resistance that subverted the violent ways of the Domination System. Preaching was “the *means* that was ethically consistent with the *end* of God’s Shalom.”¹⁵

While this interpretation bears insight, we might also note the primacy of race and racial reconciliation in Eph 2:17. “You who were far off” were Gentiles and “those who

¹² Charles L. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 2-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 75 (emphasis in the original).

were near” were Jews. The peace that Christ preached was reconciliation between racial groups. The verse on which Campbell bases his homiletic ethic is vested with racial significance. Our interpretation suggests that preachers can address race ethically through nonviolent resistance of racism. Preaching, then, can become a peaceful means toward the goal of interracial peace.

According to Campbell, “the monstrous homiletical heresy of recent years is the assumption that the whole drama of the gospel takes place between God and human beings. The aggressiveness of the powers and the moral captivity of people have received inadequate attention.”¹⁶ In order to focus his ideas on preaching and the powers, Campbell turns in large part to the ideas and sermons of persons of color. For example, he cites Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech as a seminal instance of exposing the powers and envisioning God’s alternative kingdom. He employs Howard Thurman’s work to argue that white privilege simultaneously oppresses people of color and corrupts the spirits of whites.¹⁷

Although strongly informed by scholars of color in developing his ideas, Campbell could do more to track homileticians of color that emphasize the powers. For example, Justo and Catherine González stress the political manifestations of the powers.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 70.

¹⁷ Ibid., 18, 124-127. Campbell also employs James Cone’s description of African American worship, describing it as a “token of resurrection” that redeems people from the powers of death, and endorses Orlando Costas’s clarion call toward solidarity with “non-persons of society.” Ibid., 124-127, 156. Campbell provides other brief and scattered insights about race. He notes how economic powers create racial divisions between white workers and black workers. He notes that Native American and African American voices are silenced in official histories in order to preserve the myth of America’s historical righteousness. He notes how Christian imagery of light and darkness has reinforced white racism. He supports re-envisioning history in light of racial sins such as the Trail of Tears, Transatlantic Slavery, Anti-Chinese immigration laws, and the annexation of Hawaii. Ibid., 19, 35, 38, 43, 50, 63, 83, 110, 124-127.

¹⁸ González and González, *The Liberating Pulpit*.

Eunjoo Kim advocates resisting evil spiritual powers, including Eurocentrism and oppression.¹⁹ James Harris says preaching must transform society because “even the collective effort of individuals is often met with the sin and evil that are inherent in the principalities and powers in society.”²⁰

Campbell’s argument about homiletical heresy is valuable because it reveals a problem in *white* homiletics. Inattention to the powers in white homiletics results partly from white privilege that has bred complacency about the powers. I propose that white evangelical preachers keep the powers constantly on their radar, especially the powers of unconscious racism and white privilege. This is part of what it means to envision the world rightly, which, according to Campbell, is foundational to Christian ethics.²¹

Strategies for Re-scripting

Campbell’s work suggests two strategies for re-scripting racial reality in white evangelical congregations. *First, white evangelical preachers can boldly expose the powers of racism.* Specifically, preachers can follow Campbell in using Eph 6:12 and Col 1:16-17 to show that evil powers are manifest not only in unseen spiritual forces but also in social structures such as racism. Preachers can link the powers of racism to the wall of racial hostility that Christ died to demolish in Eph 2:14. Concrete examples of racism in government policies, housing patterns, poverty rates, and the like are essential

¹⁹ Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God*, 53-54. Kim also observes that Shamanism has influenced Asian American Christians to believe that “their present suffering and problems are caused by evil spirits and that the divine power of the Holy Spirit is the means of overcoming them.” Ibid., 31-32.

²⁰ Harris, *Preaching Liberation*, 10. Harris declares, “We are called today to fight the forces of evil with the good that God has instilled within us. We are called to fight against evil however and wherever it manifests itself. Whether it’s institutional racism and injustice or personal hatred, whether it’s church politics or crime—we must not be in collusion with evil.” Ibid., 106.

²¹ Campbell, 98-100.

in helping white evangelical congregations make the connection between evil powers in the Bible and racist structures in society.

In exposing social structural dimensions of racism, preachers can employ various approaches to cultivate congregational resistance. For example, they can employ liturgies that acknowledge the sin of social structural racism and voice resistance. They can celebrate saints of color who have resisted racist powers, portraying them as examples to be emulated. They can reject the “church growth” that racial homogeneity facilitates and advocate intentional hospitality toward people of color.²²

According to Campbell, the project of exposing the powers involves the use of strong words, the sharing of convictions, and the persuasion of listeners. While Campbell does not want preaching to become another form of domination, he recognizes that anything less than assertive speech will not adequately challenge the status quo. “In the face of the powers,” Campbell declares, “speech must be bold and daring.”²³ This is especially important in privileged congregations, which sometimes display a lack of urgency regarding the powers.²⁴

Preachers addressing race in white evangelical congregations need the voice of bold proclamation that Campbell advocates. Since white privilege can make white evangelicals complacent about the powers, especially the powers of racism, white evangelical preachers can utilize daring speech in exposing the powers of racism. The white evangelical preacher can speak with steely conviction, not because of

²² In particular, preachers can repudiate the “Homogeneous Unit Principle” of church growth critiqued in chapter two.

²³ Campbell, 161-162.

²⁴ Ibid., 179.

self-righteousness, but because of fervent belief that racism is a sin and that God desires racial equality and reconciliation.

To advocate bold preaching is not to deny problems inherent in human language. Rather, it is to acknowledge the limited and sinful nature of human language alongside the doctrine of God's accommodation. According to Kim,

Preaching is the ultimate form of God's accommodated communication. Human language, in spite of its imperfection, is adopted for preaching to accomplish God's perfect, divine function of bringing salvation for our benefit...Homiletical language is empowered by the intercession of the Holy Spirit, pointing to the realm of mystery, to the experience of God. Because God graciously condescends to use our limited language as a vehicle for communicating with us, we preachers can unashamedly preach the mystery of God in our limited language, convinced that 'God can do something in, with, and through gospel-message speech.'²⁵

In light of God's accommodation, preachers can humbly trust God to fashion our fallible speech into a divine word. We can address race with conviction in hopes that God will use our preaching to transform individuals and communities toward racial equality and reconciliation.

Second, white evangelical preachers can boldly envision God's alternative realm in terms of racial diversity, racial equality, and racial reconciliation. Campbell encourages preachers not only to expose the hostile powers but also to envision God's alternative realm. In this sense, Campbell's ethic is an "eschatological ethic," an ethic rooted in eschatological vision. Eschatological vision is important when discussing race in white evangelical contexts because white evangelicals often advocate color-blindness on the grounds that "everyone will be the same in heaven."

White evangelical preachers can introduce an alternative racial fantasy by appealing to Eph 2:11-22 and corresponding eschatological images in the book of

²⁵ Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God*, 138-139.

Revelation. Eph 2:11-22 supports racial diversity, racial equality, and racial reconciliation in light of Christ's death. For example, Eph 2:11-12 suggests that Christians of different races should keep their distinctive racial identities in mind. Eph 2:18 suggests that Christians of different races have equal access to and status before God. Eph 2:14-15 suggests that Christ reconciles Christians of various races to form "one new human" not by eliminating racial distinctions but by eliminating racial divisions.

Correspondingly, Rv 5:9 and 7:9 envision racial diversity, racial equality, and racial reconciliation in God's alternative realm. Rv 5:9 says the Lamb who was slain has "ransomed for God saints from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." Rv 7:9 depicts a heavenly scene in which a great multitude "from every nation, and from all tribes and peoples and tongues" worship the Lamb of God together in harmony. It stands to reason that John, the author of Revelation, would not have been able to discern that the multitude represents all tribes, peoples, and tongues unless he could hear the different languages and see the different skin tones, facial features, and hair textures in his vision. It appears that in the heavenly kingdom, racial distinctions remain while racial divisions and inequities dissolve. There is racial solidarity without racial sameness.

In light of Eph 2:11-22 and its eschatological counterparts in Rv 5:9 and 7:9, I propose the concept of "righteous race consciousness" as an ethical alternative to color-blindness. A righteous race consciousness takes account of race for the sake of resisting racism and seeking racial equality and reconciliation. In this paradigm, Christians attend to race, not because race demarcates fundamental differences in human beings, but

because race is a social construction that influences social structures and personal interactions in everyday life.

For white evangelical congregations, righteous race consciousness encompasses four aspects. First, righteous race consciousness entails recognizing people of other races as different but not deficient. Cultural differences related to race are not ignored but appreciated. Second, righteous race consciousness entails recognizing unjust social arrangements related to race. Such arrangements include housing patterns, economic patterns, criminal justice patterns, and educational patterns that privilege whites and oppress people of color. Third, righteous race consciousness entails recognizing whiteness as a race with particular cultural values that are neither neutral nor normative. It is important to perceive the distinctiveness of the white race because otherwise whiteness can function as a seemingly neutral norm. Fourth, righteous race consciousness entails sacrificing the unjust privileges of whiteness in America. These include economic, social, political, and educational advantages. A righteous race consciousness will never be fully righteous, in part because some racism is likely to remain unconscious, but hopefully it moves toward racial righteousness.

Developing righteous race consciousness takes time. Initially, the white Christian who is deliberately conscious of race may feel more racist than ever before. Deliberate attention to race can seem to exacerbate racism, but actually it reveals the racism already residing in our hearts and minds. Only as we become more keenly aware of racism—conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, personal and social structural—can we repent of racism and relinquish white privilege.

In light of Rv 5:9 and 7:9, preachers can also reframe critical race theory's doctrine of racial realism. This doctrine holds that racism is fundamental to American social structures and will endure in spite of our best efforts against it, and therefore, the ideal of racial equality is unattainable. While positing the permanence of racism, the doctrine of racial realism simultaneously and paradoxically calls for a righteous struggle against racism.

The question becomes, then, why should we expend energy resisting racism if it is indomitable? According to Derrick Bell, a certain type of nobility accompanies the struggle for racial equality. The struggle may also lead to the improvement of racial conditions for future generations even if it does not result in full racial equality.²⁶ Rv 5:9 and 7:9 suggest another reason to struggle against racism: in the final reign of God, racial equality will be realized and racial reconciliation will be complete.

I propose, therefore, that preachers embrace "eschatological racial realism." This concept holds that racism is permanent until God's final rule. Racism is intractable until the Lamb of God returns to reign. We resist racism despite its intractability because we can make meaningful advances toward racial equality and reconciliation in the present, and because God's reign will bring about ultimate racial equality and reconciliation. Small strides toward racial equality and fleeting moments of racial reconciliation are not trivial victories en route to ultimate failure. They encouraging signs that God's racially just kingdom is on the way.

²⁶ Derrick Bell, "The Racism is Permanent Thesis: Courageous Revelation or Unconscious Denial of Racial Genocide," in *The Derrick Bell Reader*, 309-313. Bell, "Racial Realism," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, 302-312.

Sally Brown's *Cross Talk*: A Pastoral Model

In *Cross Talk: Preaching Redemption Here and Now*, Brown addresses the ethics of preaching atonement. In view of certain atonement ideas that have sanctioned domestic abuse and social oppression by glorifying human suffering, Brown suggests that the New Testament's reflections on the cross present an ethical way forward. She observes that the New Testament's reflections on the cross are varied, unsystematic, and pastoral, taking the form of "practical wisdom" that aims to form congregational behavior rather than systematic reflection that aims to formulate a comprehensive theory of redemption. She characterizes New Testament cross talk as local, specific, artful speech, and enjoins modern-day preachers to preach accordingly.²⁷ Essentially, Brown encourages preachers to proclaim Christ's atonement in terms of diverse pastoral metaphors rather than a single, comprehensive, abstract theory.

According to Brown, preachers need to understand the operative atonement ideas in a given congregation in order to be able to discern what types of pastoral metaphors for atonement might be most appropriate and effective. Preachers can obtain this information by listening for the congregation's assumptions about the following: (1) what in their experience presents a need for redemption (e.g., sin, injustice, or suffering); (2) what God's disposition toward humanity is (e.g., love, wrath, or compassion); (3) what it looks like to be redeemed (e.g., being reconciled, liberated, or healed); and (4) what God does to redeem humanity (e.g., forgives, empowers, or justifies).²⁸ Preachers can listen for such assumptions in a variety of contexts, including prayer meetings, deacon retreats, and hospital rooms. There will likely be various conceptions and images of atonement

²⁷ Brown, 5-6, 18-19, 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 44.

circulating within a given congregation, some that compete and some that complement each other. According to Brown, “our preaching about the saving significance of Jesus’ death will be more effective if we take these dominant congregational understandings into account.”²⁹

Following Peter Schmiechen, Brown suggests that one vivid pastoral metaphor of atonement is “Christ the Reconciler Who Overcomes Hostility.” This New Testament metaphor depicts Jesus Christ as the peacemaker between hostile parties. In examining this image, Brown discusses Eph 2:11-22. She states,

In these verses, no less than four metaphors envision how the cross reveals God’s redemptive overcoming of the hostility of rival, claim-making parties. At the cross, says the writer, (1) those who were aliens to the community of faith were ‘brought near by his blood’; (2) Jesus ‘broke down the dividing wall of hostility’; (3) ‘in his flesh he has made both [previously alienated] groups into one’; and (4) he has overcome deadly rivalry by ‘putting to death [the] hostility’ (Eph 2:13-14, alt.).³⁰

While Brown’s interpretation is illuminating, we might also note the primacy of race and racial reconciliation in this passage. The rival parties here represent different races.

