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Special Edition of *Christian Ethics Today* Privilege and Reparations: The Angela Project 2019

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America's Forbidden Zone

By Kevin Cosby

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'"

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:1-8

I still remember the disappointment my sister and I felt when our parents said, "It's time to go home." We had just watched two movies of the triple feature showing at the West Louisville Drive-in Theatre. A popular source of family entertainment when we were children in the 1960s, patrons would drive onto a gravel road, pay the admission fare at the gate, and then pull into a parking space beside other waiting cars. You would then roll down your window half way and hang a silver speaker on your car window so that everyone inside could hear the movie. I don't remember the two movies we saw that night, but I will never forget the movie we didn't get to see that night—*Planet of the Apes*.

It was a science fiction movie about a future world turned upside down. Astronauts somehow had transcended *chronos* and landed on a strange planet where the social order that they knew on earth had been inverted. On this new planet, humans held the status and privilege of apes, while apes had the status and privilege of humans. Apes were the dominant species while humans were oppressed and enslaved. It was the feature movie playing that night and I desperately wanted to see it. But, unfortunately, my mother was not into unrealistic science fiction. Despite my urgent protest, my mother was firm. "It's time to go." But as we were leaving the drive-in theatre, my mother

sought to console me by assuring me that the movie would end with the zookeeper capturing all the apes and taking them back to the zoo.

Years later, when I finally watched the movie, I realized that *Planet of the Apes* was more than a movie about a strange future world where apes rule. It also was a movie about what happens when history is covered up. The movie was centered on an area of the planet called the "Forbidden Zone," a restricted region in which both apes and humans were forbidden to enter.

All sectors of society from civil to religious cautioned against entering the Forbidden Zone. At the end of the movie, a curious character, played by Charlton Heston, and his intellectually undeveloped female

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companion dare to enter the Forbidden Zone. And when one of the primate leaders was asked by another ape, "What will he find?" He replied, "He will find his destiny."

The most poignant scene in the movie occurs when Astronaut Taylor sees the Statue of Liberty protruding from the ground. It is then that Taylor realizes the true history of the planet. This was not the planet of the apes, but rather the planet of the humans that had come under the possession of the apes after a nuclear explosion. The nuclear fallout inverted the order of things, placing the apes in a hegemonic role above humans. The Forbidden Zone was dangerous because the truths it held exploded the myth of ape supremacy and human inferiority.

The movie addresses many of the major themes of the turbulent 1960s. The danger of nuclear weapon proliferation and Cold War politics were important themes of the day. However, the primary theme of the movie was the issue of racial hierarchy and human

ignorance regarding how these racial grades came to exist. The movie was not the unrealistic science fiction work that my mother imagined. It was an allegorical commentary of how America's racial history has been covered up.

When it comes to our racial history, most Americans live in the "Forbidden Zone." What makes the Forbidden Zone prohibited is that discovering America's true racial history will explode the myths of white supremacy in all its forms and establish for black American descendants of slavery a unique justice claim with the United States government and society.

Just like the humans on the planet of the apes, in every social and economic measurement, blacks are on the bottom. Whites are 60 percent of the population; yet they control 90 percent of the wealth. Blacks who can trace their lineage back to American slavery are 13 percent of the population, yet control only 2.7 percent of the land. According to research conducted by Prosperity Now and the Institute for Policy Studies, by the year 2053, the median level of black wealth will equal zero. White family median wealth is now \$133,000, while black family median income, minus depreciating assets, is \$1700. Blacks have almost no wealth upon which to draw in times of crisis or emergency. Blacks are worse off financially today than they were in 2000. The median income for black households at the new millennium was \$41,363. Today the median is \$39,490.

Despite the successes of the Civil Rights Movement and the US having had its first black president, African Americans are in worse condition today than we were 50 years ago. In 1968, unemployment for blacks was 6.7 percent. In 2017, it was at 7.5 percent. These numbers are, in fact, much higher when one factors in blacks who are incarcerated. Black home ownership in the 1960s was at 41 percent; today it is at 40 percent. Meanwhile, black incarceration has tripled between 1968 and 2019.

Most whites never think about how these conditions came to be for blacks. Part of the privilege that whites have in America includes playing the colorblind card, which wipes their mental memory clean of centuries of racism. The new racism in America is colorblind racism. Colorblind racism seeks to downplay the importance of race as though it doesn't matter. Yet, amazingly, most whites tend to be very color-conscious when it comes to whom they marry, the neighborhoods in which they live, the churches they join, and the friends they have.

The myth of a colorblind society is further reinforced by a racial virtual reality on television. The racial harmony depicted in advertisements and mass media are

not representative of the real-life experiences of the great majority of Americans. Three-quarters of most whites in America have not one friend from another race. Even if the virtual integration we see in media existed in the real world, that would not solve the problem of fundamental racism in America—the racial wealth gap. The reason why racial strife seems so unsolvable is because we have not accurately defined what it is and how it impacts both blacks and whites.

In the minds of most Americans, eliminating racism means simply whites liking blacks. If that is what ending racism truly means, then in a sense we are indeed post-racial. If ending racism is defined as a matter of liking one another, then the words of author Nancy DiTomaso in *The American Non-Dilemma*, are true: "Most whites conceive of racism as a people who harbor ill will toward nonwhites doing bad things to them" (Pg7).¹ By relying on this definition, whites can absolve themselves of being considered racists because they can say, "I harbor no ill will toward blacks, neither have I done any bad things toward blacks." In

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fact, they might say, "I detest any white person who does."

In light of this narrow definition of racism, there's disturbing data about blacks being the lowest caste due to perceptions of black inferiority, laziness and debased culture. The problem with most Americans, however, is not that we are colorblind; it's that we are history-blind. Being history-blind means we also are justice-blind. In the words of Gore Vidal, we are living in the "United States of Amnesia."

Ending racism is not a matter of whites beginning to like or accept blacks, but rather whites lifting blacks from the dungeon to which white America consigned blacks beginning with slavery. We will never fix racism until we have the courage to cross over into the forbidden zone of American history and see the brutalities and blocked opportunities that have prevented blacks from enjoying citizenship as full Americans with all rights and privileges.

Racism is a power dynamic that whites have with blacks. Racism is the white control of a disproportionate amount of wealth, power and resources gained

through historic injustices against blacks. The dilemma for blacks is that it is a history that white America has taken to the forbidden zone. Not only is it a history about which whites are woefully ignorant, it is a history about which whites are *willfully* ignorant. William Faulkner once said, “What we don’t have the courage to fix we simply ignore.”

America’s ignorance of race is willful. Immediately after the end of Reconstruction, a group emerged called the Daughters of the Confederacy. Essentially, their goal was to rewrite racial history in America.

They had three objectives:

1. To prove that the Civil War was not about slavery, but rather, about state sovereignty.

This they sought to establish in spite of the fact that every Confederate state wrote in its statement of secession that the maintenance of slavery was their primary consideration. Alexander Stevens, the vice president of the Confederacy, said in his Cornerstone speech, March 21, 1861: “Our new government...rests, upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical and moral truth.”²

2. To prove that slavery was a benign institution in which blacks were treated humanely.

Frederick Douglass gave an accurate depiction of the brutality of slavery in his July 5, 1852 speech, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” Douglass posited, “What, am I to argue it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with iron, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is wrong?”³

The following is an actual advertisement for a runaway slave:

“Twenty dollars reward, ran away from the subscriber, on the 14th instant, a negro girl named Molly. She is 16 or 17 years of age, slim made, lately branded on her left cheek, thus, “R”, and a piece is taken off her left ear on the same side; the same letter is branded on the inside of both

her legs.”

Amber Ross, Fairfield District, S.C.⁴

3. To prove that Confederate soldiers were heroic and honorable people.

They were a people who fought courageously against overwhelming odds for a just cause. They erected 700 monuments to honor men who engaged in what the United Nations would classify as crimes against humanity. Going to American history’s forbidden zone will show that the leaders of the Confederacy were not heroic; but rather, in the words of James Baldwin, were “moral monsters” who were engaged in acts of treason against the United States.

The tragedy of Daughters of the Confederacy is how they were able to spread this disinformation into the curriculum of schools systems across the America. When one factors in 246 years of slavery, along with another 100-plus years of slavery, black descendants of slavery have a unique justice claim.

The Justice Claim can be broken down as:

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J-im Crow

U-rban renewal

S-lavery

T-errorism (lynching)

I-ncarceration (mass)

C-ourts and cops

E-conomic exclusion

Justice, according to Walter Brueggemann, is represented by two words in the ancient Hebrew language: *Mishpat* is concerned with fair distribution so that all members of the community have access to resources and goods for the sake of a viable dignity. The second word for justice, *tsedaquah*, is concerned with active intervention on behalf of victims of injustice in order to correct and repair those who have been disadvantaged.

For the past 30 years there has been a bill in Congress called HR40. It was introduced by Michigan Congressman John Conyers in 1989. The bill did not call for reparations; it called for the study of slavery in America. For 30 years, the bill has not been able to

get out of committee. To do so would mean going to America's Forbidden Zone. Going to the Forbidden Zone would mean rejecting the myth of white exceptionalism as well as the myth that black suffering is the result of inherent laziness and inferiority.

South African theologian Allen Boesak observed, "It is absolutely imperative for the oppressor to preserve their innocence, just as it is imperative for the oppressed to destroy it."⁵ Whites will do everything to avoid the forbidden zone of American history. Those who venture there are accused of living in the past or stirring up racial hostility. We are being accused of being an angry black man or woman. We are being ostracized and excluded from opportunities and jobs.

A good model for lovers of racial justice is the unnamed woman in Luke 18:1-8. An unscrupulous person of power, perhaps a minister (Luke 20:45-47), exploited her powerlessness and stole her property. Her dilemma was that she was powerless—socially as a woman, economically as a widow, and politically because she had no legal standing. She sought justice from the circuit judge who had made his routine visit to her village.

Because the judge "feared neither God nor mortals," he denied the woman's justice and went on to the next village. To his surprise and consternation, however, the woman followed him to the next village, demanding justice. Wherever the judge went, she showed up to demand justice. Jesus says that although the judge was unjust, he gave her justice because she would not stop pursuing it. Power, in the words of Frederick Douglass, "concedes nothing without a demand."⁶

If you are trying to get our nation to the Forbidden Zone, expect in the words of Robin Deangelo: "silence, defensiveness, argumentation, certitude, and other forms of pushback." No white person gets to Forbidden Zone without intentionally deciding to go. Nothing in white space will ever create an awareness of a Forbidden Zone. But for those who dare to venture into this uncharted space of American history, I suggest a few books, movies and documentaries. ■

Books

The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism, by Edward Baptist. Basic Books, 2014

White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide, by Carol Anderson. Bloomsbury USA, 2016

When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America, by Ira Katznelson. WW Norton & Co Inc., 2005

The American Non-Dilemma: Racial Inequality Without Racism, by Nancy DiTomaso. Russell Sage Foundation, 2013

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, by Michelle Alexander. The New Press 16, 2012

Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom, by David Blight. Simon & Schuster, 2018

Southern Baptists and Southern Slavery: The Forgotten Crime Against Humanity, by Alvin Carpenter. Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2013

Periodicals, Articles and Research Reports

"The Case for Reparations", Ta-Nehisi Coates. *The Atlantic*, June 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

"The Case for Funding Black Led Social Change" Susan Taylor Batten. Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE), 2017 <http://www.blacksocialchange.org/wp-content/>

A good model for lovers of racial justice is the unnamed woman in Luke 18:1-8.