Christ, in this text, is the reconciler that overcomes *racial* hostility.

Although Brown does not emphasize the racial implications of Eph 2:11-22, she offers racial reflection in discussing the work of African American scholars. For example, in arguing that broad narratives of social suffering cry out for “redemptive address,” Brown cites James Cone’s work on the cross and the lynching tree. Cone provocatively argues that Jesus’ cross and the lynching tree must be viewed in light of each other, lest “the redemptive possibilities of the cross remain obscure” to African American Christians and white American Christians. Comparing the cross and the

²⁹ Ibid., 45.

³⁰ Ibid., 94.

lynching tree can empower black Christians to resist unjust social oppression. It can also critique white privilege as a domination system that opposes Jesus Christ: just as the unjust powers of Rome crucified Jesus, the unjust powers of whiteness lynched numerous African Americans.³¹ According to Cone, the cross is a symbol not only of personal salvation but also of “divine opposition to the violation of the black body and soul.”³²

In discussing the relationship between God and violence, Brown incorporates Brian Blount’s work on the slain Lamb in the book of Revelation. Blount observes in Revelation the recurring paradoxical image of a slaughtered Lamb reigning on a throne. The Lamb, a victim of violent domination, reigns with power in apparent weakness, an image set in relation to Jesus’ death. According to Blount, the image of the slaughtered yet reigning Lamb undercuts the notion of power as domination and instead reveals power as “wreaking weakness.” The Lamb, however, is not a submissive victim but a “resistant Lamb” that emerges as victor. Although the Lamb undergoes violence, it survives and prevails. Like the Lamb, followers of Jesus can face the powers that try to destroy them and “refuse to go down.”³³

Blount’s work on the slain Lamb is reminiscent of Brown’s dissertation entitled “Preaching Ethics Reconsidered: The Social Construction of Christian Moral Reasoning and the Reimagination of Power in Preaching according to the Cross.” Therein, she argues that the ethical task of preaching is to re-imagine the nature and use of power in the church and the world. Brown views the cross as an apocalyptic event with epistemological implications, and she proposes the cross as an integrating hermeneutic

³¹ Brown, 81-83.

³² Ibid., 82.

³³ Ibid., 97-99.

for understanding the ethics of power. While the world understands power as domination, the cross reveals that power is “life willingly poured forth in fidelity to the power and purposes of God.”³⁴ According to Brown, the cross serves as an epistemological lens enabling the church to critique dominative forms of power and to embody distinctively Christian forms of power.

Brown’s ethic of the cross puts a helpful spin on Campbell’s analysis of the powers. She exposes dominative forms of power as idolatrous.³⁵ In light of Cone and Blount’s work, white power has often been dominative and idolatrous. White evangelical preachers, therefore, must be vigilant to critique white power and privilege in light of the cross.³⁶

Strategies for Re-scripting

Brown’s work suggests two strategies for re-scripting racial reality in white evangelical congregations. *First, preachers can discern and proclaim fresh pastoral metaphors for racial atonement that suit the local white evangelical context.* As Brown suggests, preachers can learn the operative atonement ideas in a given congregation in order to discern what types of pastoral metaphors for racial atonement might be most persuasive. Not only can the preacher discern the congregation’s atonement ideas

³⁴ Sally A. Brown, “Preaching Ethics Reconsidered: The Social Construction of Christian Moral Reasoning and the Reimagination of Power according to the Cross” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2001), 191.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

³⁶ For example, African American homiletics James Harris and Brad Braxton critique racial power in light of the cross. Harris links the unmerited suffering of Jesus with the unjust suffering of African Americans during slavery, Jim Crow, and modern-day racism, implying that the cross indicts whites for misusing power. Harris, *Preaching Liberation*, 31. Braxton interprets the cross as a display of strength in apparent weakness and cites Rosa Parks as an example of how God “subverts oppressive regimes through persons who lack social power.” The implication is that white power has often been dominative while black power has often been cross-shaped. Braxton, *Preaching Paul*, 31-32.

through attentive listening in general, the preacher might also arrange to meet with a group of laypersons for the purpose of discussing atonement ideas. In this scenario, laypersons could assist the preacher in developing pastoral metaphors for racial atonement that could function effectively in a local congregation.

My own experience in white evangelical congregations leads me to suggest two pastoral images of racial atonement based on Eph 2:11-22 that could prove homiletically helpful in white evangelical contexts. (1) Preachers can adapt Brown's work on "Christ the Reconciler Who Overcomes Hostility" and explore the pastoral metaphor "Christ the Reconciler of Races." This metaphor builds on the satisfaction image that predominates atonement theology in white American evangelical congregations. In Eph 2:11-22, Christ reconciles racial groups to God and each other through his sacrificial death.

Preachers can employ the image of Christ the Reconciler in relation to Jesus' atoning sacrifice to elucidate personal dimensions of racial atonement. For example, each of us has racism in our hearts, whether conscious or unconscious. According to Eph 2:16, racism is a sin for which Christ died. We are called, therefore, to repent of racism and put our faith in a color-loving God. As we repent, God supplies forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross. God's forgiveness comforts us and keeps us from wallowing in white guilt. At the same time, it challenges us to take responsibility for our racist thoughts and actions, and to avoid them in the future.

Forgiveness also has social dimensions that call us humbly to seek reconciliation with people of color. Confessing the sin of racism and asking for forgiveness is part of the reconciliation process. Forming meaningful personal relationships across race is important as well. If Christ died as the Reconciler of Races, then white evangelical

Christians honor Christ by repenting of personal racism and pursuing interpersonal reconciliation with people of color.³⁷

Confessing the personal sin of racism, developing peaceful and equitable relationships with people of color, and asking for forgiveness are important yet insufficient steps for racial reconciliation. In view of the social structural dimensions of racism, racial reconciliation also demands socio-political responses such as reparations, support of racially just public policies, and resistance of racist patterns in housing, education, politics, economics, law, and so on.³⁸

(2) With this in mind, preachers can explore the pastoral metaphor of “Christ the Conqueror of Racism.” This metaphor builds on the Christus Victor image of atonement that is latent in many white evangelical congregations. White evangelicals often use the terminology of “redemption” without developing the image of being “released” or “liberated” from evil social structural powers.³⁹ In Eph 2:11-22, however, the blood of Christ redeems or releases Christians from the social structural powers of racism (Eph 2:13; cf., 1:7).

³⁷ These points may register in the minds of white evangelicals without too much obstinacy. According to Emerson and Smith, white evangelicals generally respond to racism by stressing confession and forgiveness and the importance of building relationships with people of color. Emerson and Smith argue that these responses “may be important because, given the long, tumultuous history of U.S. black-white relations, solutions that call only for structural change are probably as naïve as solutions that merely ask individuals to make some friends across race.” Emerson and Smith, 170.

³⁸ For example, in 2011 there was a controversy about whether President Barack Obama was born in the United States. The claim that Obama was born outside the United States was groundless, yet was taken so seriously by the press and the populace that the White House felt compelled to release the long form of Obama’s birth certificate. Since it is improbable that a white President would have to deal with a similar allegation, this is an instance of social structural racism that preachers can decry. For more information on the “birther controversy,” consult Michael D. Shear, “With Document, Obama Seeks to End ‘Birther’ Controversy,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/28/us/politics/28obama.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Birther%20Controversy&st=cse [accessed April 28, 2011].

³⁹ In my experience, when the Christus Victor image is employed in white evangelical congregations, it is applied to evil spiritual beings, such as the devil, and not to social structural powers.

Preachers can use Eph 2:11-22 to show that racism is not only a personal sin for which Christ's death provides forgiveness but also a social structural power that Christ conquers on the cross. For example, Eph 2:14 depicts Christ as the destroyer of racism. Therefore, our "Victory in Jesus," a formative hymn and theological concept in many white evangelical contexts, includes victory over racism and liberation from its bondage. This does not mean that Christians are unaffected by social structural powers of racism but that we are set free to embody faithful resistance toward such powers.

Resisting social structural racism implies political responsibility. Whites are called to resist political manifestations of racism that continue to surface in American society. For example, there is currently a need to resist unjust immigration policy and support compassionate immigration reform.⁴⁰ The political dimension of resisting racism should not be confused with partisan politics, however. Preachers can address the politics of race without a partisan agenda. African American homiletician Samuel Proctor highlights the dangers of partisan politics: "How can the preacher call both or either party to accountability, in the name of the great prophets and Jesus, if allegiance has already been sworn to one party to keep it in office? ...Generally partisan politics is filled with the kinds of compromises that violate the preacher's calling."⁴¹ While partisan politics is inappropriate, addressing the political dimensions of race is important.

Second, preachers can introduce the pastoral metaphor of "white sacrifice" as an important aspect of racial atonement. Brown encourages preachers to explore new

⁴⁰ Rah points out that in many white evangelical churches there are more members of the National Rifle Association than advocates of compassionate immigration policy, this despite the fact that there is no biblical passage that supports the right to bear arms and almost one hundred biblical passages calling God's people to care for the alien among them. Rah, 75.

⁴¹ Samuel Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1994), 134.

images of sacrifice that resonate with contemporary culture and the biblical witness.⁴² In light of critical race theory and Eph 2:11-22, white sacrifice is an important new image of sacrifice, especially in white American evangelical congregations. The cross reveals that white privilege is idolatrous because it has been and remains a form of domination. White sacrifice, therefore, is a way to resist idolatry and demonstrate fidelity to the crucified Christ.

The concept of “white sacrifice” is abstract, easier to understand than embody. Thus, it is important for preachers to suggest concrete ways for white evangelicals to sacrifice white privilege. For example, they can implement the ecclesial reparation project outlined in chapter four in order to sacrifice white economic privileges. They can encourage white Christians to move to nonwhite residential areas in order to sacrifice white housing privileges. They can submit to the spiritual authority of Christians of color and help laypersons do the same in order to sacrifice white theological privileges.⁴³ They can refuse legacy admissions to colleges and universities in order to sacrifice white educational privileges.

It is counter-intuitive for whites to adopt an ethic of sacrificing racial privilege because our socialization makes this idea seem absurd. The attempt to sacrifice white privilege can even make us feel like traitors to our race. But preaching in an atmosphere saturated with unconscious racism and the oppression of people of color compels white evangelical preachers to resist our own white privilege, and to help our congregations do likewise.

⁴² Brown, *Cross Talk*, 116.

⁴³ Rah, 205. A simple way to initiate this process is by inviting a preacher of color to preach whenever a guest preacher is needed.

Lucy Rose's *Sharing the Word: A Conversational Model*

In *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, Rose proposes a communal and nonhierarchical homiletic called “conversational preaching.” In this model, the preacher stands on equal ground with the laity. The preacher does not offer definitive declarations but tentative proposals that invite counterproposals. Multiple perspectives are acknowledged in the pulpit, creating space for various interpretations and life experiences. The purpose of preaching is to refocus and nurture the church’s central conversations.⁴⁴

Rose emphasizes the cumulative effect of preaching.⁴⁵ This is helpful because homileticians and preachers sometimes portray preaching as a sequence of discrete sermons that carry individual impact. Preachers wishing to address race effectively do well to conceive an ongoing strategy for cumulative impact rather than a single sermon or sermon series. Since race is a key aspect of American culture, and since Eph 2:11-22 depicts it as a central Christian concern, race merits continuous homiletic attention.

Rose’s emphasis on the cumulative impact of preaching corresponds to her conception of preaching as gathering the community of faith around the Word. In Rose’s work, there is a compelling ambiguity about where, exactly, preaching takes place. She does not limit preaching to the Sunday morning sermon, but envisions it as ongoing conversation among church members. The preacher’s role is to nurture these conversations and give them focus.

⁴⁴ Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 4-5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

Rose's homiletic ethic is grounded in a feminist epistemology that stresses solidarity between preacher and congregation to such an extent that the distinction between clergy and laity virtually vanishes.⁴⁶ Campbell, on the other hand, imagines the preacher as a daring prophet who speaks boldly, yet within a framework of friendship with parishioners: "The preacher must take up the stance of the friend in a community of friends. This stance enables the preacher to speak with conviction and even authority without silencing all other voices and turning preaching itself into an act of domination."⁴⁷ I encourage white evangelical preachers to take seriously both the distinction between clergy and congregation and the solidarity between the two. The preacher can be both a daring prophet that boldly exposes racism during Sunday morning sermons and a friend that nurtures conversations among church members who hold varied perspectives on race.

It is important to remember that race is a controversial subject in white evangelical congregations. If the preacher assumes only the role of daring prophet, he or she might alienate listeners, lose credibility, and have trouble rallying the congregation to take unified action toward racial equality and reconciliation. On the other hand, if the preacher assumes only the role of equal partner in nurturing conversation about race, then conventional white evangelical perspectives, such as the denial of social structural racism and support of color-blindness, may win the day. If, however, the preacher can manage to speak boldly against racism in the pulpit *and* nurture conversations about race within the framework of solidarity and friendship, he or she may have a better chance of rallying

⁴⁶ "The preacher and the congregation gather symbolically at a round table without head or foot, where labels like clergy and laity disappear and where believing and wanting to believe is all that matters." Ibid., 4.

⁴⁷ Campbell, 162.

the congregation to take unified action toward racial equality and reconciliation.