[uploads/2017/02/BSCFN-Case-Statement.pdf](#)

"Foreclosed" Ryan Cooper and Mat Bruenig. The People's Policy Project, 2017 <https://www.peoplespolicyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Foreclosed.pdf>

"Dreams Deferred", Chuck Collins, et al. Institute for Policy Studies, 2019.

https://inequality.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/IPS_RWD-Report_FINAL-1.15.19.pdf

"Billionaire Bonanza", Chuck Collins, et al. Institute for Policy Studies, 2017, <https://inequality.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Billionaire-Bonanza-2018-Report-October-2018.pdf>

"The Road to Zero Wealth", Emanuel Nieves, et al. Prosperity Now, 2017, <https://prosperitynow.org/resources/road-zero-wealth>

"What We Get Wrong about Closing the Racial Wealth Gap", William Darity, et al. Duke University, 2018 https://socialequity.duke.edu/sites/socialequity.duke.edu/files/site-images/FINAL%20COMPLETE%20REPORT_.pdf

Movies and Documentaries

Twelve Years a Slave

Reconstruction (PBS/Henry Louis Gates)

Slavery by Another Name (Based on the book by Douglas A. Blackmon), PBS

Eyes on the Prize: PBS

13th, Ava DuVernay (Netflix)

If you immerse yourself in this material it will help you discover what is in the Forbidden Zone of America's racial divide. It will expand your perspective, create much needed empathy for America's racial victims, and move you toward asking yourself the three critical questions essential to change:

- **Why?**

- Why are things the way they are?
- Why do I live in white space while blacks live in poor space?
- Why do blacks have only a fraction of the wealth that whites have?
- Why are so many black men in jail and so few blacks in STEM careers?

Without going to the Forbidden Zone of American history, we are left to conclude that the defect is intrinsic to blacks themselves and not how society has been structured to pick the winners and losers solely on the basis of race.

- **Why not?**

- Why not commit ourselves to fixing America's 400-year-old race problem?
- Why not move beyond the superficialities of kumbaya relationship to true justice, repair and equity in the distribution of opportunity and resources?
- Why not empower all people to exercise self-determination in order that they might realize their full potential?

- **Why not me?**

Why not allow God to use you to begin the process? The woman in Jesus' parable was greatly disadvantaged in her pursuit of justice. She was a widow confronting structural and systemic apathy along with pushback against her justice claims. But she did not lose heart that a just outcome was possible in spite of the evidence to the contrary. She exercised what the

Bible calls faith. She possessed the faith to pursue justice in a society committed to injustice. Faith is what the early abolitionists in the 19th century exercised when the elimination of slavery seemed impossible in this country.

To be the "Why not me?" that God uses does not demand that you be powerful or credentialed. Instead, it requires that you be passionately burdened by the plight of the disinherited and that you join God in the pursuit of justice for ADOS (American Descendants Of Slaves.)

The primate leader in the *Planet of the Apes* knew that George Taylor would find his destiny in the planet's Forbidden Zone. We too shall find our destiny as we embark on the chartered path of our country's Forbidden Zone of history! ■

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1 Nancy DiTomaso. *The American Non-Dilemma: Racial Inequality Without Racism*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2015, p. 7.

2 <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/cornerstone-speech/>

3 Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Speech to the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, on July 5, 1852, at Corinthian Hall in Rochester, New York.

4 Alexander Milton Ross. *Memoirs of a Reformer, 1832-1892*, Toronto: Hunter Rose & Company, 1893

5 Allan Boesak and Len Hansen, editors. *Globalisation: The Politics of Empire, Justice, and the Life of Faith*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2009, p. 69

6 <https://rbsep.lib.rochester.edu/4398>

Robin J. DiAngelo. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018. p. 8.

The Handwriting on the Wall

By Patrick Anderson, editor

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking (Daniel 5: 5-6).

Several years ago I sat in front of a plantation house in Jamaica as the sun set across the sea and watched as the darkness totally enveloped the vast estate. I imagined how it must have felt to be a member of the slave-holding family living in that house in 1830. For centuries, slaves stolen from their homes in Africa had been forced to clear the land, build the buildings, till the soil, and harvest huge amounts of sugarcane making the slave-owners and their families extremely wealthy. The slaves from Africa were not the first slaves to be used by the white Christians from Europe. The first were the original inhabitants of the island whose numbers rapidly decreased due to diseases brought to them by the European invaders, and the harsh conditions of slavery imposed on them in the name of Christian evangelism. The slave-owners and their families lived like royalty in their mansions, their every whim met by obedient slaves, while their slaves lived in squalid conditions, forced to labor under the whip.

As I sat outside the relic plantation house, I considered what it must have been like in that house on the nights leading up to and during the Baptist War of 1831, the slave rebellion so named because of the pivotal role Sam Sharpe, a black Baptist lay preacher, played in the large revolt in western Jamaica, which resulted in massive destruction of property and a bloody and brutal repression by the government. The white inhabitants of the palatial house had heard of the killings of other slave-owners and their families throughout the island. They could smell the smoke from the burning plantations and fields of sugarcane, see the glow of raging fires on the horizon, and had the inescapable knowledge that before long, even on that night perhaps, their slaves would rise up and unleash their fury on them.

I wondered if the terror about the impending doom the slave-owners felt was compounded by their deep knowledge that they deserved what was about to happen to them, that justice was on the side of the slaves

and against the slave-owners and their families. Surely they understood that if the tables had been turned, that if it were the Africans who had captured, bought and bred white Europeans as slaves and forced them to live and toil under inhuman conditions, those white Europeans would have been justified to rebel, to cast off the shackles, to drive the slave-owners and their families into the sea. After all, had not the white colonialists rebelled against the relatively benign rule of Great Britain in America to the north? Had they not reacted in violence to conditions far less odious than slavery? Could they not know that the natural reaction of the oppressed is to fight the oppressors? Had they not read the lofty language of the French and American Revolutions? Did they not understand the

No matter how they were taught to interpret certain Bible passages to rationalize the chattel slavery of Africans, some of them at least must have known they were wrong,

universal human sentiment for liberty?

They felt fear, surely. But they also had to feel guilt. No matter how they were taught to interpret certain Bible passages to rationalize the chattel slavery of Africans, some of them at least must have known they were wrong, that if they were slaves they too would revolt. Surely they understood the incredible disconnect between the ideals of freedom as expressed in the American Declaration of Independence and the enslavement of an entire race of people. Or, was it left for future generations of the descendants of white Christian European enslavers and those who benefitted from the slave system to reconcile with the evil and injustice of it all?

When news of the slave revolts and the destruction of the slave systems in Jamaica and Haiti reached the slave-owners in Georgia and South Carolina and throughout America, it struck fear into the hearts of white people. White people, and not only the slave-owners in America, lived in fear of a slave revolt and took deadly and drastic steps to quash any sign of rebellion. Whether or not the white people knew deep

down that slavery was wrong, that if they themselves were slaves they would feel justified to rebel, something struck fear and guilt in their hearts. There must have been many sleepless nights in the big houses. When the Babylonian king saw a hand writing words on the wall of his palace, he was absolutely terrified even before he knew what the words meant. He knew he had done wrong; and so were the hearts of slave-owners and their families convicted with the sin of what they were doing.

The anti-slavery campaigns in Britain, and the outright rebellion on the slave island of Jamaica in 1830, drove the slave population in large numbers to their refuge of first resort, the company of fellow Christians. African slaves outnumbered their white masters by 10 to one, and they knew their Bible, the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt, the proclamation of Jesus who said he had come to “bring release to the captives.” They knew that God did not intend for them to live in chattel slavery and they gathered together as a formidable force, worshipful and courageous.

Perhaps I am wrong in thinking that some of the white plantation residents felt guilty for their slaving practices. Maybe I have the advantage of historical, theological and cultural perspective that those people did not have. Maybe.

Most white people in the 1800s on the Caribbean Islands and in the United States thought of themselves as superior to the dark-skinned people they knew only as slaves. Today, only the despicable white nationalists seem to openly express the belief in white supremacy. But there is still a deeply held undercurrent, usually unspoken, of white supremacy which infects the beings of a large proportion of white people. Why else would white people be so blind to the harmful effects of slavery and the aftermath of slavery for the descendants of slaves in America?

White people tend to think of slavery as ancient history (get over it!), and the Jim Crow society of the 20th century as “just the way we were raised.” We deny, deflect, minimize and rationalize injustice. Today, we are again in the middle of a tiresome debate in America, that is whether we are a society of exclusion or pluralism, whether we are E Pluribus Unum or One Nation Under God (understood as only Jehovah and Jesus). One view sees America as the champion for the poor and dispossessed, drawing strength from its pluralism. The other view understands the greatness of America to be found in its white and Christian origins.

The disparities between the rich and poor have never been greater. We are experiencing a swelling tide of disadvantage among descendants of American slaves

including poverty, lack of health care, joblessness, low pay, predatory financial systems, police shootings, church burnings, voter suppression, mass terrorism, mass incarceration and so much more. Our recent 20th century legacy of discrimination is bad; but the 21st century is not doing so well either, despite the much-touted advances in race relations.

As a white American, I have been blind to the structural and institutional injustice in America throughout my lifetime. I can no longer plead cultural ignorance. White supremacy infects every aspect of my white identity. To deny or ignore this fact is to argue like a deaf person. When two deaf persons argue vehemently in sign language, sometimes one will make a strong point and then close her or his eyes, turning away from the other, therefore making it impossible for any contrary point to penetrate. You cannot argue with deaf people who close their eyes.

It is not relevant that my family heritage did not include slaveholders, or slave merchants, or members of lynching gangs. The fact is that I (we) as a white

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American have been complicit in and have benefitted from white supremacy, racism and white privilege and that complicity and those benefits have come to us at the expense of the suffering of the battered and robbed people of color. Anyone questioning this historical fact need only read the large body of literature on the subject. From the end of the Civil War which “ended slavery” in America, until today, our laws and practices have worked to disadvantage people of color and to benefit people like me.

I did not ask to be born white; it just happened. My life has not been trouble-free nor without travail. But because I was born white, I was dealt a good hand or, as some say it, I was born on first, or second or third base. My life did not start behind the eight ball. Like all white people in America, I inherited white privilege and am a recipient of the benefits of a pro-white world. I am a member of the dominant class, not the dominated one.

The millions of people who were born in slavery, and the millions since born to the descendants of those slaves, through no choice of their own, inherited the

undeserved disadvantages of the dominated class. I have benefitted from being born a white person in a pro-white world, while descendants of slaves have suffered and continue to suffer undeserved detriments. This is not right, and the fact that I have undeservedly benefitted from this unjust system brings a level of pain that impels me to want to do something to correct it. The weight of the sin of white supremacy and the injustice emanating therefrom will not be assuaged until and unless the debt is paid down. However we consider what that payment entails, it is clear that an economic, financial aspect is called for.

It is painful for us white people to confront the truth about the relationship between the historical abuse and misuse of power by white people and the injury, harm and loss resulting from the historical and continuing injustice toward people of color. That's why it is so hard for white people to admit that we have benefited from racism, white supremacy and racial injustice.

We suffer from intentional blindness to these facts. We deny, close our eyes and rationalize the obvious situation we live in. Honest analysis of the question of reparations for the descendants of American slaves and the victims of racism and white supremacy throughout our history compels us to confront the hellish truth that this society was founded, funded and ultimately has continued to operate to benefit wealthy white men. We have, either wittingly or unwittingly, endorsed systems, practices and policies that are abusive to all other communities of color. That is the unpleasant truth about the history of this society.

If we take seriously the belief that we are members of the body of Christ and that each member of that body is important and necessary, then I cannot ignore my (our) complicity (1 Cor. 12). As a follower of Jesus, I cannot bypass the confession I must make. Why are these confessions important? Because the truth of history and the truth of injustice compel confession as does the truth of the privilege it affords me (us) and denies others (descendants of American slaves). Seeing these things challenges Christian beliefs and values and requires appropriate action.

Therefore, I confess: I have purchased houses through an advantageous mortgage system; borrowed money at low interest to make improvements; and sold the property after appreciation in value, therefore "building wealth." Meanwhile, my black sisters and brothers were "red lined" into disadvantaged neighborhoods, denied credit, saw their property deteriorate in value, and were trapped in a cycle of disadvantage. The places I have lived were segregated unnecessarily due to racist housing policies. Lest you think these observations no longer apply to today's America,

consider that as recently as 2011, Wells Fargo Banks and Bank of America paid settlements of hundreds of millions of dollars for bilking African Americans into ruinous sub-prime mortgage products called "ghetto loans" for "mud people" by loan officers.

I confess: I have not been subject to the daily toll of racism. I have not been followed around by security agents while shopping. I have not been assumed to be armed and dangerous while reaching for my billfold during a traffic stop. I have not feared that my sons would be mistakenly shot by police when they went out at night with their friends. I have never been stereotyped because of my pigmentation.

I confess: The textbooks and other materials I was given during 12 years of public education were in good repair and up-to-date. I was able to attend a private segregated, well-funded college where I was taught by well-educated and credentialed faculty.

I confess: I know some racist jokes.

I confess: The Baptist churches I have attended, supported and ministered in throughout my life were built and paid for through a system of advantage for white people. The theology taught at the Baptist schools I attended was nurtured in the 19th century and before by justifying and advocating for chattel slavery of Africans, and throughout the 20th century supported and benefitted from segregation, racist public policy and white supremacist understandings of race and culture.

I confess: Although I share the skin pigmentation of white supremacists who have been responsible for the majority of mass killings in America, I have never felt ostracized or disadvantaged due to the melanin in my skin.

Can we white folks not admit that we have benefitted from white supremacy? Let us confess these things. If you are like me, you have been blind to many of the various issues and historical facts discussed by the writers in this issue of Christian Ethics Today. As Christians, and as people wishing to be known as ethical, we should be first to acknowledge, confess and repent that our privilege has caused others to suffer and continue to suffer.

There is much more to contemplate. But having confessed, and repented, what then can I (we) do to correct the ledger? Zacchaeus figured it out rather quickly.

In a conversation with my friend Judge Wendell Griffen one day, we took on the subject of reparations. I said, "Wendell, no one in my family tree ever owned slaves. I abhor everything about slavery and believe its proponents were in sin. What debt do I have? What do you want me to do--write you a check?" I went on to describe my own understanding of the complexity

of the matter, sounding more like an apologist for continuing the indifference regarding the lasting effects of the sin of white supremacy. In his tolerant and loving manner and, as a true friend, he began the process of informing this arrogant, flippant white man. Evidence of his friendship is exhibited in the tolerance he has exhibited. He has yet to slap me silly.

The truth is that any payment for 400 years of injustice is not a simple matter. It took lifetimes to build this unequal situation, and it may take more lifetimes to destroy it; but neither should the matter be left to the victims of injustice to solve. Like Zacchaeus, the solution is found in the hearts of the offenders under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Once our eyes are opened to the truth of history and, once we understand our complicity in the systemic injustices which have benefitted us at the expense of the descendants of American slaves and, once we are called to the altar to repent, then and only then can we be open to seeing American society as it is.

The deep rifts between black and white Christians in the American church must be bridged one relationship at a time, to be sure. But the deep, institutional aspects of racism cannot be remedied through the mere presence of friendships and interpersonal relationships, as important as they are. The institutions of government, business, churches and denominations, educational institutions, business and commerce are slow to change

and need prodding to do so. We must start somewhere.

I see the handwriting on the wall for us. We do not understand it, but as Daniel interpreted the words for the Babylonian king, so have many followers of Jesus interpreted the writing for us. Like the king, we tend to look at the words and immediately lose our balance, become weak, and our knees begin to knock. We know we have done wrong. But for us, unlike the king for whom the judgement was pronounced, the words need not express doom. Daniel translated the writing for Belshazzar saying:

“This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN “Here is what these words mean: Mene : God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel : You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres : Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” ... That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, Daniel 5: 25-28, 30

The journey toward redemption and reconciliation is still available to us through God’s grace. One good place to begin the journey, I believe, is to read the essays in this issue of *Christian Ethics Today*, acquainting ourselves with the writings and expressions of the good women and men who have written herein, and seeking out other literature on the subject of race and reading it in the spirit of our Christian faith. ■

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Christian Ethics Today in order to provide
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issues that are of concern to contemporary
Christians, to the church, and to society.

The Gospel of Luke and the Issue of Privilege: Using Context to Re-read Luke to Address Systemic Racism

By Lewis Brogdon

Introduction

The words rich and poor are mentioned sixteen and nine times respectively in Luke's account of the ministry of Jesus and reflect his belief that the gospel addresses issues of wealth and poverty. One of the most powerful scenes in Luke records Jesus reading a passage out of Isaiah in the synagogue that says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (4:18). Jesus announces the gospel first to the poor. The way Luke uses this announcement to the public ministry of Jesus is an important part of the theological statement he makes about Him and the good news he brings to a world mis-ordered by injustice.

Luke mines the theme of the gospel in relation to the poor and rich throughout his gospel account. In 1:46-55, Mary sings of God filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty. In 6:20, 24, Jesus pronounces a blessing on the poor and promises them the kingdom of God and promises calamity on the rich because they have already received comfort. Stories of the rich landowner in 12:15-21, the rich man and Lazarus, and the rich young ruler in 18:18-27 held in tension with the admonition that no person can serve two masters (God and mammon) in 16:13 are examples of the extent Luke goes to address the poor and the rich, their relation to the socio-political workings of Rome, and the meaning of faith and faithfulness taught by Jesus of Nazareth. In special studies and New Testament introductions, biblical scholars such as Luke Timothy Johnson, Raymond Brown and Sandra Wheeler give attention to Luke's interest in the poor and the rich as major literary themes.¹ Commentaries such as the New Interpreter's Bible allude to this theme as well, noting that Luke refers to the poor and the rich more than any other gospel.²

However, Lukan studies have advanced beyond focusing on the poor and the rich as literary themes. Greater attention is given to the socio-political context of the first century and the relation between imperialism and suffering connected to this form of occupation. This is likely the deeper reason Luke gives attention to certain groups of people; for it reflects a critique of a system-exploiting and crushing people. For example, even when the poor and rich are not

mentioned directly, Luke addresses other groups who are socially marginalized – the infirm and women. There are abundant examples of Jesus' care for the downcast throughout Luke, including: his healing of Simon's mother-in-law (4:38); his cleansing of a leper (5:12); his healing of a paralytic (5:17); his healing of a man with a withered hand (6:6); his raising of widow's son (7:11); his statement that good works for those in need proved the advent of the kingdom (7:22); his forgiving of a woman (7:36); his healing (exorcism) of the Gadarene demoniac (8:26); his raising of Jairus' daughter (8:40); his feeding of five thousand (9:10); his story of the good Samaritan that illustrated

This is likely the deeper reason Luke gives attention to certain groups of people; for it reflects a critique of a system-exploiting and crushing people.

the importance of helping anyone in need (10:25); his story about the forgiveness and restoration of the lost son (15:11); and his prayer of forgiveness on the cross (23:24). The fact that the poor are only one of many groups experiencing marginalization reflects Luke's awareness of larger forces at work impacting the lives of people, which is why he presents a radical message that critiques this system and explores ways to respond to a mis-ordered world.

This important development in Lukan studies is opening up our understanding of the original meaning of this gospel and its implications for contemporary Christian interpretation, theology, ethics, preaching and ministry. In the pages that follow, I provide an interpretation, a rereading of Luke's gospel in light of the privileges systemic injustice affords some and denies to others. Luke's focus on the poor and rich applies to issues of privilege because it connects with the original context of Luke, a context of imperial or systemic oppression. A second connection is that in the same way Luke's Jesus announced and proclaimed the gospel in response to an unjust world that produces

suffering, so too must our interpretations and theologies speak to these same issues. In other words, to faithfully interpret Luke today means to reflect upon the privileges white Americans gained from centuries of systemic oppression – slavery and segregation – and to ask hard questions of what Luke’s gospel, Luke’s Jesus, asks of us.

I. Toward a Contextual and Lexical Understanding of the Poor and the Rich

The rich and poor are literary themes in Luke; but, more importantly, they are contextual terms. As contextual terms, they require an understanding of their meaning in the Greco-Roman world, particularly in ancient Palestine, and an understanding of what these designations looked like in the lives of first century people. The contextual dimension of the words “rich and poor” is something modern readers of Luke miss, resulting in false conclusions and equivalences in our understanding of these words and how to apply them today. A common mistake is to restrict the meaning to money – rich, having a lot of money or poor, not having money. That is an oversimplification that does not help readers understand the original message and import of Luke.