Preaching about race in white evangelical congregations requires bold speech that exposes racism and conversational speech that invites others to join the discussion.

Strategies for Re-scripting

Rose's work suggests two strategies for re-scripting racial reality in white evangelical congregations. *First, preachers can adopt a long-term approach for re-scripting racial reality that nurtures conversation about race among laypersons.* Re-scripting racial reality is not a one-time or one-month or one-year project, but a long-term pursuit. White evangelical preachers might adopt a long-term strategy that begins with an emphasis on personal repentance from racism and moves deliberately toward socio-political responses to racism such as white sacrifice and reparations. This is not to justify indolent gradualism in the face of racial injustice. It is to take racism as seriously as possible by rejecting any "quick fix."

Rose's model reminds white evangelical preachers that the Sunday morning sermon is not the only place "preaching" occurs. Preachers can use a variety of opportunities to nurture conversations about race, racism, and appropriate Christian responses. Such conversations may take place informally at a restaurant, or formally as the subject of a Bible study in the church fellowship hall. Some conversations may develop organically, while others may require the preacher's deliberate initiative.

Since the goal of re-scripting is to re-build an entire discursive framework for race and racism, the preacher needs to invite church members to participate in the re-scripting project with real voice. One phase in the re-scripting process, therefore, might be to offer

critical race education to the congregation. For example, the weekly adult Bible study could focus on critical race education for a few months. The preacher could introduce key themes in critical race theory such as interest convergence, unconscious racism, white privilege, the victim perspective, the transparency phenomenon, the doctrine of racial realism, and the critique of color-blindness. Laypersons could discuss these concepts in small groups and plenary sessions, sharing their ideas and reactions with one another. Preachers might also ask the class to read and discuss a piece of accessible antiracist literature, such as Joseph Barndt's *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* or Tim Wise's *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*.

In leading the critical race education course, the preacher could slowly and deliberately re-script racism in social structural dimensions and re-script racial ethics in terms of race consciousness. The classroom setting is conducive for offering clear explanations of concepts such as "righteous race consciousness." It is also conducive for taking questions and facilitating fruitful discussion. In facilitating conversations about race, the preacher could listen carefully for how views about race are changing and identify which church members might emerge as lay leaders on racial issues.

Second, preachers can empower laypersons to offer testimonies about race during worship services. Rose describes preaching as a personal testimonial "wager," a tentative and incomplete statement that reveals a "small truth" from one person's perspective. According to Rose, a "shift to personal testimony" is an important aspect of conversational preaching, which is characterized by a "personal or autobiographical

quality.”⁴⁸ Not only can preachers testify about race during their sermons, laypersons can also testify about race, particularly in light of their critical race education.

Lay testimony is a powerful demonstration of the priesthood of believers and a cherished liturgical practice in many white evangelical churches. Lay testimony dramatizes Eph 3:10, which indicates that the entire church, not just the pastor, speaks God’s wisdom to hostile principalities and powers. While implementing lay testimony is risky, preachers can mitigate the risks by asking specific laypersons to share testimonies instead of issuing a church-wide invitation, and by asking for a written copy of testimonies in advance in order to review them for appropriate length and content.⁴⁹ By inviting laypersons to offer testimonies about the relationship between Christianity and racism, the preacher empowers the congregation to shape the new script of racial reality in both the church and the broader culture.

According to Lillian Daniel, lay testimony has a rhetorical function. Namely, it is a “call to action” that produces “doers of the word” and shapes and molds Christian community.⁵⁰ Testimonies are often stories of personal transformation, and when one person courageously testifies to a change of mind, it can liberate others to consider changing their minds.⁵¹ Lay testimony can potentially have a transformative effect on an

⁴⁸ Rose, 104, 124-125.

⁴⁹ Lillian Daniel recommends asking specific individuals to offer testimonies instead of simply issuing a blanket invitation to the entire church. Lillian Daniel, *Tell It Like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2006), 12. As a pastor, she does not read testimonies beforehand because she enjoys being surprised by testimonies and does not want to “censor” them. *Ibid.*, 152. My own pastoral experience suggests that working with laypersons on editing their testimonies ahead of time gives them confidence as they prepare to share their thoughts and experiences with the congregation. Pastoral review of testimonies, therefore, does not have to involve censorship, but instead can serve to empower laypersons through collaboration.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xvi, xix.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 156-158.

entire congregation. Through lay testimony about race, a church could quite literally talk itself into seeking racial equality and reconciliation.

John McClure's *Other-wise Preaching*: A Collaborative Model

In *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*, McClure employs the method of deconstruction and the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to critique and re-envision homiletics from a postmodern perspective. He advocates preaching that is informed by and responsible to “the other.” According to McClure, other-wise preachers are “self-suspicious” and constantly learn from others, about others, and with others.

McClure applies deconstruction to four key theological authorities: scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. He identifies the Bible not as a centrifugal power serving identity but as a “centripetal self-erasure” serving others. He approaches tradition through Foucault’s “genealogical counter-memory,” which “deconstructs memory (and tradition) in an effort to open memory to its other.” He underscores the discreteness and multiplicity of human experience, rejecting homiletic appeals to common human experience and challenging preachers to “become aware of the infinite and irreducible *difference* between their own experiences” and the experiences of others. He supports “communicative reason,” an epistemology rooted in embodied interaction with others. Finally, he advocates testimonial preaching.⁵²

McClure’s interpretation of “genealogical counter-memory” is comparable to critical race theory’s revisionist history. Both concepts deal with the politics of memory

⁵² McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 14, 28, 63, 98, 126 (emphases in the original).

in relation to bodily differences among human beings.⁵³ According to McClure, “Homiletic countermemory is a prolonged moment of erasure, when preachers allow their own well-formed memory, and the memories of their hearers, to dissolve into proximity to others, present and past, whose bodies begin to signify things unremembered.”⁵⁴ The preacher focuses on the suffering bodies of “memory’s unremembered others” until “a new official history seems in order.”⁵⁵ While McClure does not expound the racial implications of genealogical countermemory, the concept can be applied to race because the bodies of people of color have suffered disproportionately throughout American history.

McClure’s critique of common human experience, on the other hand, draws specific attention to race. In arguing that appeals to common human experience invariably disregard the distinctive experiences of “others,” he states: “The fact is that we’re not all men, not all white, not all middle class, not all English-first-language, and so on.”⁵⁶ Similarly, critical race theory’s concept of the transparency phenomenon warns that white appeals to common human experience are likely to project white perspectives as neutral or universal norms. This is one example of how appeals to common human experience can impose “an oppressive grid of common sense” on others.⁵⁷

For this reason, the notion of embodied “proximity” to others stands at the center of McClure’s ethic. He challenges preachers “to make a mutual speaking-listening, face-

⁵³ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 105.

to-face encounter with others an essential aspect of the preaching process.” This habit serves to make preachers constantly aware of the irreducible difference between their experiences and the experiences of others. Thus, the preacher’s efforts to identify with the congregation during sermons are less likely to degenerate into uncritical assumptions of universal human experience.⁵⁸

In many ways, *Other-wise Preaching* evokes McClure’s earlier book entitled *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*. Therein, he advocates “collaborative preaching,” a model in which the preacher holds face-to-face conversations with laypersons each week for the purpose of brainstorming the upcoming sermon and receiving feedback on the previous Sunday’s sermon. In this approach, insights and images gleaned from church members directly impact the content of the preacher’s sermons.⁵⁹

Collaborative preaching, like other-wise preaching, emphasizes human differences rather than similarities. It views the other as “the potential bearer of wisdom and insight, rather than the bearer of values that are threatening.”⁶⁰ Similarly, critical race theory’s voice of color thesis suggests that people of color bear the greatest racial insight, and that their perspectives on race should be privileged over white perspectives. I propose, therefore, that white evangelical preachers seek face-to-face conversations with people of color that can inform their preaching ministry, particularly their preaching about race.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁹ John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 48-58.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

Strategies for Re-scripting

McClure's work suggests three strategies for re-scripting racial reality in white evangelical congregations. *First, preachers can cultivate genealogical countermemory focused on people of color.* In other words, preachers can help white evangelical congregations recall American history in proximity to the suffering bodies of Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Preachers can retrace racial injustices including slavery, the Trail of Tears, Jim Crow, Japanese Internment Camps, and recently adopted immigration policies in Arizona and Alabama.

As preachers consistently nurture such countermemory, the group consciousness in a white evangelical church may begin to interpret racism in terms of social structures as well as personal prejudice. White evangelicals may even begin to revise their understanding of American history, to interpret their own experiences in light of white privilege, and to embrace race conscious solutions to racism. For example, if white congregations remembered history in proximity to black bodies laboring on plantations, the notion of black reparations might gain more traction.

Second, preachers can arrange for white evangelical congregations to have face-to-face encounters with persons of color. This approach would embody Eph 2:13, which declares that Christians of different races are "brought near" in Christ. For example, the white preacher could invite a local church of a different race to join the white church for a Bible study series on race. Perhaps the two preachers of the churches could take turns leading Bible study sessions, and members of the two churches could discuss their reactions in interracial small groups.

In this scenario, the two preachers would work to ensure that the gatherings do not degenerate into a manifestation of “tokenism,” or “feel good sessions” for whites. Participants would instead be encouraged to “get real” about the ordinariness of racism from the victim perspective. On the other hand, the two preachers would also work to ensure that the gatherings do not degenerate into “blame the victim” sessions, in which white people tell people of color that racism is their problem, and that a strong individual effort can overcome any racial injustice in American society. Instead, white participants would be challenged to take the primary responsibility for resisting and rectifying racism.

When applied carefully to race, McClure’s model of face-to-face encounters with the other can reduce the transparency phenomenon by facilitating embodied interaction with people of color. It can also concretize the voice of color thesis by facilitating interactions in which the views of people of color genuinely challenge whites rather than occasioning white self-congratulation or the assuagement of white guilt. McClure implies that truth emerges in face-to-face conversation.⁶¹ This may well be the case when people of color and white people gather for conversations about race that are as meaningful as they are difficult.

Third, preachers can convene small groups of laypersons to work on racism collaboratively and move the congregation toward providing racial reparations.

Assuming that critical race education would have been offered previously, these small groups would discuss possible congregational responses to racism by studying Eph 2:11-22, the Jerusalem collection, and other scriptures that illuminate race.⁶² The preacher

⁶¹ McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*, 105.

⁶² For examples of other scriptures that illuminate race, review the discussions of racial reparations and critical race theology in chapter four.

would attend, listen, learn, and work to develop pulpit language that conveys how the congregation is being persuaded about race. The conversations, therefore, would help to shape the new racial script and reveal slowly, in bits and pieces, the new racial fantasy informing congregational consciousness.

The conversations, however, would not be a simple exchange of ideas among equals, as in Rose's model. They would instead take place as part of the preacher's long-term strategy to cultivate a shared commitment to providing reparations.⁶³ While Rose argues against persuasion on the grounds that persuasive styles of preaching have abusively disregarded or dismissed the views of laypersons, McClure retains persuasion as a key aspect of the preacher's role as leader.⁶⁴ Persuasion, according to McClure, is a rhetorical act that aims to change attitudes and inspire new action. He specifically advocates "interactive persuasion," a form of persuasion that is "not an action *on* someone but an action *with* someone."⁶⁵

Interactive persuasion occurs in small group discussions wherein laypersons hold the power to persuade the preacher just as the preacher holds the power to persuade the group. Lay perspectives are voiced and heard, yet the preacher aims to persuade even as he or she listens earnestly to others. In order to rally white evangelical Christians to provide racial reparations, the preacher will need to be persuasive. The interactive approach is more likely to persuade a congregation to provide reparations than bold and daring pulpit speech alone.

⁶³ I am indebted to John S. McClure for the phrase "conversations toward shared commitment." John S. McClure, e-mail message to author, July 25, 2011.

⁶⁴ For the debate between Rose and McClure on this point, consult Rose, 133 and McClure, *Otherwise Preaching*, 111.

⁶⁵ McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 25.

In my appropriation of Campbell's model, the preacher envisions an alternative racial script based on Eph 2:11-22 and boldly expresses it to the congregation during Sunday morning sermons. In my appropriation of McClure's model, the preacher works with laypersons on congregational responses to racism and allows their input to shape sermons. These approaches are different but not incompatible. Campbell's model is particularly important in the early stages of re-scripting racial reality, while McClure's model is particularly important in the advanced stages of re-scripting racial reality.

The white evangelical preacher must be a daring prophet that exposes racism and envisions God's alternative realm of racial equality during Sunday morning sermons. The white evangelical preacher must also be a collaborating pastor that nurtures conversation about race and persuades the congregation interactively during small group discussions. It is my contention that one approach without the other will not suffice for re-scripting racial reality in white evangelical congregations.

Summary

The foregoing strategies can aid white evangelical preachers in re-scripting racism as a personal and social structural sin and re-scripting racial ethics in terms of race consciousness. Preachers can re-script racism in social structural dimensions by exposing the powers of racism, exploring fresh pastoral metaphors for racial atonement, offering critical race education, and cultivating genealogical countermemory. Preachers can re-script racial ethics in terms of race consciousness by envisioning God's alternative realm, advocating "righteous race consciousness" instead of color-blindness, promoting white sacrifice, and facilitating face-to-face conversations with people of color. These

strategies are varied yet complementary. Each is important, but some may prove more effective than others in a given congregation.