A. The Socio-Political Context of Luke’s Gospel

Understanding the historical context that informed the time the text was written and the occasion of its writing are important parts of biblical interpretation. Readers of the text cannot understand what it means today without understanding - as best as we can ascertain - why it was written and what it meant to those who first read the text. Context is everything in biblical hermeneutics – informing our understanding of it as a historical document and a religious text that informs faith and ethics today.

Luke wrote his account of the life and teachings of Jesus against the backdrop of a small country with its capital city occupied by a foreign empire. Rome’s occupation and control of the region, and particularly ancient Israel, is essential to understanding the events that framed the backdrop against which Jesus and, later, Luke lived. Context brings the text to life. It is also critical in understanding the import and radical nature of Jesus’ teachings recorded in Luke’s gospel. Consequently, when Luke writes his account of the ministry of Jesus, he is thinking specifically about this historical and political context, a context in which many people suffer and are displaced because of injustice. In fact, he believes this context informed the content of Jesus’s teachings on riches, the poor, the meaning of discipleship and salvation.

Richard Cassidy examines the political nature of Luke’s gospel to identify what he calls the “social

stance of Jesus” on issues relating to groups such as the poor, the infirm, women, pagans, riches and the rich. His rationale and methodology are relevant for this study.

When we refer to Jesus’ “social stance,” we mean the response that Jesus made, through his teachings and conduct, to the question of how persons and groups ought to live together. In our use of the term “political,” we include, for example, the form of government, the various political authorities, and governmental policies such as taxation. In referring to Jesus’ social and political stance, our intention is to emphasize that Jesus not only responded to the social situation of the poor, the infirm, and the oppressed, but also to the policies and practices of the political leaders of his time... the chief characteristics of Jesus’ social and political stance and enable us to see how the various elements, taken together, constitute a vision of a new social order of social relationships.³

Cassidy wants readers to understand that what they

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read in Luke is a response to issues emanating from the political and social world of the day, to systems, policies, and ideas. Jesus’ statements about women, the infirm, the poor and rich should be understood in a dual manner: what he says to them or about them; and the relation of the statement to the socio-political context.

Because Luke gives so much attention to “material” matters or what we often call social and economic issues, Luke’s gospel and the teachings of Jesus have an inescapable political dimension to them. The connection between Luke, politics and imperial Rome has been an emerging theme in New Testament studies.

Recent scholarship has drawn particular attention to several issues relating to politics, imperial cults and imperial propaganda in New Testament studies... This intriguing phenomenon is also evident in Lukan scholarship, attempting to depict Luke’s attitude toward the Jewish and the Roman

authorities. In this respect, Lukan scholars, stressing the political aspects in Luke-Acts, have dealt with the imperial context more seriously in relation to Luke's appreciation of the imperial cults or the imperial propaganda. Regardless of the position one takes about Luke's depiction of the Roman Empire, it is very unlikely that Luke is not interested in politics. It is almost impossible to comprehend Luke's writing in isolation from its historical setting, the empire.⁴

Recent years have seen a significant growth of scholarly interest in the political aspect of the New Testament. With the rise of postcolonial studies, the imperial context of the New Testament has come to attract much attention... Therefore, in order to understand early Christianity, it is crucial to consider its political environment: the Roman Empire. The political aspect of Luke-Acts, however, has largely been neglected until recently... The picture of the Roman Empire in Luke-Acts is inseparably connected with Luke's view of the church, the people of God, in the context of the Roman Empire. A fuller understanding of the empire will lead to a better understanding of the church in a way unattainable by simply studying the church itself.⁵

These quotes alert readers to issues of historical, social, and political context that inform the situation and reasons the author writes.

An important iteration of this work has been to give readers information about the people we encounter in the biblical text. Some studies flesh out terms like "the poor" by examining what poverty looked like under imperial Roman rule. Jerome Neyrey's edited volume entitled *The Social World of Luke-Acts* gives careful attention to the world in which they lived and why these matters are of supreme importance for interpretation.

An agrarian society, typical of the majority of those in Mediterranean antiquity, is one built predominantly upon the plow and agricultural production. The chief productive factor in agrarian economies is land. Control of land is one of the central political questions of agrarian societies... Agrarian societies can also be considered peasant societies, a set of villages socially bound up with preindustrial cities. These types of societies are stratified into essentially two social classes – a small ruling elite in the cities and a mass of toiling agriculturalists in the villages whose labor and product supports that elite. Another way to delineate "social class" within the peasant/agrarian

societies is to look at who controls the land and the distribution of its products. Elites will control more or most and be advantaged in the distribution... Lenski has estimated that only 2% of the agrarian population belongs to the ruling elite, about 8% comprises the service class in the cities, and the remaining 90% or so tills the soil or services the village.⁶

...the basic economic structure of ancient societies from the elites' point of view was that of a redistributive network. This means that taxes and rents flowed relentlessly away from the rural producers to the storehouses of cities (especially Rome), private estates, and temples. This surplus, which might have gone to feed extra mouths in the village, ended up being redistributed for other ends by the ruling groups.⁷

In the Gospels, however, which in part reflect Jesus' own life situation in Galilee, the poor were small farmers with inadequate or barren land, or serfs on large estates; in the cities without the assistance of produce from the land were somewhat worse off.⁸

Scholars uncover the unjust workings of systems bent on concentrating wealth in the hands of the few – those loyal or favorably positioned to unjust systems. Careful background work illumines readers to the fact that when a foreign nation colonizes a nation or region, access to wealth has social and political dimensions. This means then that some forms of poverty in the ancient world were a product not so much of a lack of hard work and initiative as they were the product of how political and social systems control and distribute wealth.

B. Contextual-Lexical Understanding of Poor and Rich

Contextual work is important. However, it should accompany careful lexical and translational work. Both are necessary to understand the import of Luke from the first century context and its application to issues of privilege resulting from centuries of slavery and legal discrimination in America. Lexical work on the semantic range of Greek words for poor and rich should be examined, followed by a study of how these words are translated in popular versions of the Bible. The poor [οἱ πτωχοὶ] v. 20 carried a range of meaning in the first century – poor, destitute, a noun as beggar or poor person whose survival is dependent on the compassion of others – and rich [τοῖς πλούσιος] v. 24 can mean rich, well-to-do, opulent, wealthy, ample and

New International Version (NIV)	<i>Blessed are you who are poor...but woe to you who are rich</i>
Message	<i>You're blessed when you've lost it all...but it's trouble ahead if you think you have made it</i>
English Standard Version (ESV)	<i>Blessed are you who are poor...but woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation</i>
New American Standard (NAS)	<i>Blessed are you who are poor...but woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full</i>
The Living Bible	<i>What happiness there is for you who are poor...but oh, the sorrows that await the rich. For they have their only happiness down here</i>
New Living Translation (NLT)	<i>God blesses you who are poor...what sorrows awaits you who are rich for you have your only happiness now</i>

or abundance.⁹ Most translations use poor and rich, except the Message translation that misrepresents the contextual and lexical meaning of πτωχός and πλουσιος.

One of the important things biblical scholars try to do is to reflect accurately the meaning of the word in its original context and then find modern words that reflect and connect best to the original context. Most scholars opt for poor and rich in 6:20 and 6:24. I agree with this translation, but also recognize its limitations. In fact, it is not always a helpful translation, especially when thinking of ways to apply Luke to readers today.

In addition to the aforementioned translations, the New English Translation (NET), a translation that aims to reflect the meaning of the original text, fails to produce a translation that helps readers see the contextual nature of poverty and wealth. For example, the translation of 4:18 is: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” or 6:20: “Blessed are you who are poor” give a footnote explaining the significance of the word “poor” in Luke. The translator notes, “The poor is a key term in Luke. It refers to the pious poor and indicates Jesus’ desire to reach out to those the world tends to forget or mistreat.”¹⁰ If both verses, and more importantly, the message of Jesus, are addressed to those who are mistreated, why not reflect that in the translation? The phrase “the poor” does not convey the role of socio-political factors in the poverty rampant in ancient Palestine. Even Clarence Jordan’s Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts follows these popular translations. In 6:20, he translates the passage “the poor are God’s people, because the God movement is yours,” and 6:24 to say “it will be hell for you rich people, because you’ve had your fling.”¹¹

What do these translations really tell us about what Jesus meant by these statements, how they applied to those who heard him in the first century, and what

they mean to us today? They tell us very little. Readers are left to read into the text understandings about rich and poor that may not accurately reflect the original context and their application today. This is why I use a contextual (think socio-political) and lexical approach that produces a translation that reflects the social and

These translations provide a brief opening to understand that their condition has exploitative dimensions to it, especially when considering that Luke’s statements about the poor are always made in relation to the rich.

political world of first century people and the semantic range of these respective words.

Readers of Luke need to go back to the lexicon for other ways to account for the contextual nature of poor and rich. One source is Arndt and Gingrich’s popular Greek lexicon. It provides insight into a possible meaning or application that translators overlook. The authors note “at times the reference is not only to the unfavorable circumstances of these people from an economic point of view; the thought is also that since they are oppressed and disillusioned they are in special need of God’s help, and may be expected to receive it shortly.”¹² This gives substance to one’s understanding of poor. Arndt and Gingrich mention words like “unfavorable circumstances, oppressed, and disillusioned.” In some way, this should be captured in translation. For example, I found two translations that provide different language that is instructive. The Emphasized New Testament by J. B. Rotherham uses destitute to describe the people to whom Jesus pro-

claims good news, while the Phillips translations uses “you who own nothing.” These translations provide a brief opening to understand that their condition has exploitative dimensions to it, especially when considering that Luke’s statements about the poor are always made in relation to the rich.

When I translate *πτωχός* and *πλούσιος*, I want to convey that the poor are victims of systemic oppression and so I use words such as underprivileged, oppressed, marginalized for *πτωχός* and privileged for *πλούσιος*.

- 4:18 – The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the oppressed.
- 6:20 – Blessed are the oppressed for theirs is the kingdom of God – or – Blessed are the marginalized for there is the kingdom of God.
- 6:24 – However, how horrible it will be for the privileged for they have received their comfort.
- 16:19 – But there was a certain privileged man who dressed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

The benefit of these translations is that they draw attention to systemic realities – the poor are victims of a vicious socio-political system and are as a result, displaced, vulnerable and left destitute – begging for survival. The translations also draw attention to those who benefit from this system. Yes, they are rich; but rich really means privilege because their riches or social location are in relation to those whom the system excludes and exploits. Again, this is why a translation focusing on oppression, or even marginalization, and privilege brings greater attention to the contextual nature of poor and rich and provide a greater beginning point for modern readers to apply Luke.

II. Re-reading Luke

Luke has to be re-read. Readers have to reorient their understanding of poor and rich and then reread Luke’s message about these groups through his socio-political context. Why do readers have to do this? Re-reading Luke corrects the reader’s tendency to spiritualize and sidestep issues like material poverty. How can readers spiritualize poverty when Luke is so clear that material poverty is a gospel issue and a central concern of Jesus? Luke intentionally situates himself with other first century Christians who believe particular things about wealth and poverty in occupied and unjust spaces. Attending to this belief and its connection between his context and the actual content of Jesus’ teachings is of the utmost importance for readers of Luke. The problem we have today is a failure to make the proper connection between the context of Luke’s gospel and our own historical and political context. Christians and

preachers moralize Luke without making explicit and appropriate connections to the context of occupation and injustice. Doing this basically takes the teeth out of the gospel in a way that leaves modern Christians unchallenged by Luke’s message, a message so radical that it cost Jesus his life.

A. Re-reading Luke through the Lens of Systemic Oppression and Privilege

With this said, then, the question for Christians is: “What does the Gospel according to Luke say to the historical, political and social context of American Christianity?” It is important here to bring attention to the theological commitments of African American Christianity and the ways in which they appropriate Luke. For example, for African American New Testament scholar, Stephanie Crowder, “Lukan theology is grounded in a Jesus who comes not just to offer compassion to those who are wounded but to speak to the evil of those who wound.”¹³ She sees Luke’s Jesus as one who “comes to bring spiritual release and political, physical and social refuge to those on the margins

Christians and preachers moralize Luke without making explicit and appropriate connections to the context of occupation and injustice.

and that “marginalizing circumstances must not be ignored, because they affect those who would follow Jesus.”¹⁴

American Christianity would be challenged by this understanding of Luke’s gospel and Luke’s Jesus. In fact, if American Christians dealt seriously with Luke’s critique of people with privilege, it would disrupt the widespread nominalism we see today. If white Christians have to reckon with their privilege we would see decisions similar to those narrated in Luke’s gospel account like the rich young ruler in chapter 18 and the rich man in chapter 19.

Modern Christians need help applying Luke and one way to do that is by aligning his context with ours. If Jesus, first century Jews, and Christians lived during the days that Rome occupied Israel and controlled the distribution of wealth and perpetuated injustices that affected the lives of the masses of people, the challenge for modern interpreters is to understand the political and or social systems that function in a similar manner today. In the same way that Jesus challenged these systems in the first century, he continues to challenge these systems through the witness of his

disciples. This would mean, then, that interpreters need to think intentionally about systems like the government, its policies and their impact on people. Other major systems like trans-national corporations would be appropriate because they exert widespread influence. Such connections could open up Luke's message in ways that can deepen faith, revitalize the prophetic witness of a religion almost totally co-opted by the socio-political and economic machinations of 21st century Empire, and strengthen the marginalized in their fight for justice and dignity.

A very important connection readers of Luke need to attend to as partners in The Angela Project is the impact of the history of slavery and racism on the millions of people of African descent. In the same manner that Rome occupied Israel and exerted political, economic and social control over people, so too did white Americans use slavery and racial injustice to exert control over the lives of African Americans for centuries. There is a clear contextual connection that readers need to see and draw on as they imagine ways Luke's message applies to modern issues. The connection is that the experiences of occupation and control are similar between people in first century Palestine and Africans in America.

Another way to apply Luke is to give attention to language. Luke talks about the rich and the poor because it fits his context. This language is appropriate, but should not limit us when attempting to apply the import of his message about Jesus. If Luke were writing today, after centuries of slavery and another century of legalized discrimination, he would use language to talk about the privileges this system affords whites and oppression to give language to the ways blacks are deprived. The gospel according to Luke to America would speak to systemic racism and lay before people a call to discipleship that is radical and would likely turn many away.

Doing these two things can help us re-read and apply Luke to address the 400 years of slavery and racism in America. This would also open up certain passages in Luke that give insight into the dangers of privilege gained in the world. (Privilege is usually the result of taking what's intended to be shared by all for oneself.) The teachings of Jesus in Luke are clear that such riches and privileges should be relinquished. That is why I believe that in order to see the import of Luke, there is a need to change words normally translated as rich and poor to privileged and marginalized or oppressed. This needed change fits both the original context of Luke and, more importantly, opens up the text's application for readers today.

B. Re-reading Key Passages in Luke

1. Jesus teaches on the poor and rich in the Sermon on the Plain (6:20-26). Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are oppressed or marginalized, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. 23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. "But woe to you who are privileged, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

2. The story of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31). "There was a privileged man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar (or an "underprivileged per-

If Luke were writing today...he would use language to talk about the privileges this system affords whites and oppression to give language to the ways blacks are deprived.

son") named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar (or the "underprivileged person") died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The privileged man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your privileges, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted ("privileged") here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers ("other ones with the same privileges I had"). Let him warn them, so that

they will not also come to this place of torment.’

“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.’

“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

3. The story of the rich young ruler (18:18-30). A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”

“All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give up your privilege, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very privileged. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the privileged to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who has privilege to enter the kingdom of God.”

Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Peter said to him, “We gave up our privilege to follow you!”

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”

4. The story of Zacchaeus (19:1-10). Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was very privileged. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the oppressed, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I

will give four times as much as was taken.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Another benefit to a contextual-lexical approach to poor and rich is the way it opens up other passages in Luke.

The story of the rich fool (12:13-21) - Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of privilege; life does not consist in an abundance of benefits privilege affords you.”

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store

Look Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the oppressed, and if I have cheated any body out of anything, I will give reparations to them, four times as much as was taken.

my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’” “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ “This is how it will be with whoever hoards resources for himself and keep others from experiencing the same opportunities you were given but is not rich toward God.”

2. Jesus teaches on salvation (Luke 13:22-30). Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’

“Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and

you taught in our streets.’

“But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are oppressed or marginalized who will be first (or “privileged”), and the privileged now who will be last (or “underprivileged”).”

3. Jesus teaches on discipleship (9:23-25 and 14:25-33). Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves (“including one’s privilege”) and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life (“privilege”) will lose it, but whoever loses their life (“privilege”) for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain all the privilege the world gives you, and yet lose or forfeit their very selves?...Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up the privileges you have cannot be my disciples.

“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

C. Re-reading to Better Understand Lukan Theology

A second related and highly important matter is whether this rereading of Luke reflects his theological message. It is one thing to argue that two Greek words should be translated differently in light of socio-political realities, but a different thing to argue the translation reflects the deeper message Luke tries to convey to readers. I am convinced that my reading of Luke

reflects his theological message that challenges disciples of Jesus to relinquish privilege as an expression of neighbor love. Luke’s theological message is discerned in three stories: the rich man and Lazarus in 16:18-31; the rich young ruler in 18:18-30; and Zacchaeus in 19:1-10. These stories give examples of what it means to respond to the radical call of discipleship by Jesus.

The responses Luke narrates should be interpreted in light of two key passages: the story of the Good Samaritan in 10:25-37 that teaches the principle of neighbor love; and the story of Jesus’ radical call to discipleship in 14:25-33. Both stories serve as guideposts or markers reflecting core theological beliefs for Luke. In chapter 10, Jesus instructs a certain lawyer to “go and do likewise,” meaning do for others what the Samaritan man did for the injured man in the story. Jesus uses the story of the Samaritan to demonstrate the meaning of loving one’s neighbor and follows the story by issuing a command to follow this example. In 14:33, Jesus makes radical statements about the level of commitment required to follow him. One’s alle-

Luke shows his readers how both men, men with privilege, refused to follow the way and message of Jesus.

giance and love for him must surpass allegiance and love for others. He says, “Whosoever does not forsake all that he has, cannot be my disciple.” He does this because he wants people to understand that a disciple cannot have competing loyalties and loves. What readers of Luke will see is that these stories actually illustrate how people responded to the message of Jesus and its implications for their lives.

The rich man in 16:18-31 ignores Lazarus and, therefore, clearly violates Jesus’ teachings about neighbor love in 10:25-37. Lazarus was a neighbor in need of love in the form of food, clothing and compassion. The rich man overlooked him and his needs. This man of privilege also illustrates a refusal to forsake what he had for Jesus. He used his material wealth on himself and seemed to live a life giving little consideration of others – dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day. The rich young ruler does not follow the way of Jesus either. At the direct request of Jesus, he refuses to give his money to the poor. His refusal to do this is really a failure to treat the poor as neighbors in need of love. He also refuses to forsake all that he has for the sake of the gospel because it

would cost him too much. Luke uses this story to show that this man has a master and it is not God (16:13 “cannot serve God and mammon”).

Luke shows his readers how both men, men with privilege, refused to follow the way and message of Jesus. More importantly, Luke wants readers to see just how tight the grip of the socio-political system can be on persons. Their lives, values and material resources are so tied into the system and its privileges that they refuse to relinquish them, even if it brings relief to the poor and marginalized – love neighbors in need. When Jesus called these people to let their privileges go, just as Moses told Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, these men, like Pharaoh, refused.¹⁵ This is an important part of the theological message of Luke.

The third example models radical neighbor love and “followship” of Jesus. In 19:1-10, Zacchaeus, without being directly prompted by Jesus (as best we can ascertain), decides to give half of all his goods to the poor and to pay back every person he wronged (cheated) four times more than he took. His radical response prompted Jesus to say: “This day has salvation come to this house” (19:9). Zacchaeus modeled neighbor love and a willingness to forsake everything for Jesus. Zacchaeus is Luke’s shining example of radical discipleship because he was willing to let go of the privileges given through unjust means as a tax collector and local collaborator to the unjust system of taxation. More importantly, unlike the other rich men, Zacchaeus’ sacrificial act demonstrates neighbor love. The story of Zacchaeus is important for Luke because it shows it is possible to relinquish privilege, to correct wrongs done to the vulnerable, and to follow Jesus, who represents a new way of ordering social relationships and material wealth. Zacchaeus shows readers the way of salvation.

Imagine what it would mean to preach sermons in a country that enslaved Africans for centuries and discriminated against them for over another century using texts in Luke that are translated in this manner? Imagine what Luke’s Jesus would say and is saying to us as it relates to oppression and privilege? Imagine what could happen if more white Christians saw themselves in these stories about rich men in Luke and had to grapple with which response reflects their practice and the practices of their churches and their political decisions? Christian theology, ethics, preaching and ministry all would take on new forms if Luke’s gospel were re-read through the lens of systemic oppression and privilege.

Conclusion

My work on Luke offers two contemporary benefits. First, rereading Luke in this way helps readers think

about racism as holding onto the benefits and privileges of centuries of slavery. The re-reading of Luke provides a way for Christians to think about privilege and its relation to the radical call to discipleship taught by Jesus. The insertion of the words marginalized and privileged for the Greek words *πτωχός* and *πλούσιος* helps readers to see the radical nature of Jesus’s teachings, calling them to relinquish privileges gained through unjust means. Second, Luke helps Christians see systemic oppression and privilege in the biblical text. This is an important and requisite part to encourage more Christians to enter into the contemporary debate about reparations and the legacy of slavery in America. There is a debate about reparations today. Ironically, it is being discussed by politicians, social advocates and educational institutions. Christian denominations and churches are not playing a prominent role in the debate as usual. That has to change.