One lacuna in the above literature is that none of the books theorize the ethics of emotion and embodiment in sermon delivery.⁶⁶ This is unfortunate because homiletic ethics are not merely cognitive but also affective. If the foregoing strategies are implemented without appropriate emotion and embodiment, they may fall ethically and homiletically flat. Therefore, I now follow African American scholars Samuel Roberts and Henry Mitchell in theorizing the ethics of emotion and embodiment in sermon delivery.

Ethics of Emotion and Embodiment: Quickening the Will for Racial Reconciliation

According to African American ethicist Samuel Roberts, there is a moral task inherent in preaching. Namely, preaching quickens the will of the listener to seek and do God's will.⁶⁷ If preaching has no impact on congregational behavior, it has failed at its most basic moral task. I maintain that ethical preaching about race quickens the will of congregants to resist racism in all its forms and to seek racial equality and reconciliation.

A crucial point in Roberts' argument is that strictly rational preaching is unlikely to quicken the will of listeners. Therefore, preaching must stimulate the emotions as well as the intellect in order to be fully ethical. According to Roberts,

Human will is...the powerful union of the affective and cognitive aspects of our nature. Human will is the harnessing of affective desire for the embodiment of an idea. Vision achieved through cognition awaits the power of desire in order for an act to be completed. With respect to achieving our ultimate goal in the

⁶⁶ Cambell, however, includes an insightful section on righteous anger. Campbell, 176-178.

⁶⁷ Samuel Kelton Roberts, "The Moral Task of African American Preaching," in *Born to Preach*, 73-75.

preaching task of quickening the will of the hearer, we may presume that if this goal is to be met then the preacher must relate to the hearer at both the cognitive and the affective levels.⁶⁸

While white homileticians often note the dangers of emotionalism, black homileticians often note the ethical potential of emotion. Henry Mitchell, for example, advocates holistic preaching that speaks to emotive and intuitive faculties as well as mental faculties. He says preaching should issue from the preacher's gut and find its way to the congregation's gut, so that deep calls unto deep.⁶⁹ This is critical because faith itself resides not strictly in the mind but largely in the emotions. According to Mitchell, emotional appeal is necessary for transforming behavior. He suggests that behaviors such as love and trust are emotional in nature, and thus preaching must impact emotive consciousness if it is to inspire ethical action.⁷⁰

Toward this end, Mitchell exhorts all preachers to implement the African American homiletic technique of "celebration."⁷¹ The celebration is a fervent emotional appeal that generally occurs at the end of a sermon. It may include poetic rhetoric,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁹ Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 17-20. Henry H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977), 152.

⁷⁰ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 121.

⁷¹ Ibid. While Mitchell is the most renowned proponent of celebration, celebration is broadly advocated in black homiletic literature. For example, Frank Thomas promotes "celebrative design" in preaching which frames celebration as both the goal and the final stage of the sermon. Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997), 4, 84. Harris endorses Mitchell's understanding of celebration. Harris, *The Word Made Plain*, 86. Crawford promotes a celebrative climax to the sermon. Crawford, 71. Rodney Cooper advocates celebration as the "high point" of the sermon. Rodney L. Cooper, "African-American Preaching," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 199. Olin Moyd says, "Preaching must be celebrative, and it should be designed to provoke celebration among the listeners." Olin P. Moyd, *The Sacred Art: Preaching and Theology in the African American Tradition* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995), 123.

repetition, shouting, singing, or call-and-response. Celebration can take different forms, such as “the whoop”—the musical peroration in many black sermons—or “going by Calvary”—recounting the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁷² According to Mitchell, the celebration does not introduce new material but emotionally reinforces the message, accentuates the good news, and inspires listeners to take ethical action.⁷³ I encourage white evangelical preachers to incorporate celebration at the end of their sermons, especially sermons about race.

In preaching about race, a fully cognitive, unemotional approach is ethically insufficient for at least three reasons. First, it allows the will of congregants to remain unmoved in an atmosphere saturated with unconscious racism. In this sense, it tolerates the racist status quo. Second, unemotional preaching about race diminishes the very real sufferings and struggles of people of color. How can one address with integrity the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Trail of Tears, Jim Crow, Japanese Internment Camps, the Civil Rights Movement, the L.A. Race Riots, and contemporary patterns of racial injustice without a contortion of the face, a quiver in the voice, or a tear in the eye? Third, unemotional preaching about race implies that racism is not deeply important.

To affirm the necessity of emotion in preaching is not to deny the dangers of emotionalism, of which preachers must be aware. Rather, it is to affirm the ethical resources of emotion, especially its power to inspire the will of listeners to pursue racial equality and reconciliation. While emotions can be used to manipulate people in unjust

⁷² Teresa Fry Brown, for example, advocates the “whoop.” Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God’s Word* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 171. For an in-depth discussion of whooping in African American preaching, consult Martha Simmons, “Whooping: The Musicality of African American Preaching Past and Present,” in *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present*, eds. Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009), 864-884.

⁷³ Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 120-121. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, 64.

ways, they can also be used in ways rational argumentation cannot to motivate the pursuit of justice. Emotional preaching, when appropriately marshaled, can reflect the harsh realities of racism and elicit gut-level responses of repentance, resistance, and amendment of life.

Ethics of Metacommunication

Ethics of emotion are related to ethics of metacommunication. According to white homiletician Randall Nichols, “metacommunication” is “communication about communication” that occurs during communication. For example, if a preacher says, “I now want to tell you something extremely important,” that is a verbal form of metacommunication. If, on the other hand, the preacher pauses, leans forward, gestures with both hands, and speaks intensely, that is an embodied form of metacommunication that likewise signals an important statement. Nichols says “the dozens of phrases, gestures, tones of voice, and body postures we automatically use serve metacommunicative purposes.”⁷⁴ Preachers aware of metacommunicative behavior can harness it for homiletic effect.

While Nichols’s analysis of metacommunication is concerned with the clarity and effectiveness of preaching, I want to stress the ethical significance of metacommunication in preaching. Specifically, I contend that the ethics of bodily metacommunication in sermon delivery are crucial in preaching about race. When homileticians discuss sermon

⁷⁴ J. Randall Nichols, *Building the Word: The Dynamics of Communication and Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980), 99-100.

delivery, they often focus on rhetorical effect rather than ethics.⁷⁵ When homileticians discuss ethics, they often focus on the verbal content of sermons rather than sermon delivery. An ethic of preaching about race subverts this pattern by stressing the ethical significance of sermon delivery.

Since race is related to bodily characteristics such as skin tone, facial features, and hair texture, to preach with a disengaged body curtails the significance of race and racism. It metacommunicates that bodies and the social meanings they reflect are inconsequential. To preach with an animated body, however, metacommunicates that bodies and their racial characteristics matter. Therefore, it is important for white evangelical preachers to embody their sermons in a robust way.

The preacher's body is equipped with moral resources for metacommunication.⁷⁶ Take the face, for example. According to African American homiletician Teresa Fry Brown, the face may be "the most powerful channel of nonverbal communication."⁷⁷ The preacher's facial expressions are not only rhetorically significant but also ethically significant. Their power lies largely in their contagion. A scowl can convey the sinfulness of racism more powerfully than verbal language, eliciting righteous anger about racism. A grimace can evoke a heart of repentance from racism. A smile can offer assurance of God's forgiveness. Eye contact can demonstrate that racism is a real, "in your face" problem for everyone in the pews that is not to be ignored. Facial ethics of

⁷⁵ For example, consult Charles L. Bartow, *The Preaching Moment: A Guide to Sermon Delivery* (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1980); Childers, *Performing the Word*; Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Delivering the Sermon: Voice, Body, and Animation in Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

⁷⁶ Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 69.

⁷⁷ Teresa Fry Brown, *Delivering the Sermon*, 79.

sermon delivery can speak to the emotive sector of congregational consciousness in a way that words cannot, inspiring empathy for the racially oppressed and indignation about racial injustice.⁷⁸

The hand is another resource for metacommunication. Hand gestures display the preacher's commitment to the message and therefore participate in the preacher's ethos.⁷⁹ Yet, they also summon listeners to respond to the sermon with action. Demonstrative hand gestures convey that racism is important and that something must be *done* in response. Inactive hands can imply that race is a subject for cerebral contemplation that does not require action.

Tone of voice is a third key resource for metacommunication about race.⁸⁰ In black homiletics, vocal dynamics often transmit ethics. Lamentation over sin is groaned. Calls to action are shouted. Celebration of the gospel is whooped. Evans Crawford observes that the pitch of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermons, "the way the full sorrow and yearning of black people sounded in [his] voice, was more than a rhetorical strategy. It was a witness to an ethical stance, an exercise of freedom in a way that was responsive to the rightful demands for justice and equality."⁸¹

The preacher's vocal dynamics do not simply function for rhetorical effect or entertainment value; they also impart ethical integrity to grave topics. If preachers address racism in tenuous or tedious tones, it is not only uninspiring but might also be

⁷⁸ Harris says "the concepts and ideas of love and justice" burst forth from the preacher's face. He notes that "the face is the most glaring representation of race," intimating that racial issues are corporeal, and corporeal issues are racial. Harris, *The Word Made Plain*, 6.

⁷⁹ I use the term "ethos" in the Aristotelian sense to denote the perceived character of the preacher.

⁸⁰ On voice in preaching, consult Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

⁸¹ Crawford, 71.

unethical, because people's lives are on the line. Perhaps this is why Proctor emphasized the sound of sermonic authority: "As the trumpet must blow a certain sound, the sermon must speak with authority."⁸²

A dynamic voice can evoke the misery of racial oppression, the hope of racial reconciliation, and the urgency of the need to take action more powerfully than a verbal effort. A monotone voice, on the other hand, can make racism sound unimportant and racial reconciliation sound tedious, even if the preacher's manuscript is compelling. Preachers in white evangelical congregations can utilize compelling vocal dynamics to elicit appropriate emotional responses to race.

According to Harris, the preacher's emotion and embodiment in sermon delivery are paramount because they constitute "a significant part of the sermon's substance."⁸³ I want to specify that emotion and embodiment in sermon delivery constitute much of the sermon's ethical substance. According to communication theorist Albert Mehrabian, ninety-three percent of the meaning communicated in speech is found in body language and tone of voice while only seven percent is found in the words spoken.⁸⁴ Applied to preaching, this suggests that the ethics of metacommunication may outweigh the ethics of communication.

⁸² Proctor, 26.

⁸³ Harris, *Preaching Liberation*, 63.

⁸⁴ Albert Mehrabian, *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1971), 43-44. Cited in Childers, *Performing the Word*, 57.

The Preacher's Personal Ethics

Because emotion, body language, and tone of voice are integral to the ethics of preaching about race, the personal ethics of the preacher are paramount. Facial expressions, hand gestures, and vocal dynamics can be rehearsed, but ideally these elements issue organically from the preacher's core. Ethical preachers live a life of resistance to the power of racism. They come to terms with race and racism in their own lives. They prayerfully seek a God-given passion for pursuing racial equality and reconciliation. They repent of racism, conscious and unconscious, and seek to build just and harmonious relationships with persons of color through the proximity of face-to-face conversations. They seek to divest themselves of the idolatrous power of white privilege. They support and provide racial reparations.

Ethical preachers take race personally. Preachers who are not emotionally invested in race relations have little potential to preach ethically about race. Only preachers who feel deeply about racism and racial reconciliation can inspire the congregation to feel deeply about it. Only the congregation that feels deeply about racism is likely to respond with action.

Conclusion

Re-scripting racial reality in white evangelical churches is a daunting but crucial endeavor. By employing insights from Eph 2:11-22, embracing ethics of emotion in preaching, and incorporating the foregoing homiletic strategies, preachers can introduce a new script of racial reality that changes the minds of white evangelicals about race. Namely, racism is a social structural and personal sin that oppresses people of color and

privileges white people. Christ died on the cross to release us from the social structural power of racism and to forgive us for the personal sin of racism. Christ's death establishes racial equality and reconciliation, not by eliminating racial distinctions but by eliminating racial hierarchy and division. White evangelicals are called, therefore, to exhibit righteous race consciousness, including the sacrifice of white privilege.

White evangelical preachers must declare this alternative racial script with boldness because racism continues to hold white evangelical churches and American society at large in its grip. Preachers can be confident that such homiletic efforts are not in vain because in God's ultimate reign, racial equality will be achieved and racial reconciliation will be complete.

Appendix

A Praxis of Preaching about Race: Sermons and Critiques

Preaching for racial equality and reconciliation is a long-term pursuit during which white American evangelical preachers undergo considerable personal and vocational transformation. Resisting racism in its myriad forms encompasses constant learning, discomfort, risk, and growth for the white evangelical preacher. This appendix presents example sermons I preached while in the process of developing the foregoing homiletic theory as well as critical reflection on the sermons that illustrates my own continuing process of homiletic growth with regard to race. In preparation for the example sermons, a word about practical theology and praxis is in order.

Practical Theology and Praxis

According to African American homiletician Dale Andrews, practical theology “grounds theological thinking in the experiences and needs of people.”¹ It takes history rather than theory as its primary reference point. Practical theology is no less rigorous than academic theology. The key difference is practical theology’s goal of a well-performed deed rather than a well-articulated theory.