The reparations debate continues, but with little progress. One reason progress is not made is because it lacks the moral and spiritual support of the dominant

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religion of the country and that is Christianity. Again, this is why I lift up the bold work and vision of The Angela Project in challenging Baptists to take up this important work. Too many Christians cannot see the connection between privilege and discipleship because they cannot see it in the text they read and in the message of Jesus. I hope this begins to change. The challenge for white Christianity will be to reorient their witness and lean into encounters with the gospel that begin a new period of divestment (Jesus said “forsake all”) of the privileges slavery and discrimination have afforded them. The Angela Project’s aim is to lead a new trajectory in America, but not to fix all the problems in our generation. Our challenge is to respond to the gospel in our lifetime and leave for those who follow us examples and patterns of faithful “follow-ship” or discipleship. Following radical commands from Jesus would help us address injustices that have misordered our society. It would also help us to re-orga-

nize material resources in a way in which all people are able to thrive. I hope we will take up this radical work in the coming months and years.

1 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula MT: SBL, 1977); Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Sondra Ely Wheeler, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

2 R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX. Leander Keck, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 25-26.

3 Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (New York: Orbis, 1978), 20.

4 Pyung Soo Seo, *Luke's Jesus in the Roman Empire and the Emperor in the Gospel of Luke* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 1.

5 Kazuhiko Yamazaki-Ransom, *The Roman Empire in Luke's Narrative* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 1-2.

6 Douglas E. Oakman, "The Countryside in Luke-Acts" in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*. Jerome H. Neyrey, ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 154-55.

7 Ibid., 156.

8 Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 67.

9 Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Germany:

United Bible Societies, 1993), 157, 145; and Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon* (London: Oxford Press, 1978), 1550, 1422-23.

10 The New English Translation (NET) Bible, (Biblical Studies Press, 1997), 1805.

11 Clarence Jordan, *The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts* (New York: A Koinonia Publication, 1969), 30-31.

12 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. Walter Bauer, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 728.

13 Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, "The Gospel of Luke," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*. Brian K. Blount, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 158.

14 Ibid., 164, 166.

15 Like the Exodus story, Pharaoh's refusal to do justice - "let my (as in enslaved) people go" - foreshadowed or preceded the collapse of the Egyptian empire and its economic system that was so heavily dependent on slave labor, the responses of these rich men foreshadow a similar collapse. Jesus warned about this in 21:20-22. In 70 C.E., Rome sieged Jerusalem and destroyed the very system these rich men were benefitting from. Could our continued refusal to repair the damage done from slavery foreshadow judgment for America? ■

The purpose of *Christian Ethics Today* is to inform, inspire, and unify a lively company of individuals and organizations interested in working for personal morality and public righteousness.

Zacchaeus and the Salvation of American Christianity

Lewis Brogdon

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the oppressed, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (19:8-9)

There are two very interesting and very radical statements in these few verses. The first is, of course, the fact that Zacchaeus would relinquish the wealth he had gained unjustly and would repair generously the damage done to those he cheated. The reader should note that he acknowledged his complicity in the system of taxation even though it was the creation of social and political forces that preceded him. Second, is the response of Jesus to Zacchaeus – "today salvation has come to this house." What is so surprising about his response is that it does not fit the way most white evangelicals talk about salvation. Luke does not tell us that Zacchaeus prayed the "sinner's prayer" or that he asked Jesus into his heart. Zacchaeus does something that involves the poor and those cheated by unjust economic practices and Jesus responds by talking about salvation. Both responses – Zacchaeus and Jesus - are revealing and radical in that they do not reflect the normal ways we talk about discipleship and salvation.

The fact that Zacchaeus is not the paradigm for our understanding of salvation is one of the reasons American Christianity refuses to correct mass injustices like slavery, genocide, and poverty. In many of the denominational strands of white American Christianity, there is no need to confess AND repair wrongs done to the vulnerable. Instead, sins are individualized and forgiven on an individual basis, which means many white Christians do little to acknowledge and repair harm done, no matter how severe and far reaching. This model that focuses on individual forgiveness does not call white churches to acknowledge and repair damages done to others leaves America not experiencing "salvation" as Jesus spoke of in Luke 19. So, in a real sense, Zacchaeus' response to Jesus represents the salvation of white American Christianity

from four centuries of bondage to the hate, exploitation, deception, and death brought on itself by enslaving and discriminating against African Americans. When Zacchaeus becomes one of primary ways we imagine and envision salvation, salvation will come to America.

This passage in Luke raises an important question for Christians as we assess the four-hundred year history of slavery and racism in America (1619-2019) and that question is, "Would Jesus say that salvation has come to America?" If we take Luke's account of the response of a privileged man's encounter with the gospel seriously, then we are left to answer "No, sal-

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vation has not come to America because those with privilege and those who cheated building a country with slave labor have not repaid them four times as much." One of the reasons we have made very little progress in addressing the manifold impacts of centuries of slavery in a country where the Christianity is the dominant religion is because Zacchaeus' example has not been followed. In this essay, I want readers to think about the following: What would it mean for American Christianity to take seriously the example of Zacchaeus in giving up privileges gained through injustice and its role in salvation coming to this country? What would it mean to draw on this passage in how we think and talk about Christian soteriology? The essay will begin with an examination of how Luke narrates discipleship and salvific encounters and then shift to explore why we need to expand our understanding of salvation, and how it can help us explore the issues of reparations and privilege.

Luke's Narration of Salvation as a Response to

Privilege

Think about the language and ways we talk about salvation. Christians often confess they are saved. Rarely do they think about what they are being saved from besides generic and individualized statements like “saved from my sin.” It is true God saves us from our individual sin. God also saves us from sin imbedded in the structures and systems in the world that hold and carry out laws, policies, and practices that disenfranchise people. These systems; through exploitation, greed, and violence produce mass poverty, suffering, and death, all things that are sinful and concern the Holy One – (remember John 3:16 “*for God so loved the world...*”). This suggests that God saves us in a holistic sense. God saves us from sin in our hearts and sin in the systems we create in our communities and the world.

Luke’s vision of salvation reflects this holistic understanding – salvation that is personal and systemic – and shows us the God who brings salvation in the fullest sense of the word. In order for readers to see God’s vision of salvation, Luke tells stories that demonstrate the ways people are ensnared and enslaved by sin imbedded in both the heart and systems of the world. There stories about salvation as a return from a life of excess in 15:11-32 and stories about salvation as a response to privilege in 19:1-10.

In particular, the stories of the rich man and Lazarus in 16:18-31, the rich young ruler in 18:18-30, and Zacchaeus in 19:1-10 give examples of what it means to respond to the radical call of discipleship by Jesus and the salvation he brings to the world. The responses should be interpreted in light of two key passages in Luke: the story of the Good Samaritan in 10:25-37 that teaches the principle of neighbor love; and the story of Jesus’ radical call to discipleship in 14:25-33. In chapter 10, Jesus instructs the expert in the law to “go and do likewise,” meaning do for others what the Samaritan man did for the injured man in the story. In 14:33, Jesus says, “whosoever does not forsake all that he has, cannot be my disciple.” These stories will illustrate how people in ancient Palestine responded to the message of Jesus and its implications for their lives.

The rich man in 16:18-31 ignores Lazarus and therefore, clearly violates Jesus’ teachings about neighbor love in 10:25-37. Lazarus was a neighbor in need of love in the form of food, clothing, and compassion. The rich man overlooked him and his needs. This man also illustrates a refusal to forsake what one has for Jesus. He used his material wealth on himself and seemed to live a life giving little consideration of others. The rich young ruler did not follow the way of Jesus either. At the direct request of Jesus, he refuses

to give his money to the poor and to treat them as neighbors in need of love. He also refuses to obey a command of Jesus because it would cost him too much of what he had (16:13 “cannot serve God and mammon”).

Luke shows his readers how both men refused to follow the way and message of Jesus. More importantly, Luke wants readers to see just how tight the grip of the socio-political system can be on persons. Their lives, values, and material resources are so tied into the system and its privileges that they refuse to relinquish them, even if it brings relief to the poor and marginalized. When Jesus called these people to let their privileges go, like Moses told Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, these men, like Pharaoh, refused.¹

The third example models radical neighbor love and “followship” of Jesus. In 19:1-10, Zacchaeus, without being directly prompted by Jesus (as best as we can ascertain), decides to give half of all his goods to the poor and to pay back every person he wronged (cheated) four times more than he took. This radical response

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prompted Jesus to say, “Today has salvation come to this house” (19:9). Zacchaeus modeled neighbor love and a willingness to forsake everything for Jesus and is Luke’s shining example of radical discipleship because he was willing to let go of the privileges given through unjust means as a tax collector and local collaborator to the unjust system of taxation. This story is important for Luke because it shows it is possible to relinquish privilege, correct wrongs done to the vulnerable, and to follow Jesus, who represents a new way of ordering social relationships and material wealth. In the end, Zacchaeus shows readers the way of salvation.

The Impossibility of Salvation?

Jesus and Luke were not naïve about the human tendency to water down and trivialize a call to radical discipleship. That is why there is a story in chapter 18 of this not happening. What this means is no small matter. Luke’s Jesus talks about discipleship and salvation. I believe this story is mentioned and related to both because, for Luke, you cannot be saved by a savior

you will not follow as a disciple. In this passage, Jesus alludes to the incredible difficulty of salvation for those with privilege but in 18:18-30, he does it after someone reject his radical call to discipleship. This aspect of Lukan theology is a warning unheeded today. Jesus responded to the rich young ruler's refusal to sell all he has and follow him with the claim that it is hard for the rich to be saved. This is a radical theological statement. A rejection of radical "follow-ship" and an accompanying refusal to deal seriously with one's privilege complicates and sometimes obstructs the salvific work of God. Others heard this statement and considering the magnitude of the request Jesus made to this man, they asked, "Who then can be saved?" This is a sobering and appropriate question to ask in response to what the gospel required of the privileged. It asks for everything – "whoever does not forsake all for the sake of the gospel cannot be my disciple" (15:33?). This text, and others in Luke, lay before white American Christianity the impossibility of salvation when one or ones hold onto privileges gained through unjust means.

I am sure some of my readers feel uneasy reading the statement "the impossibility of salvation" because they are thinking about salvation as only the personal forgiveness of your sin and the personal granting of salvation by God. They have heard enough preachers tell them about the Romans road to salvation or they have been instructed to walk to the front of the church and pray to receive salvation. Preachers have told people for years that it is easy to "get saved" or "be saved" and followed this with a few simple words to pray or a few steps to take. So the word impossible in front of salvation can raise serious concerns for a religious culture that has distilled it down to a simple transaction. If you think about it, in the same way that white Christians tend to think individually about racism (racism is prejudice and not a system of advantage), white Christians, particularly evangelicals, think the same way about salvation. They think of salvation as personal and does not involve others. This is a very narrow view of salvation. I agree that salvation is personal but it also involves others.