Practical theology is related to praxis. According to African American homiletician Olin Moyd, “Praxis has to do with the critical correlation or relationship between theory and practice. The correlation is dialectical. This means that theory and

¹ Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 38.

practice engage each other and are formed and revised by each other.”² More specifically, I understand praxis as the habit of (1) performing a deed, (2) reflecting critically on the performance, (3) performing the deed again in light of the critical reflection, and (4) repeating the process.³ Praxis assumes that there is a type of learning that occurs in doing, that practice is a heuristic device. Ideally, praxis improves performance over time.

In homiletic praxis, the direction of insight flows from theory to practice *and* from practice to theory. Homiletic theory can improve preaching, and preaching can improve homiletic theory. The bidirectional flow of insight between theory and practice is a crucial aspect of homiletics as a practical theological discipline.

Sermons and Critiques

While writing the dissertation I have served as Pastor of First Baptist Church, Valdese, North Carolina, a white, evangelical church in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Formed in 1920, the church has approximately seven hundred members and is dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Pastoral responsibilities have compelled me to think practically about the dissertation. This has strengthened my research by disallowing me to divorce homiletic theory from the practice of preaching in a local church context.

² Moyd, 83.

³ David J. Lose calls this “an action/reflection model of learning.” David J. Lose, “Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice,” in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*, eds. Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 49.

The town of Valdese is overwhelmingly white. It has a small Hmong population, a small Hispanic population, and a very small African American population. The First Baptist Church, generally speaking, is not overtly racist and has demonstrated a willingness to grow in the area of race relations. For example, upon my recommendation three years ago the church agreed to partner with a local Spanish-speaking church and to begin observing the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday.

Each of the following manuscripts represents a sermon I preached at First Baptist Church during a Sunday morning worship service while in the process of constructing the foregoing homiletic theory. Unfortunately, the medium of written communication omits crucial aspects of sermons, such as tone of voice and body language. It must be stressed that sermon manuscripts are merely written versions of embodied performances.

Nonetheless, I hope the words of the manuscripts exemplify the foregoing homiletic theory, demonstrating its integrity and viability. I offer critical reflection on the sermons in hopes of modeling a robust homiletic praxis that illustrates my own process of growth and transformation with regard to race and unearths further insight for preaching effectively about race in white American evangelical congregations.

“Behind the Curtain”

The following sermon manuscript is based on Rv 7:9-10. It was preached on October 25, 2009 during a bilingual joint worship service with Mount Olive Baptist Church, the Spanish-speaking partner church of First Baptist Church. To my knowledge, it was the first bilingual worship service in the history of First Baptist Church. I preached the sermon with Reverend Israel Aguilar, a Guatemalan immigrant who serves as Pastor

of Mount Olive Baptist Church. I preached in English and he translated in Spanish, sentence by sentence.

Sermon Manuscript

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!' (Rv 7:9-10, NRSV).

Imagine a curtain separating earth and heaven. At the beginning of Revelation, God pulls the curtain aside and shows John a vision of heaven. John sees a huge crowd, too many people to count. There are people of every nation, tribe, and language. They are all declaring, "Salvation belongs to our God."

In heaven, people from different nations worship together. But on earth, people of different nations have a tendency to fight each other. In the twentieth century alone, Belgium and the Congo fought each other. Germany and Namibia fought each other. Japan and Russia fought each other. Greece and Turkey fought each other. Italy and Ethiopia fought each other. France and Vietnam fought each other. China and Tibet fought each other. The U.S. and North Korea fought each other. Iraq and Iran fought each other. And the Arab-Israeli conflict has continued since 1929. These are just a few examples. I haven't even mentioned World War I or World War II.

A young American minister went to visit an older member of his church. The man was a respected spiritual leader and World War II veteran. He surprised the young minister when he pulled out an old tattered photograph of a young Japanese family. It showed a father and mother with their young child. The old man said to the young

pastor, "When I was fighting in the war, I pulled this off of a body in the Philippines. That's when I started to realize just how terrible war is." War is a terrible thing. The good news is that if you pull back the curtain, you'll see people of every nation worshipping God in peace.

In heaven, John also sees representatives of every tribe and people group standing in unity before God's throne. But on earth, people of different tribes, races, ethnicities, and cultures are often divided against each other. My brother, Rick, who lives in Japan, has sometimes been mistreated there because he is white. When Dayna and I traveled to Romania, we learned that light-skinned Romanians are often prejudice against darker-skinned Romanis. Although we have a black president now, racial inequality persists in our country. Studies show that school districts with mostly white students have more money to spend per student than school districts with mostly students of color. White people pay less interest than people of color with similar mortgages.⁴ African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans have much higher poverty rates than whites.⁵ White persons receive lighter punishments than people of color with similar criminal records.⁶

When my wife, Dayna, and I were moving to Nashville, we contacted a real estate company to help us find a house. One of the first things the agents said was, "Stay away from Nolensville Road; it's a Hispanic area." We were shocked. They spoke as if no white couple would ever want to live near Hispanic people. We did not move to

⁴ Lee Anne Bell et al., 125-126.

⁵ Barndt, 47.

⁶ Battalora, 4-5.

Nolensville Road, but we did end up with wonderful Hispanic neighbors on both sides of our new house.

Earlier this year, in Georgia, the Montgomery County High School had two separate proms: one for white students and one for black students. “It was heartbreaking,” said one black senior. “It was the one night to see all your friends dressed up and I’m told, I have to wait until the next night because of the color of my skin.”⁷ The good news is that if you pull back the curtain, there are people of all tribes, races, and cultures worshipping God together.

John sees people of every language shouting praise. Can you imagine how awesome it would be to hear every language the human race has ever invented praising God at the same time? Evidently, God loves all languages. But on earth, we have our favorites.

When Dayna and I lived in Tennessee, there was a huge controversy in Nashville about language. Someone proposed an “English-only” law that would make English the official city language and the only accepted language of government officials. The law did not pass, but since then a city councilman has proposed it again. You won’t find that kind of legislation inside the pearly gates, because there, people of every language praise God equally.

Revelation tells us that heaven is a place of demographic diversity and spiritual unity. What unites the citizens of heaven is not nationality, skin tone, culture, or language but the saving blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of the Lamb has washed their

⁷ Leonard Doyle, “Segregated High School Proms Divide Georgia’s Students,” *Telegraph*, June 21, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/5586617/Segregated-high-school-proms-divide-Georgias-students.html> [accessed May 4, 2011].

robes clean, and they're all holding palm branches, which symbolize victory.⁸ Because the blood of Jesus Christ has covered our sins, we have victory over sin and death. We have eternal life!

There is great hope today because Christ offers forgiveness, because Christ offers resurrection, and because heaven is a place for all types of people. Behind the curtain, there is a colorful crowd of countless saints worshiping God. That means our worship service today is a preview of the life to come. In this sanctuary, God has briefly pulled back the curtain. Let us not lose sight of this vision. Let us continue to pull back the curtain. And let us continue to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Critical Reflection

Critical race theory's voice of color thesis suggests that voices of color be privileged over white voices in discussions about race in America. Yet, this sermon featured a white person's views on race being expressed through a Guatemalan person's mouth. The arrangement is inherently dangerous in that a person of color could be coerced to endorse a white person's perspective on race.

However, I met with Reverend Aguilar and his wife, Ann, beforehand to review the sermon manuscript and discuss its content and translation. They indicated that they appreciated and concurred with the sermon. The sermon therefore exemplified McClure's model of face-to-face consultation with "the other" as an important aspect of sermon preparation. However, there was little genuine "collaboration" in constructing the sermon due to the language barrier between Reverend Aguilar and me.

⁸ Christopher Rowland, *The Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 621.

At a subsequent bilingual service at First Baptist Church, I translated his sermon into English. We now hold an annual bilingual Pentecost service in which we alternate who preaches and who translates from year to year. Therefore, Reverend Aguilar's perspectives on race can be expressed through my mouth as well. Hopefully, I can learn Spanish so that we can genuinely collaborate on future sermons.

As I read Rv 7:9-10 aloud at the beginning of the sermon, I was overwhelmed with emotion. The tears, though unintentional, may have stimulated the emotive consciousness of the congregation and made a quickening of the will possible. Perhaps the tears metacommunicated that the topic of race bears particular gravity, and that humility and vulnerability are appropriate postures for white people to assume in responding to racism.

The vignette about my brother was intended to cast racism as a worldwide problem before shifting to the particular problem of racism in the United States. In retrospect, however, it might have served to understate the distinctive and social structural nature of racism in the United States. It is regrettable that the first example of racism in the sermon portrayed a white person as victim. Although the sermon quickly moved to a litany of statistics that emphasized racism against people of color, to begin a list of examples of racism with an instance of prejudice against a white person was inappropriate because people of color are the primary victims of racism in the United States and white people are the primary perpetrators.

The sermon exposed the power of racism and envisioned God's alternative kingdom in multiple ways. For example, it exposed the power of racism manifest in the real estate industry, in public schools, in the prison system, and in government policies.

It envisioned God's kingdom as a realm where people of diverse languages, skin tones, and nationalities dwell together in harmony.

The story about racism in real estate was intended as a concrete example of everyday racism. However, the story implied that I am a paragon of antiracism, when in reality I struggle with racism. According to Leonora Tisdale, prophetic preaching involves "standing *with* the congregation rather than *opposite*" them, so that the text challenges both preacher and congregation.⁹ Perhaps an example of my own racist tendencies would have been more appropriate than an example of someone else's racism that I found repulsive.

The story about segregated high school proms was intended to show that overt racism and segregation persist in our country. After the sermon, one listener expressed her disgust about the segregated proms. It was her only comment about the sermon, which made me wonder if my decision to cite such egregious racism detracted from the sermon's emphasis on subtler forms of racism.

The statistic about school districts was apropos because it clearly illustrated de facto racism and because many members of First Baptist Church work in the public school system. The statistic about prisons was also apropos because First Baptist Church is located in a county with multiple prison facilities, including a major correctional center for youth, and several members of the church work in the criminal justice system. Hopefully, these examples empowered listeners to perceive and resist structural racism at their workplaces.

The link between the various languages in John's vision and modern-day "English-only" laws was intended to be political but not partisan. By casting the "pearly

⁹ Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching*, 49 (emphasis in the original).

gates” in contradistinction to certain white politics, the sermon hoped to expose a political manifestation of racism that opposes the politics of heaven. The choice to focus on Nashville rather than Valdese, however, might have been misguided. Some politicians in Valdese and the surrounding area support English-only legislation. I hoped that critiquing a similar situation in Nashville would indirectly challenge racially unjust politics in Valdese. While the indirect approach allowed me to gain a hearing for a critique of political racism, it may have simultaneously distracted attention from local politics by turning the congregation’s gaze to another state.

Rv 7:9 says the saints in heaven are clothed in white robes. The sermon briefly interpreted the white robes as a symbol of cleansing from sin. Regrettably, this aspect of the sermon uncritically perpetuated color symbolism that equates whiteness with divinity, a longstanding pattern in American theological racism. Alternatively, the sermon could have distinguished between white robes and white skin and supplied a critique of racist color symbolism, all while maintaining that the blood of Christ cleanses people of different races from sin. Such a critique could have made the sermon more racially just.

The final paragraph was intended to punctuate good news in a sermon that featured abundant bad news about racism. By lifting up Christ’s forgiveness, the sermon implied that racism is a sin. However, it did not explicitly call for repentance from racism, which is another of the sermon’s shortcomings. A bold and direct appeal for racial repentance could have improved the sermon.

The conclusion drew a parallel between the heavenly scene in Revelation and the colorful crowd of saints in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church. The final line linked racial reconciliation with the Lord’s Prayer. Since First Baptist Church regularly recites

the Lord's Prayer during worship, the final sentence tied racial reconciliation to the weekly liturgy. It summoned both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking congregations to continue embodying the racial politics of heaven on earth.

Despite the sermon's defects, multiple church members spoke appreciatively about how it challenged them. The appreciative response might indicate that the sermon was prophetic in a pastoral way, challenging congregants without alienating them.¹⁰ On the other hand, it might indicate that the sermon was not prophetic enough.

“And the Wall Came Tumbling Down”

The following sermon manuscript is based on Eph 2:11-22. It was preached on June 13, 2010 as part of a sermon series on Ephesians. During the week before the sermon, a keynote speaker at a major town event made racially insensitive comments during his speech. A public controversy ensued. Although the sermon text and topic were scheduled weeks in advance, the sermon turned out to be particularly timely. It was delivered in an atmosphere rife with racial reflection.

Sermon Manuscript

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹²remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace

¹⁰ Consult *ibid.*, xii.

to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God (Eph 2:11-22, NRSV).

When I was in sixth grade, a white boy came up to me at school one day and said, “Did you hear? Today is black versus white day. Don’t go to the gym, or you’ll get beat up.” Another white kid told me the black kids had knives. Some of the big white boys said they weren’t afraid and were going to beat up the black kids. I was scared to go to gym class, but thankfully no one attacked me. Later in the day, I heard that two black students from the local high school were going to come to our school and shoot all the white kids. Thankfully, that didn’t happen either. But there was a great deal of racial tension in the air.