If American Christianity is going to address the long and painful history of slavery and racism, it has to begin a process of making structural changes that challenge how they think and organize social and religious systems. One needed change is in the area of soteriology. American Christianity has to expand its understanding of salvation. Salvation in the New Testament is not restricted to the personal forgiveness of sin. Rather, it is the restoration of everything in creation at the cosmic, social, and personal levels and includes

reconciliation with both God and one another. In a commentary on the Book of Romans, Luke T. Johnson argues that Paul taught salvation has a social dimension to it.

The theme of salvation is central to Romans. Paul here asserts that it is the entire goal of the message he proclaims (see 5:9-10; 8:24; 9:27; 10:1, 9-10, 13; 11:11, 14, 26; 13:11). The pertinent question is, What does he mean by salvation? Here is a case where later Christian understandings – derived from a variety of sources in addition to all the canonical witnesses – should not be allowed to obscure Paul's own. There is no sign in Romans itself that Paul conceived of "salvation" as something that pertained mainly to individuals or to their respective eternal destinies ("heaven or hell"). I am not suggesting that such a perception would be utterly incompatible with Paul. Indeed, he has clear statements concerning a future life shared with God and Christ (2 Cor 5:1-10; Phil 1:21-26; 1 Thess 4:17). The issue is only whether this is what he means in Romans

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by *soteria*. Careful analysis of his usage in this letter suggests that Paul thinks of salvation here in social rather than individual terms, and that it is something that occurs in this life...salvation in Romans means something close to "belonging to the people of God"... That Paul conceives of salvation in social terms is suggested also by his following statement, that it is for "the Jew first and also the Greek," since these are designations not of individuals but of peoples or ethnic groups... this phrase suggests a rootedness in historical particularity; it is to the Jew first, then the Greek.²

Johnson argues (1) that the theme of salvation is central to Romans; and (2) that Paul's conception of salvation in Romans is social, not one focused on eternal destinies. When Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" and spends three chapters wrestling over the problem of Jewish unbelief that ends in his confession that "all Israel will be saved" (11:26), it is apparent that salvation involves people, not just

individuals, and how God worked in times past and the future to reconcile and save “us” collectively.

Johnson is absolutely correct on this point. When Paul explains the import of the salvific work of Jesus in books such as Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians, the scope is broader than one’s individual eternal destiny. In 2 Corinthians, Paul describes salvific work as “God reconciling the world to himself in Christ” and in Ephesians, Paul speaks of the mystery of God’s will that he purposed in Christ “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth” (1:10). Passages like these illustrate that salvation encompasses the whole of creation and every aspect of social and human relationality. This preoccupation with individual salvation has caused many in the church to ignore the ways God works in all creation to bring unity and reconciliation under Christ. Another interesting point that Paul makes in these passages is how “the saints” are invited to join God in this work, meaning they play a role in the unfolding nature of salvific work.

This aspect of salvation, the social aspect of God’s salvific work, will remain elusive and impossible as long as our soteriologies focus on personal forgiveness. The whole point of the exchange between Jesus and the rich young ruler in Luke 18 was to help him see the relation of his wealth to those around him. He was rich. However, the political and social system of ancient Palestine was unjust, meaning the poor were taken advantage of, and resultantly, left displaced. Jesus wanted this pious person to see the connection and correct it. Jesus said “one thing thou lackest.” Jesus identified the root of the matter (he has a way of doing that) and it ended up being the one thing this very “religious” person refused to see, acknowledge, and correct – his privilege and what it cost others. There are many white Christians like this rich ruler who cannot be saved, or should I say “will not be saved” because they are rich and privileged and refuse to acknowledge and repair damage done to others to their benefit. In other words, they refuse to join God in bringing unity and reconciliation to the world in Christ.

Salvation and Reparations

As long as our focus is on personal salvation, the forgiveness of our individual sins, and our ticket on the train to glory, we will ignore what happens in the socio-political world, the world in which we live, past and present. That is exactly what much of white Christianity does with the history of slavery. They ignore it because they assume it has nothing to do with their salvation.

Because salvation has social dimensions, Christians

cannot ignore what happens in the society, past and present. How can we join God in the ministry of reconciliation without taking seriously the things in the world that cause estrangement, suffering, and death? Christians must take history seriously since it has a major influence on the world today. For example, history can give us the insight needed either to follow the faithful example of those who went before us or to bring to light the ways they were unfaithful. When history shows us the ways our forebears acted that were unfaithful to God and the gospel, our challenge is twofold: (1) to give a faithful witness of God and gospel that corrects past error; and (2) to repair the damage done in the name of God and gospel. After all, there can never be reconciliation and salvation without justice. If history matters, then, it means that God’s salvific work must reconcile and bring unity to the painful and protracted history of slavery and racism in America. More importantly, it also means that Christians are called to join God in this work that salvation may come to us all. If this is the case, then

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reparations for the history of slavery and racism may play a role in the salvation of America.

I am sure you have not thought about the role of reparations in the social salvific work of the gospel in America. It is not a common way to think about the salvific work of God. Seminary and divinity school professors do not teach students to apply soteriological thought to historical and social issues like slavery. While the connection may be new, it resonates with Luke’s understanding of salvation and the example of Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was willing to give up his riches (think privilege) and to repair the damage done to others. When he did this, salvation came to his house. This is the path for white American Christianity for the next four hundred years. One of the reasons the reparations debate has not gained traction is because it confronts white Americans with the dilemma of acknowledging the ways the history of slavery and racism benefitted them. In other words, white privilege is very much at the heart of the issue of reparations and the reason reparative measures are never taken. I am convinced

that the church must confront issues of privilege - the current benefits linked to slavery and systemic oppression - if reparations will gain any traction socially. White churches and its leaders must lead this discussion and even offer suggested reparative measures, not the leaders of the churches and communities victimized and exploited by centuries of racism.

Zacchaeus shows us this path to salvation. The question is, “Will white Christians follow it or will they follow the path of another rich man in Luke? The issue of reparations is a modern illustration of the same relationships Luke presented in his gospel account of the ministry of Jesus. The gospel prioritizes and reorders relationships with Jesus, one another, and the systems of the world. So the living out of faith means one of two things. A life of faith can mean living in a way that obeys and follows Jesus and loves others as neighbors by repairing the damage done to them. This can only be done by letting go of privilege. A life of faith can also mean living in a way where unjust systems are absolutized and followed, mostly because of privileges gained. However, in following this way, the way of Luke’s Jesus is forsaken. Because, as Luke’s Jesus claims, “you cannot serve God and mammon” - God and privilege.

A System Linked to Centuries of Slavery and Discrimination Needs Salvation

Four hundred years of history, most of which has involved enslavement and legalized segregation attests to the fact that America needs salvation. Our country needs salvation, not churches on every corner, scores of celebrity preachers, televangelists, or the majority of Americans claiming Christianity as their faith. Those are good things but they have not translated in the salvation of America from the color line. Scores of churches, popular pastors, and Americans claiming Christian faith has done little to nothing to correct and repair the fundamental problem in America, which is its social structure and its connection to slavery and segregation. This country is structured in a way that is unjust and needs the saving power of the gospel. Interestingly, the Christian religion, instead of being an agent of change, has actually served to support unjust social systems and arrangements. This is what we are trying to change with **The Angela Project** – the system of racial advantage that privileges some and marginalizes others.

The real problem of racism is institutional and structural. White Americans, regardless of their personal views about black people, hold the levers of control in society. They own businesses. They make the laws. They interpret and enforce the laws. They own and

regulate financial institutions. They control and regulate the media. Their cultural norms and morays are central and viewed as the standard of beauty, excellence, and truth. They sit on governing boards and oversee the majority of educational institutions. White Americans control the production and consumption of knowledge. They establish the curriculum taught in schools, teach in almost all of the classrooms, and train other teachers. In other words, white Americans exert control and influence the shape of society at every level.

Minorities, to a great extent, have very little control and influence over these systems because they are situated and concentrated at the bottom of system. In contrast to white Americans, they do not own the majority of businesses. They do not make the laws. They do not interpret and enforce laws they established. They do not own and regulate the financial institutions in the country. They do not control and regulate the media. Their cultural norms and morays are peripheral. They rarely sit on governing boards and do not oversee the

Four hundred years of history, most of which has involved enslavement and legalized segregation attests to the fact that America needs salvation.

majority of educational institutions. Black Americans do not control the production and consumption of knowledge. They do not establish the curriculum taught in schools, do not teach in almost all of the classrooms, nor train other teachers. In other words, black Americans do not exert control and influence the shape of society at every level.

Even if a white brother or sister were to respond that African Americans do not exert this level of influence because they only comprise twelve to fourteen percent of the population, this response could not explain why black Americans do exert a level of influence and control commensurate with their demographic percentage. For example, blacks do not own 12% of businesses in America. They do not control 12 or 14% of the wealth of the country. They do not represent 12% of university and college presidents. They do not write that percent of the textbooks used in educational institutions. They do not represent 12% of the educators. This illustrates the deeper problematic nature of the system and how it was structured. African Americans inherited a system that intentionally excluded them and do not

even have a representative degree of control and influence within the system. This reality is not the result of random forces but rather was done by design and the design is thoroughly sinful.

The painful truth is there was an economic and social benefit that whites gained by enslaving Africans for two hundred and forty six years and then following this with a form of neo-slavery we call segregation. During this time major institutions were founded and flourished as a result of slave labor – universities, colleges, banks, businesses.

I read an informative article on this topic.³ The contributors began by showing the role slavery played in the creation of wealth in the United States at every level. They said slaves and land were the main forms of wealth in the United States before 1860 and that they were used in insurance policies and bank loans. They showed how universities and colleges turned to slave owners and slave traders to raise money. Industry in the North and in Britain made money processing slave-grown tobacco, cotton and sugar from the South and the Caribbean. Railway companies used slave labor. To my surprise, I read that the most profitable activity on Wall Street was the slave trade. The article listed fifteen major corporations that profited from slavery – Lehman Brothers, Aetna, Inc., JP Morgan Chase, New York Life, Wachovia Corporation, N. M. Rothschild & Sons Bank in London, Norfolk Southern, USA Today, FleetBoston, CSX Corporation, Brown Brothers Harriman, Brooks Brothers, and AIG. All these major companies have deep roots and profits in the era of legalized slavery.

Another example of the connection to our modern social system to slavery is the area of education. Some of the oldest and wealthiest universities and colleges were founded during this time.