Ephesians 2 indicates that there is a wall of hostility between people of different races. The wall of hostility stood tall in 1619 when light-skinned Europeans began to enslave dark-skinned Africans here in America. The wall of hostility stood tall in 1787 when the Constitution defined a slave as three-fifths of a person. The wall stood tall in the 1830s when Native Americans were forced to move westward, and thousands died on the Trail of Tears. The wall stood tall in 1876 when segregation began, forcing African Americans to have separate schools, separate restaurants, and separate bathrooms. The wall stood tall in 1942 when thousands of innocent Japanese Americans were imprisoned in barbed wire camps on the West Coast.¹¹ The wall stood tall in 1992 during the L.A. race riots, in which fifty people were killed. The wall stood tall in 2003 when a young white girl in Cleveland was beat up on a day known as “Beat Up a White Kid Day.” The

¹¹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 82.

wall stood tall just the other day in Valdese when a Founders' Day speaker said that nineteenth century slaves had more rights than African Americans have today.

The wall of racial hostility produces numerous unjust social realities today. Black youth are six times more likely than white youth to be incarcerated for the same offenses. Latino youth are three times more likely. A 2002 report from the Institute of Medicine showed that whites receive better health care than people of color, even if they have comparable income and insurance.¹² A 2004 study showed that job applicants with common black names were much less likely to be called for an interview than job applicants with common white names, even though all the applicants in the study submitted exactly the same résumé.

As the wall of racial hostility affects social structures, it also affects our hearts. When we are surprised to see a black valedictorian, the wall is standing. When we hesitate to trust a Hispanic doctor, the wall is standing. When we hold our wallets as we pass a Hmong teenager on the street, the wall is standing.

Dayna and I went to Charlotte last week to celebrate our anniversary. Before we left, I called several florists there to see who could deliver the right flowers at the right price. Only two people I spoke with could deliver the flowers I wanted. One had a polite, white female voice. The other was a man with a foreign accent. Would you believe I considered ordering from the white lady, even though her flowers cost ten dollars more for the same arrangement? The wall of racial hostility can even divide us over the phone.

This wall I'm talking about has stood for centuries all over the world. In fact, it stood tall between Jews and Gentiles in New Testament times. Gentiles often resented

¹² Vigen, 220.

Jews for their wealth, status, and influence.¹³ There was a great deal of tension between the two groups, and in the year 38 C.E. and again in the year 66 C.E., Gentiles violently attacked Jews in the city of Alexandria.¹⁴ These were basically first century race riots. The wall of racial hostility back then is similar to the wall of racial hostility today.

But, there is good news this morning. According to Ephesians 2, when Christ died on the cross, the wall of racism came tumbling down. Verse 14 says: “[Christ] himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.” The two groups here are Gentiles and Jews. They are people of different races, and Christ brings them together in peace through his blood.

We have long known that there’s power in the blood to save us from our sins, but did you know that the blood of Christ saves us specifically from racism? Verse 16 says Christ died to put to death the enmity between Jews and Gentiles. In other words, Christ died to rid the world of racism. When the cross of Christ is lifted, the wall of racism falls. The vertical beam of the cross shows that Jesus reconciles humanity to God by removing our sin. The horizontal beam shows that Jesus reconciles the races by removing the hostility between us.

As Christ wipes away our racial hostility, verse 15 says that Christians of different races coalesce into one new person, a picture of unity. This doesn’t mean that we become color-blind and act like we’re all exactly the same. That would eliminate the beauty of distinctive human cultures. It would also ignore the way race functions to privilege white people and oppress people of color. Instead, verse 15 means that we have racial diversity and Christian unity at the same time. We have unity without uniformity.

¹³ Feldman, 109-114.

¹⁴ Ibid., 113-120.

Look at Rv 5:9, and you'll see people of every tribe, nation, and tongue worshipping together in heaven. It's clear that our racial distinctions continue there, but our racial divisions cease.

There is no racial division in God's kingdom, and there is no racial hierarchy either. God does not privilege some races over others. In fact, Eph 2:18 indicates that people of different races have equal access to God. In this verse, the Holy Trinity establishes racial equality. Different races are granted access to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Whether you are born with light skin or dark skin, you have the same access to God. Whether you grow up in Chinatown or Little Italy, you have the same access to God. Whether you speak Spanish or Swedish, you have the same access to God. God has established racial equality. Racial equality is not merely a matter of political correctness; it's a matter of spiritual correctness.

Therefore, we must repent of our racist impulses and embody the racial reconciliation Jesus died to achieve. Racial reconciliation is not strictly a social issue; it's a gospel issue. In Ephesians 2, to speak about the peace of Christ is to speak about interracial peace. To speak about Christ's atonement is to speak about interracial at-one-ment. And to lift high the cross is to bring down the wall of racism. When we lift high the cross, we see that all who are beneath it are equal children of God. When we lift high the cross, we are eager to love people of different races, cultures, and ethnicities. When we lift high the cross, we know that a peaceful relationship with God goes hand in hand with peaceful interracial relationships.

God started teaching me this at a young age. When I was five years old, I met the first person of color I had ever known. Her name was Mrs. Smith, and she was my

kindergarten teacher. She was a kind and beautiful woman. I remember liking her very much. Yet, even at the age of five, I sensed a barrier between her and me: she was black, and I was white. One day, as Mrs. Smith was passing out papers, she cut her finger. She said, "Ouch," and I leaned forward to see her paper cut. I wanted to see her blood because I thought it would be black. I had never seen black blood before. To my surprise, I saw bright red blood on her finger. I thought to myself, "That's the same color as my blood." My parents had taught me that what's on the inside of people is more important than what's on the outside, so from that time forth, I figured that Mrs. Smith and I were more alike than different.

Years later, God would show me that blood really is the key to racial equality. Blood really is the key to racial reconciliation. Not our blood, but the blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of Christ was shed for everyone. The blood of Christ was shed for Native Americans! The blood of Christ was shed for African Americans! The blood of Christ was shed for white Americans! The blood of Christ was shed for Arab Americans! The blood of Christ was shed for Pacific Islanders! The blood of Christ was shed for Hispanic Americans! The blood of Christ was shed for Asian Americans! The blood of Christ was shed for every tribe, nation, and tongue! The blood of Christ was shed for every race, culture, and ethnicity! The blood of Christ brings down the wall of racism! The blood of Christ unifies all races! The blood of Christ calls for interracial peace!

Critical Reflection

The introduction was intended to establish a real-life reference for the wall of racial hostility in Eph 2:14. As I preached the introduction, some congregants shook their

heads in disgust at the racism displayed in my middle school. No heads were shaking, however, during the historical overview of racism in the United States. The congregation's body language suggested that they endorsed my criticism of personal racism but were less comfortable with my criticism of social structural racism in American history. Perhaps their reaction mirrored my own struggle. I am more comfortable criticizing personal racism than social structural racism. Nonetheless, by tracing modern racial prejudice to its historical and social structural roots, the sermon nurtured genealogical countermemory and re-scripted racism as both a personal and social structural sin.

The historical overview included an instance of racism against a white person. Since media outlets sometimes feature the language of "reverse racism," or racism against whites, I was concerned that if I did not mention an instance of racial prejudice against white people, the sermon might lose credibility. Unfortunately, acknowledging racism against a white person may have allowed whites to suppose that since people of all races experience racism, whites bear no special responsibility for racism. On the other hand, the example of racism against whites was one girl being beaten, while the other examples of racism included thousands of people being killed, so the juxtaposition suggested that racism in America has overwhelmingly featured whites as perpetrators and people of color as victims.

The sermon addressed local racism by criticizing a speech given at a town event during the previous week. Since I was not present at the speech, and since no transcript of the speech was available, my only sources of information about the speech were reports in a local newspaper and eyewitness reports from friends. I decided that I knew

enough about the incident to criticize it as racist speech. Yet, I did not feel qualified to critique it in detail because the details in various reports conflicted. While I was apprehensive about taking sides in a controversial local event, my comment, so far as I know, turned out to be uncontroversial. Perhaps this is because most of the comments in the newspaper agreed that the speech was racist, or at least inappropriate.

The statistics about racial disparities in juvenile incarceration, medical treatment, and job applications were meant to expose the social structural nature of racism. The vignettes about personal prejudice were meant to expose the unintentional racism that resides in the hearts of whites. Hopefully, the vignettes began to draw unconscious racism to the level of consciousness.

The story about my racist impulse when ordering flowers was meant to display my own struggles with racism. Hopefully, it compelled listeners to reflect on their own racist tendencies. The story indicated that racism has sonic dimensions as well as visual dimensions. It suggested that race is tied to language and culture as well as skin tone, hair texture, and facial features.

A key transition in the sermon was: “We have long known that there’s power in the blood to save us from our sins, but did you know that the blood of Christ saves us specifically from racism?” Here, I alluded to a popular Southern Baptist hymn, “There is Power in the Blood.” During the worship service in which the sermon was preached, I arranged for the congregation to sing this hymn, hoping it would add power to the sermon. In an impromptu decision, the music minister skipped the third verse, which says: “Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow? There’s power in the blood, power in the blood.” His decision made the service more racially just by refusing to celebrate

whiteness as a spiritual virtue. I had not reviewed the lyrics of the song beforehand and had forgotten that the hymn featured a positive emphasis on whiteness. This experience suggests that liturgy is a crucial consideration when preaching about race because it can serve to enhance or undermine sermons on racial equality.

The statement that Christ died for our sins has been spoken countless times through the years at First Baptist Church. Thus, the paragraph about Christ dying specifically for the sin of racism framed the progressive idea of racial equality in traditional theological terms. When I spoke of the vertical and horizontal beams of the cross, I pointed to a large cross at the front of the sanctuary in hopes that the sermon would alter thenceforth the way the cross is viewed. Hopefully, this was a strong moment of envisioning race as a central Christian concern.

The interpretation of verse 15 subverted the widespread notion that color-blindness is the Christian racial ethic. The sermon aimed to show instead that God is a color-loving God who calls us to exercise righteous race consciousness. Hopefully, the allusion to Rv 7:9 established that racial diversity is a heavenly agenda rather than a liberal agenda, as it is sometimes characterized. The comments on verse 15 also correlated racial oppression with white privilege. The sermon could have been strengthened by further discussion of white privilege.

The interpretation of verse 18 presented racial equality as a theological ideal rather than a political ideal. The politicization of race in America can hinder our ability to see race from a Christian perspective. In my experiences at First Baptist Church and the wider community of Valdese, I have often heard pejorative assessments of “political correctness.” Therefore, an important line in the sermon was: “Racial equality is not

merely a matter of political correctness; it's a matter of spiritual correctness." This affirmation challenged listeners to view racial justice as a biblical and spiritual pursuit. The sermon also included an explicit summons to repent from the sin of racism.

The story about the kindergarten teacher was meant to convey that although race exerts enormous impact on our lives, it is a social construction that does not mark biological differences. I thought a story might communicate this point more effectively than the technical arguments of critical race theory. However, the story may have undercut rather than counterbalanced the notion that race marks important social differences. As I told the story, I noticed that some congregants smiled and others relaxed. Perhaps the story was too quaint amid an otherwise forceful discussion of race. On the other hand, the story seemed to pique the congregation's interest, stimulate their emotive consciousness, and draw them more deeply into the sermon.

The climax of the sermon employed the African American homiletic technique of celebration. It did not introduce any new ideas, but rather reiterated with emotional fervor the sermon's thesis: Christ's blood was shed to establish racial equality and reconciliation. By tying racial reconciliation to the blood of Christ, the sermon hoped to persuade listeners that race is an issue about which Christ cares deeply, indeed, an issue for which he gave his life, and therefore, Christians are called to strive for interracial peace.

“Better Race Syndrome”

The following sermon manuscript is based on 2 Kgs 5:1-27. It was preached on November 14, 2010 as part of a sermon series entitled, “Christ and Culture.” The series

addressed the relationship between Christianity and various cultural topics, including poverty, news media, sexuality, same-sex sexuality, marriage, and race. In preparing for the series, I anticipated that sermons on certain topics, such as sexuality and same-sex sexuality, would prove especially burdensome for both preacher and congregation. In the end, no sermon proved more burdensome than this sermon on race.

Sermon Manuscript

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. ²Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, 'If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.' ⁴So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. ⁵And the king of Aram said, 'Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.'

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. ⁶He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, 'When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.' ⁷When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.'

⁸But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.' ⁹So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. ¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.' ¹¹But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, 'I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ¹²Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?' He turned and went away in a rage. ¹³But his servants approached and said to him, 'Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, "Wash, and be clean"?' ¹⁴So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

¹⁵Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant.' ¹⁶But he said, 'As the Lord lives,

whom I serve, I will accept nothing!’ He urged him to accept, but he refused. ¹⁷Then Naaman said, ‘If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt-offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord. ¹⁸But may the Lord pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant on this one count.’ ¹⁹He said to him, ‘Go in peace.’

But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, ²⁰Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, ‘My master has let that Aramean Naaman off too lightly by not accepting from him what he offered. As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something out of him.’ ²¹So Gehazi went after Naaman. When Naaman saw someone running after him, he jumped down from the chariot to meet him and said, ‘Is everything all right?’ ²²He replied, ‘Yes, but my master has sent me to say, “Two members of a company of prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim; please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.”’ ²³Naaman said, ‘Please accept two talents.’ He urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and gave them to two of his servants, who carried them in front of Gehazi. ²⁴When he came to the citadel, he took the bags from them, and stored them inside; he dismissed the men, and they left.

²⁵He went in and stood before his master; and Elisha said to him, ‘Where have you been, Gehazi?’ He answered, ‘Your servant has not gone anywhere at all.’ ²⁶But he said to him, ‘Did I not go with you in spirit when someone left his chariot to meet you? Is this a time to accept money and to accept clothing, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves? ²⁷Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you, and to your descendants for ever.’ So he left his presence leprous, as white as snow (2 Kgs 5:1-27, NRSV).

Whenever you take a trip to the doctor, the doctor has a plan. The doctor’s first step is diagnosis: to learn your symptoms and identify your illness. The doctor’s second step is prognosis: to tell you what to expect from your condition and the probable course it will run. The doctor’s third step is treatment: to prescribe medicine that will restore your health. Diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment: that’s the proper medical protocol. The first step may be the most important, because if the diagnosis is wrong, then the prognosis and treatment will be misguided. I bring this up because if we are not careful, we will misdiagnose Naaman.

Naaman had a skin condition, but his malady was deeper than that. When Elisha told him to go wash in the Jordan, he said: “Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of

Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be made clean?” As Naaman suggests the superiority of his country’s rivers, he implies that his nation and his people are better, too. Diagnosis: Naaman has come down with a case of “Better Race Syndrome.” Better Race Syndrome is an illness of the soul that makes you think your race is superior to others.

The remainder of the story confirms that Naaman’s leprosy is a symbol of Better Race Syndrome. Gehazi contracts the same disease. He thinks Elisha goes too easy on “Naaman the Aramean.” His reference to Naaman as an Aramean suggests racial arrogance and racial hostility. And sure enough, Gehazi chases Naaman down, lies to him, and rips him off for money and clothes. For that, Naaman’s leprosy is transferred to Gehazi. Throughout the story, Naaman’s leprosy is a symbol of Better Race Syndrome.

Unfortunately, Better Race Syndrome is a diagnosis we still have to make today. People of all races get this disease. Yet, notice in verse 27 that Naaman’s condition is associated with white skin. This detail is instructive because our social system makes white-skinned people especially prone to Better Race Syndrome. In 1790, Congress passed a law that said only white immigrants could become citizens of the United States.¹⁵ This law was still in effect when my parents were born. For most of our country’s history, only white people have been considered worthy of citizenship. No wonder whites have a propensity to view people of color as second-class citizens.

A white man in another town once said to me, “Now George is black, but he’s a great guy.” That’s Better Race Syndrome. I was at the Valdese Recreation Center pool one day and overheard a white guy saying, “Why do the Hmongs come to our pool? Why can’t they have their own pool?” That’s Better Race Syndrome. A few weeks ago,

¹⁵ Omi and Winant, 81.

a white man in town was telling me why ministers usually like Valdese. He said, “You’ll have to forgive me, but the schools are mostly white, so that’s good.” That’s Better Race Syndrome.

But before we come down too hard on others, perhaps we should examine our own hearts. I struggle with Better Race Syndrome. My parents brought me up to be nonracist. I had numerous black friends in high school. I worked at a black church when I was in seminary. I have led our church to partner with a Spanish-speaking congregation. I am writing a Ph.D. dissertation on racial reconciliation. I can’t stand racism. I like to think of myself as nonracist and even antiracist.

And yet, one day when I was at Vanderbilt, I went to an H&R Block office to have my tax returns completed. I drove to the branch closest to the school in downtown Nashville. I walked inside the office and everyone there was black. Out of approximately ten associates and twenty customers, I was the only white person. I thought to myself, “Do these people know what they are doing? Is this an official H&R Block office? Should I go to a different branch?” I decided to stay, but my impulse was racist. I think if we’re honest, we all struggle with Better Race Syndrome.

Naaman’s case indicates that the prognosis is bleak. After he suggests the superiority of his people, the text says, “He turned and went away in a rage.” Can you see the blood rushing to his head and the vein in his forehead swelling? The Hebrew word describing Naaman connotes a burst of anger. Naaman has lost his temper. He has blown his lid! Prognosis: you can expect Better Race Syndrome to progress from feelings of racial superiority to feelings of racial hostility.

Racial hostility has many faces. Sometimes it's a subtle effort to keep someone from getting the job. Sometimes it's a joke told in a giggly whisper behind a cupped hand. Sometimes it's a shouted slur. Sometimes it's a "For Sale" sign in a white family's yard the week after a black family moves into the neighborhood. Sometimes it's irrational anger at an entire race based on one person's actions. That's why people of Korean descent left the Virginia Tech area after the shooting there in 2007.

Racial hostility is also manifest in social patterns. White persons receive lighter punishments than people of color with similar criminal records.¹⁶ African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans have much higher poverty rates than whites.¹⁷ School districts with mostly white students have more money and better educational resources than school districts with mostly black students. Racial hostility can take numerous forms, many of which are subtle and routine.

But in our text, the commander-in-chief of the Aramean military is "fighting mad" at an Israelite leader. Can you see him straightening his helmet and reaching for his sword? Can you see him stomping around in a fit of fury, stirring the ancient dust? This is a man who has an entire army at his command. Better Race Syndrome has pushed him from feelings of racial superiority to the brink of racial violence.

Wasn't this the progression of the Nazi regime? The basic idea of Aryan supremacy progressed into the holocaust of six million Jewish people. Isn't this what happened in Turkey years before in the Armenian holocaust? My wife Dayna's great-grandparents were caught right in the middle of it. They fled to the U.S. because the Turkish government was slaughtering their Armenian race. A little closer to home, isn't

¹⁶ Battalora, 4-5.

¹⁷ Barndt, 47.

this what happened in the Transatlantic Slave Trade? The basic idea underlying two hundred and forty six years of American slavery and the holocaust of millions of Africans was the assumed superiority of white-skinned people. Isn't this what happened when Native Americans were forced to migrate West and thousands died on the Trail of Tears? Better Race Syndrome led whites to assume that we had a right to any land we wished and everyone else would have to die or get out of the way. The prognosis is bleak indeed. If Better Race Syndrome is left untreated, it can progress into racial hostility and perhaps into racial violence. This disease can be deadly.

Thankfully, there is a treatment available. You know, sometimes doctors prescribe a two-part treatment. For example, the last time I had a sinus infection, the doctor told me to use a nasal spray for the congestion and to take an antibiotic for the infection. Some prescriptions have two aspects, and that's what we see in our story.

Elisha tells Naaman to wash in the Jordan seven times. After Naaman's servants finally get him calmed down, they convince him to try Elisha's idea. When Naaman gets to the Jordan, the text says, "He went down into the waters." Naaman humbly lowers himself to try an Israelite remedy. And it works. He steps out of the water donning fresh, new, youthful skin. We know his Better Race Syndrome is healed because he is exceedingly kind to Gehazi, an Israelite, later in the story.

There were two aspects of the treatment that healed Naaman. First, he finally listened to Elisha. Treatment: listen to people of other races. White people have a habit of talking about race only to other whites. We don't want to hear what people of color have to say. We like to pretend we know just as much about racism as they do. But whites have been the majority race throughout our country's history. We have held most

of the power positions in business, education, and government, and we still do. People of color have been on the receiving end of racism far, far more than us, and in far, far more influential ways. This doesn't mean that people of color are always right when it comes to racism. But it does mean they have the best insight into racism's causes and cures.

We must listen to them in order to be healed of Better Race Syndrome.

Listening to people of color can reveal aspects of racism we have never seen before, since racism can be difficult to perceive through white eyes. Listening to people of color can show us that racism is not just individual actions but also everyday social conditions facing minorities. Listening to people of color can help us build interracial friendships as well. Whether we encounter people of color in classrooms, in grocery stores, in recreation centers, in churches, in workplaces, or through books or newspaper articles they have authored, we need to listen to their wisdom and be willing to try their remedies for racism.

There is a second part of the treatment that led to Naaman's healing. He washed in the Jordan seven times. Treatment: Claim your baptismal identity. Naaman's washing is a foretaste of Christian baptism. He washes in the Jordan, the site of Jesus' baptism. He comes out with skin like a child's, which signifies being born again. He comes out knowing God, which symbolizes conversion. And he comes out healed of Better Race Syndrome, which is what baptism can do for us.

Gal 3:27-28 says, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, or slave or free, or male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Baptism is a symbol of racial equality. When we claim our baptismal identity, we repent of our racial superiority complex and

seek racial equality in this world. Baptism is also a symbol of interracial unity. When we claim our baptismal identity, we repent of our racial hostility and seek interracial unity in this world.

The scripture is writing a two-part treatment today: listen to people of other races and claim your baptismal identity. The prescription is written, but it's up to you to get it filled. Those who undergo this treatment have a different prognosis: Better Race Syndrome will not turn into racial hostility, but instead into racial healing.

As we claim our baptismal identity over and over again, the Great Physician himself, Jesus Christ, will heal us over time. We will grow more and more like him, and less and less racist, until that day he takes us to the Kingdom of Heaven, where we will worship with people of every tribe, nation, and tongue! On that glorious day, we will praise the Lamb of God, and Better Race Syndrome will plague us no longer!

Critical Reflection

Of the approximately two hundred sermons I have preached at First Baptist Church, this sermon seemed to elicit one of the most hesitant receptions. Listeners appeared concerned as I preached, and after the service most people shook my hand and departed without mentioning the sermon. This is unusual because congregants often leave with a kind word about the sermon. One man, however, shook my hand intensely and said, "There's a lot of truth in that." If the appreciative comments about "Behind the Curtain" indicated that it was not prophetic enough, perhaps the congregation's reaction to this sermon indicated that it featured a genuine prophetic edge.

The introduction established the sustaining metaphor of racism as disease. Since “ethnocentrism” is an esoteric term and “white supremacy” is a polarizing term, the sermon employed the fresh pastoral metaphor “Better Race Syndrome” to capture these concepts in folk language. By diagnosing Naaman with “Better Race Syndrome,” the sermon intended to critique white ethnocentrism and white supremacy by way of the Bible.

The sermon employed what African American homiletics call “the sanctified imagination” in its creative use of scripture.¹⁸ It imaginatively interpreted the story of Naaman as a typology of modern-day racial problems in America. The sermon also used typological interpretation in portraying Naaman’s washing as a foretaste of Christian baptism.¹⁹ Although the biblical interpretation may not have squared with historical critical exegesis, it illuminated racial issues through the lens of scripture in a style reminiscent of much black preaching.

While conceding that people of all races can exhibit ethnocentrism, the sermon emphasized white skin as the marker of Naaman’s disease. This facilitated a focus on the problem of white ethnocentrism, which is far more pervasive and influential than any other form of ethnocentrism in American society. Hopefully, the sermon subverted racist color symbolism and the long history of theological racism by portraying whiteness, rather than darkness or blackness, as a symbol of sin.

¹⁸ On the use of imagination and creativity in homiletic biblical interpretation, consult Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1990), 60-66. For a defense of the use of imagination in theological reasoning, consult Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

¹⁹ On the importance of typological interpretation of scripture, consult González and González, 101.

In framing white ethnocentrism as a tendency driven by the social system, the sermon re-scripted racism as primarily a social structural sin and secondarily a personal sin. The Naturalization Law of 1790 was highlighted as a concrete example of social structural racism that legally impacted Americans until the 1950s and continues to affect American culture today. Hopefully, it began to sensitize listeners to the ways in which racist legislation has influenced and continues to influence patterns of life and thought in America.

The litany of vignettes about racism was meant to challenge the common white assumption that racism is no longer a problem in America. It was also meant to establish racism as a significant problem in Valdese. A key sentence in the sermon was, “But before we come down too hard on others, perhaps we should examine our own hearts.” This challenge toward introspection was heightened by the story of my own racist impulse at the H&R Block office. By diagnosing everyone, including the preacher, with “Better Race Syndrome,” the sermon intended to elicit widespread desire for repentance and racial healing.

The section on prognosis was intended to convey the gravity of racism and its consequences. The vignettes about racial slurs, racist jokes, racist housing patterns, and racist employment decisions were intended to illuminate both personal and social structural dimensions of racism. The statistics about racism in criminal justice, poverty rates, and education were repeated from earlier sermons in order to etch the subtle and routine nature of racism in congregational consciousness.

By tying “Better Race Syndrome” to historical instances of genocide, the sermon addressed some of the worst manifestations of racism in history. Instead of discussing

genocide through mainly non-American examples, the sermon characterized the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Trail of Tears as genocides on our own shores. Hopefully, this served to challenge the myth of America's historical righteousness and began to lay the groundwork for future discussions of critical race theory's critique of merit and the need for racial reparations.

The treatment section supported critical race theory's voice of color thesis. It indicated that people of color are authorities on racism, so whites should humbly listen to their ideas for establishing racial equality in society. This section also implied the importance of cultivating face-to-face interracial relationships at work, at school, and in other arenas of daily life. Hopefully, listeners were persuaded that listening to someone of another race was an important part of Naaman's healing, and that it remains an important part of racial healing today.

The treatment section also tied race to baptism, a key marker of Christian identity and a point of emphasis in the Baptist denomination. The interpretation of Naaman's cleansing as a prefigure of Christian baptism facilitated a link between baptism and racial healing. In claiming that baptism can help to remedy racism, the sermon linked racial equality with the most cherished ritual at First Baptist Church. Unfortunately, this move may have perpetuated the "miracle motif," the false assumption that evangelism and conversion solve all social problems. The intent, however, was to establish that baptismal identity subverts racism.

The allusion to Gal 3:27-28 was meant to capture the baptismal ideal of racial equality in a familiar scripture. It portrayed racial equality and reconciliation as spiritual concerns rather than strictly political concerns. Following the service, one listener

appreciatively remarked that she had never thought about race in relation to baptism before, so perhaps this segment of the sermon served its purpose. The sermon implied that to be born again, to be converted, and to be baptized is to be ushered into a pursuit of racial equality and reconciliation. The sermon explicitly called for repentance from racial superiority and racial hostility.

The conclusion was intended to be hopeful but not triumphalist. It celebrated the possibility of becoming less racist and more racially righteous through Christ. Yet, it implied that complete deliverance from racism would not be available until the kingdom of heaven arrives in fullness. In this sense, the sermon cohered with eschatological racial realism.

Cumulative Critiques

In view of all three sermons, at least two overarching critiques present themselves. First, the homiletic theory in the previous chapters emphasizes the need for white self-sacrifice in imitation of Christ. Yet, none of the above sermons explicitly called white people to sacrifice racial privileges. Second, the homiletic theory in the previous chapters calls white Christians to provide racial reparations. Indeed, it insists that without reparations, racial justice is incomplete and racial reconciliation is cheap. Yet, none of the above sermons mentioned the need for racial reparations, nor called First Baptist Church to provide them.

While these critiques are important, recall that the foregoing homiletic theory underscores preaching's cumulative effect. No single sermon can incorporate all the important aspects of racial reconciliation, nor are three sermons sufficient for the task.

Preaching for racial reconciliation is a project that requires years to pursue. This is why the foregoing homiletic theory suggests a long-term strategy for addressing race that begins with an emphasis on personal repentance and moves deliberately toward socio-political responses to racism such as white self-sacrifice and reparations.

The foregoing homiletic theory also suggests that nurturing conversations about race and reparations is a key strategy for preaching about race in white American evangelical congregations. Thus, I should mention that alongside preaching the above sermons, I have been nurturing conversations about race and reparations among church members. For example, one day, while dining at a local restaurant, I encountered three church members eating together. I sat down with them and we proceeded to talk about race informally for an hour. My interlocutors, who were senior citizens, told me stories about their experiences with segregated water fountains and segregated hospitals. They related a horrific story about a black woman who was taken to a local hospital where she was denied medical treatment because of her race. During her transport to another hospital, she died. They also recalled bygone years in Valdese when African Americans knew to vacate Main Street after dark because it was dangerous for them to be there. The conversation provided insight into local racial history that has implicitly informed my sermons about race at First Baptist Church.

On another occasion, at an informal lunch meeting with a lay leader, we began to talk about politics. The subject of race came up, and I told him I support reparations for African Americans. He expressed concern that reparations might further divide the nation along racial lines, but he was interested to hear my ideas. He was receptive to some of them, including an official government apology for slavery and a national

slavery museum in Washington, D.C. Toward the end of the conversation, I mentioned the idea of ecclesial reparations, but we did not have time to discuss it in detail.

On the Sunday I preached “Better Race Syndrome,” I held an evening Bible study session in the church fellowship hall to discuss the topic of race further and to field any questions that the morning sermon may have raised. Approximately sixty people attended, including the church youth group. Everyone there was white. When I suggested that law enforcement patterns have sometimes been racist, one member spoke about his experiences as a law enforcement officer in Greensboro during the 1960s. He said it was easier to arrest a white person than a black person at that time because the standards for proving the guilt of a black suspect were particularly high. A teenager stated that race is not a problem at the public school he attends. I asked if his Hispanic, African American, and Asian American classmates might have a different perspective. Another member advocated a color-blind approach to race. I noted the social structural dimensions of racism and suggested instead that Christians exercise “righteous race consciousness.” After the session concluded, one of our senior members told me about a lynching that occurred in a neighboring town years ago. The conversation as a whole was a fruitful exercise in collaborative learning.

One shortcoming of our conversations about race at First Baptist Church has been the lack of formal, face-to-face discussions about race with people of color. The next step is to invite a local African American church and our Spanish-speaking partner church to join us for a Bible study series on race. Until this discussion occurs, we at First Baptist Church have yet to submit to the voice of color thesis and are prone to the transparency phenomenon.

As I contemplate further strategies for preaching about race and reparations, Tisdale's pastoral approach to prophetic preaching is instructive. She states, "Sometimes attending to the appropriate timing for prophetic witness from the pulpit is...important—for the pastor as well as for the congregation."²⁰ In my judgment, First Baptist Church and I need more time for conversations about white self-sacrifice and racial reparations if these ideas are to gain a favorable hearing from the pulpit. For example, I could teach a Sunday night Discipleship Training series on critical race education, and thereafter form small groups to work on congregational responses to racism. More time would also grant me the opportunity to gain greater relational authority and achieve a higher degree of interactive persuasion before proposing ecclesial reparations in a Sunday morning sermon. Although the timing of prophetic witness is crucial, the sermons and conversations recounted above could have done more to emphasize white privilege, a key dimension of racism that establishes the need for white self-sacrifice and racial reparations.

Implications of Praxis

The praxis above suggests several implications that illustrate my ongoing learning process in developing a homiletic for racial reconciliation in white American evangelical congregations.

(1) The foregoing sermons employ creative methods of biblical interpretation to address race through the lens of scripture. In white homiletics, especially white evangelical homiletics, the historical critical method of biblical interpretation can sometimes delimit scripture's contemporary application. But in African American, Asian

²⁰ Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching*, 15.

American, and Hispanic American homiletics, creativity, imagination, and typology are often commended as effective ways to interpret the Bible for the contemporary context. *My praxis suggests that white evangelical preachers addressing race would do well to embrace the creative, imaginative, and typological interpretations championed by homileticians of color, while not jettisoning the historical critical method.*

(2) In preaching the foregoing sermons, I gradually moved from standing against the congregation as a paragon of racial virtue to standing with the congregation as a fellow struggler against racism. It is important for white evangelical preachers to set a moral example for their congregations, yet confessing shortcomings and struggles can strengthen rather than weaken the preacher's moral example when addressing race. *My praxis suggests that white evangelical preachers would do well to invite the congregation to join them in a struggle against racism rather than challenging the congregation to imitate their racial virtue.*

(3) The foregoing sermons are not always vigilant for theological racism. For example, in preaching "Behind the Curtain" I missed an opportunity to critique racist color symbolism that associates whiteness with holiness and blackness with sin. Du Bois's project of disentangling whiteness and divinity is important because the tendency to view white perspectives as holy remains prevalent in American culture, in the church, and in the theological academy. *My praxis challenges white evangelical preachers to remain vigilant for theological racism and to seize every opportunity to critique it.*

(4) The foregoing praxis highlights the liturgical context of preaching. While a racially unjust liturgy can undermine a sermon on racial justice, a racially responsible liturgy can nurture racial justice regardless of the sermon topic. For example, we recently

sang the congregational hymn “One Day” during a worship service at First Baptist Church. In an effort to subvert theological racism and make the liturgy more just, we changed the lyrics from “one day when sin was black as could be” to “one day when sin was bad as could be.” Moreover, we have held two interracial baptismal services with our Spanish-speaking partner church. As people of different skin tones were submerged into the same waters with different languages mingling in the air, we dramatized the baptismal declaration that there is no longer Jew or Greek but all of us are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). *My praxis suggests that an effort toward a racially just liturgy should accompany white evangelical preaching about race.*

(5) In preaching the foregoing sermons and nurturing the foregoing conversations, I attempted to re-script the specious virtue of color-blindness by advocating race-conscious responses to racism. For example, I cast an eschatological vision of racial diversity to challenge the common white evangelical assumption that “everyone will be the same in heaven.” I also advocated “righteous race consciousness” as the appropriate Christian response to racism. However, I did not adequately establish this concept as an alternative fantasy to color-blindness. *My praxis suggests that white evangelical preachers would do well to re-script color-blindness with clear and consistent advocacy of “righteous race consciousness.”*

(6) The foregoing sermons exhibit a tendency to emphasize how racism harms people of color rather than how racism helps white people. In this respect, they stand in contrast to the homiletic theory outlined in the previous chapters. Understating white privilege is expedient because white privilege is difficult to describe and counter-intuitive to question, while the evidence of racism’s harmful effects on people of color is

overwhelming. *My praxis warns white evangelical preachers of the white proclivity to understate white privilege, and challenges them to emphasize white privilege as a corollary of racism's harmful effects on people of color.*

(7) In preaching the foregoing sermons, I sometimes found it easier to talk about racism overseas or racism in the distant past than to discuss modern-day racism in Valdese, in our church, and in my own heart. The moments of exposing local and personal racism were crucial, however, because they challenged the widespread assumption that we live in a post-racial society where racism is no longer a problem. *My praxis encourages white evangelical preachers not to become far-sighted in addressing race but instead to expose the uncomfortably close racism in the local community, in the congregation, and in the preacher's heart.*

(8) The foregoing sermons expose the unconscious ideology of white superiority that pervades the minds of white evangelicals. They do not use the term "white supremacy" because it is polarizing and might alienate listeners. Nor do they use the term "ethnocentrism" because it is esoteric and might confuse listeners. Instead, they invoke a fresh pastoral metaphor ("Better Race Syndrome") to describe the sins of white supremacy and ethnocentrism. *My praxis suggests that white evangelical preachers would do well to use new pastoral metaphors and creative folk language to expose the ideology of white superiority that permeates American culture.*

(9) The foregoing praxis confirms the importance of embodied encounters with people of different races. During only one of the above sermons were several people of color present. Without people of color in the sanctuary, white Christians can easily mistake white skin as another piece of holy furniture alongside the pulpit, the pews, the

communion table, and the cross. But when white Christians rub shoulders with people of color within the holy spaces of the church, the tendencies to divinize whiteness and to universalize white experience can be diminished. Face-to-face conversations about race with people of color are critical for honoring critical race theory's voice of color thesis and for repairing congregational discourse about race. *My praxis suggests that white evangelical preachers would do well to facilitate as many face-to-face encounters with people of color as possible, especially within the holy spaces of the church.*

(10) The foregoing sermons were delivered with emotional appeal. The first began with tears. The second ended with celebratory shouting. The third was filled with intensity, especially when recounting genocides. The conversations about race also featured various emotions, such as sorrow, regret, and joy. *My praxis confirms that white evangelical preachers do well to exhibit appropriate emotions about race, which can quicken the will of congregants to resist racism and seek racial reconciliation.*

(11) The foregoing sermons highlight egregious examples of racism in the past as well as subtle examples of unconscious racism in the present. While both types of racism are important, examples of egregious racism can sometimes overshadow the subtle, unconscious, social structural racism that is highly influential in American society. *My praxis suggests that white evangelical preachers would do well to foreground subtle, social structural racism as present-day residue of America's egregiously racist past.*

(12) The above sermons use concrete language in exposing the powers of racism. For example, they recount specific historical, legal, and political manifestations of racism. They also include vivid personal anecdotes about racial experiences. *My praxis suggests that white evangelical preachers would do well to use concrete language—*

historical events, personal stories, and vivid images—in exposing the powers of social structural racism, unconscious racism, and white privilege.

(13) Two of the foregoing sermons briefly cite prejudice against whites, largely as a rhetorical strategy to maintain credibility with listeners who commonly hear terms such as “reverse racism” or “racism against whites” from certain media. However, the praxis indicates that citing prejudice against whites can distract attention from social structural racism, subtle racism, and white privilege, thereby permitting whites to think that racism is equally damaging to people of all races. *My praxis encourages white evangelical preachers to resist the rhetorical urge to cite prejudice against whites.*

(14) The foregoing sermons link theological conservatism to racial progressivism. They show how traditional Christian symbols—the Bible, the cross, Jesus’ blood, and baptism—champion racial diversity, racial equality, and racial reconciliation. They demonstrate that spiritual correctness and political correctness sometimes overlap. This is not merely a rhetorical strategy; it is the truth of the matter according to Eph 2:11-22. *My praxis suggests that white evangelical preachers would do well to show how conservative theology implies racial progressivism.*

Conclusion

At the outset of the dissertation, I argued that preaching can set the conditions for racial repentance, which, in turn, can increase racial justice and facilitate racial reconciliation. The foregoing sermons corroborated this hypothesis. For example, a few days after I preached one of them, I heard that the sermon affected one particular church member in an acute way. Evidently, the individual had never thought about Christianity

in relation to racism before, and the sermon helped him realize that he needed to repent of racism.

As preachers in white American evangelical congregations proclaim that Christ died for racial equality and reconciliation, the cross will continue to bring down the dividing wall of racism. The cross inspires repentance from personal racism and resistance of social structural racism. The cross inspires the sacrifice of racial privileges and transforms racial hostility into racial peace. The cross transforms racial injustice into racial equality, and racial segregation into racial reconciliation. And the cross promises ultimate reconciliation in the kingdom of heaven.

According to Rv 7:9-12, in the kingdom of heaven, we shall behold people of every tribe, nation, and tongue. We shall join the colorful crowd of countless saints waving palm branches in the air. We shall rub shoulders with people of different skin tones, hair textures, facial features, languages, and cultures. We shall praise the color-loving God together in perfect unity. We shall praise the Lamb who died to take away the sin of the world. Inequality shall be swallowed up in justice! Estrangement shall be swallowed up in reconciliation! Suffering shall be swallowed up in rejoicing! Sin shall be swallowed up in righteousness! Death shall be swallowed up in victory! And we shall join the angels' unending hymn: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb...Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength be to our God into the ages of the ages!"

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