Harvard University in 1636
College of William and Mary in 1693
St. John's College (Annapolis/Sante Fe) in 1696
Yale University in 1701
Washington College (Maryland) in 1723
University of Pennsylvania in 1740
Moravian College in 1742
Princeton University in 1746
Washington and Lee University in 1749
Columbia University in 1754
Brown University in 1764
Rutgers University in 1766
Dartmouth University in 1769
College of Charleston in 1770
Salem College in 1772
Dickinson College in 1773
Hampden-Sydney College in 1775

Transylvania University in 1780
Washington and Jefferson College in 1781
University of Georgia in 1785
University of Pittsburgh in 1787
Franklin and Marshall College in 1787
Georgetown University in 1789
UNC Chapel Hill in 1789
University of Vermont in 1791

These institutions profited from the slave trade, slave labor, and the wealth it created. For example, Brown University was named for the Brown brothers who gave money to the university. They were slave traders, another ran a factory that used slave-grown cotton. University Hall was built in part by slave labor. Harvard Law School was endowed with money from Isaac Royall, an Antiguan slave owner and sugar grower. Princeton University raised money and recruited students from rich, slave-owning families in the South and the Caribbean. Princeton solicited money from wealthy slave owners. Many of Columbia's students were sons of slave traders. So did Harvard, Yale, Penn, Columbia, Rutgers, Brown, Dartmouth, and the University of Delaware.

Today, these institutions have large endowments. According to current data on their endowments from the 2018-19 Almanac published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, these institutions have an incredible amount of wealth - Harvard – over 36 billion, College of William and Mary – over 874 million, Yale University – over 27 billion, University of Pennsylvania – over 12 billion, Princeton University – over 23 billion, Columbia University – over 9 billion, Brown University – over 3 billion, Dartmouth University – over 4.9 billion, University of Georgia – over 1.1 billion, University of Pittsburgh – over 3.9 billion, Georgetown University – over 1.6 billion, and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill – over 3 billion.⁴

Compare the endowments with minority institutions like Historic Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with the aforementioned data on endowments among the predominantly white institutions that began under slavery and one will see significant disparities. There really is nothing to compare when laying the wealth of white educational institutions beside wealth of black educational institutions. Why is this the case? White educational institutions have more wealth than black educational institutions because society structured the educational system in a way that gave white institutions an advantage that black institutions were not given.

Ten Largest Endowments among HBCUs

Historic Black Colleges and Universities	Current Endowment
Howard University	647 million
Spelman College	Over 366 million
Hampton University	Over 279 billion
Meharry Medical College	Over 153 million
Florida A&M University	Over 113 million
Tennessee State University	Over 55 million
University of the Virgin Islands	Over 55 million
Texas Southern University	Over 54 million
Virginia State University	Over 51 million

White institutions were given more time to build wealth to fund endowments and used the enslavement of Africans as the means to generate and build wealth. Blacks were not given the same opportunities and did not use exploitation of masses of people to build wealth to fund its institutions and interests.

This again illustrates the intentional nature of inequity in America, a system of inequity supported by white Christianity and unchanged till this very day. Again, the point is both the foundation and infrastructure of this country was built during this time, giving white Americans a significant advantage socially. This is why scholars in the field of Critical Race Theory would conclude that the fundament problem with American society is structural. We live in a society with systems of advantage we call **systemic racism** that afford white Americans **privilege**. Regardless of individual racial views, the system was engineered to function in this manner and to replicate privilege and disenfranchisement.

Systemic Racism, Privilege and Salvation

The church has made some strides in addressing individualized instances of racism. It challenges the practice of prejudice to some degree. However, it has done a poor job confronting racism that is imbedded in the fabric of American institutions. Very little has been done by Christian denominations and churches to challenge and change how society is structured economically, educationally, politically, etc.

White Christian scholars, clergy, and congregants still lack skill and courage in talking about the history of slavery, systemic racism, and its manifold impact on African Americans. This inability is rooted in a deeper problem with how white Christian communities approach these complex and painful issues.

Predominantly white churches lack a rigorous and systemic approach to studying and assessing the history and impact of slavery and racism in America and the role churches should play in addressing it. For decades,

Very little has been done by Christian denominations and churches to challenge and change how society is structured economically, educationally, politically, etc.

they continue with watered-down talk of reconciliation and forgiveness for the sin of racism in their hearts. However, little to nothing is said to address the systems and wealth associated with centuries of oppression, as if the gospel of Jesus Christ does not speak to such issues.

What white churches need is to get back to the radicalness of the gospel as expressed in Luke and to follow the example of Zacchaeus who shows them the role they have to play in repairing the harm done to African Americans. Truthfully, it almost seems impossible to conceive of a salvation coming to America that requires white Americans to surrender privileges centuries of slavery and racism has afforded them. It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for groups of whites to surrender their privilege. The question in 18:26, “*Who then can be saved?*” is more relevant now than ever.

In our quest to market and “transactionalize” salvation for living room conversions while watching TV and mass altar conversions for new member classes,

we have lost its “bigness” and mystery. For decades, evangelicals have been getting people to pray Jesus into their hearts and for decades, systemic racism has plagued this country with very little willingness on the part of those who benefitted from unjust systems to surrender them. Have we forgotten that Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor or that in Luke, one must “make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to” (13:24). Jesus’ mission and warning here are rarely, if ever, taken seriously by white Christians today who have benefitted from centuries of oppression. Many assume they do not apply to them today and dismiss both rather quickly. It is entirely possible that Luke is trying to provide a sober account of the gospel (“good news”) that takes seriously the radicalness of discipleship and the impossibility of salvation for those not willing to follow Jesus fully.

Luke wants us to be sober about the radical nature of the gospel but he also wants us to have hope that repair and salvation are possible. When asked the question who can be saved, “*Jesus replied, what is impossible with man is possible with God*” (18:27). Jesus directs his hearers focus from them to God. This is a very important point. In our own strength, we are unable to repair all that has been broken over the past four hundred years. Such a task goes beyond our limited knowledge and resources. Our calling as disciples of Jesus is simply to follow his commands to deny ourselves, forsake the privileges of the world, and bear our crosses daily (9:23-26, 57-62; and 14:25-33). Doing this is hard but not impossible. Luke shows us that the disciples did this.

Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (18:28-29).

Luke leaves us their example to follow because in doing this, God works to bring salvation to our individual souls and, more importantly, to the world, especially the oppressed.

Luke also gives us another glimpse of hope in his second writing the book of Acts. In both writings, he shows that a privileged person, like Zacchaeus, can relinquish the material and that groups can do it (Luke 19:1-10; Acts 4:32-35).

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to

the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and other miraculous events that followed unleashed a faith and hope that resulted in people with privilege divesting themselves of it and giving it to the apostles. So, it is possible, through the power of the Holy Spirit for groups to transcend in small ways the power of sin that manifests itself in holding onto resources meant to be shared by all. Our only hope in addressing the structural inequities of race in America may be in a model of radical discipleship that leads to salvation taught in Luke and alluded to in Acts.

After four hundred years of slavery and racism in America, Luke would challenge white Christians to begin a long process of relinquishing privilege and embracing what they would define as poverty so as to correct the deep structural problems built by centuries of slavery and discrimination. It sounds impossible. And, it is likely impossible. But like Luke documents in Acts, maybe a small group or a community will act on this and do something radical that restructures how we relate to one another. Their example may inspire others and maybe one day Jesus may profess “Today has salvation come to this house.” May it be so, amen. ■

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1 Like the Exodus story, Pharaoh’s refusal to do justice - “let my (as in enslaved) people go” – foreshadowed or preceded the collapse of the Egyptian empire and its economic system that was so heavily dependent on slave labor, the responses of these rich men foreshadow a similar collapse. Jesus warned about this in 21:20-22. In 70 C.E., Rome sieged Jerusalem and destroyed the very system these rich men were benefitting from.

2 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 27-28.

3 ABS Contributors, “The 15 Major Corporations You Never Knew Profited from Slavery,” *AtlantaBlackStar.com* (August 26, 2013). Accessed on April 11, 2019.

4 “2018-19 Almanac.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 24, 2018): Vol. LXIV no. 41, pp. 64-65.

The Institutional Legacy of American Slavery: Theological and Economic Entanglement

By Darvin A. Adams I

Blacks have been in this country since 1619. For more than two hundred years they provided free labor for the building of the economy of this nation. Blacks have helped to build railroads and fought in all the wars. In fact, in every way possible blacks have earned their place as full and authentic citizens of the United States. We are now more than a century and a quarter beyond chattel slavery and yet blacks are still struggling to win rights that are routinely given to citizens recently arrived from other parts of the globe. Racism is for black Americans an intergenerational problem that will not go away.

The goal of this particular essay is to provide a scholarly treatment within the economic backdrop of the history of slavery and racism in the United States. In particular, I envision helping readers to see systemic poverty as the abiding legacy of this dark history, which then, provides a helpful lens to understand the current disenfranchisement of Black Americans and the need for reparations. This essay also brings Black Liberation Theological discourse into *Christian Ethics Today's* attempt to unpack the painful and complex history of slavery in the United States through *The Angela Project*. This is not an easy task.

Given the current landscape of American racism and its economic ties to the practice of institutional slavery, I feel that a theological response is needed in regards to the growing conversations of privilege and reparations. By way of disentangling the theological and economic legacies of institutional slavery, I will begin unpacking the economic implications associated with the dehumanization of African slaves. As evidenced in the slavemaster's immoral treatment of the slave, there was a well thought out, economic plan in place. The strategic plan was designed to prosper the white slavemaster in such a one-sided way that Black people would always be economically-deprived. Because the white slavemaster believed that African slaves were not worthy of educational development and economic self-sufficiency, they strategically set in motion a plan to keep Black people oppressed. Hence, this essay attempts to describe what this dehumanizing and oppressive treatment looked like in the human spheres of theology, economics and physical torture. In pre-

senting an accurate account of the history of slavery in the United States, I believe that a conversational turn to the development of the American economy is necessary. Here, there is an unspoken contradiction within the narrative of how the cheap labor of African slaves modernized the American economy; and the growing economic poverty of Black people who have been born, raised and identified as African Americans.

Historical Overview of African Enslavement

Edward E. Baptist's text, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, is the primary source for the argument that the African slave trade made a most significant contribution to the

Here, there is an unspoken contradiction within the narrative of how the cheap labor of African slaves modernized the American economy; and the growing economic poverty of Black people who have been born, raised and identified as African Americans.

development of the U. S. economy. Baptist's text is factual in its estimation of how the American economy was developed and modernized through the efforts of African slave labor. Against their wills, African slaves were kidnapped from their native land and forced to work the slaveowner's fields so that the white master might profit. The moment in which African slaves were forced to come to the United States for labor purposes, white privilege was birthed in the religious lath-ers of white supremacy and Black dehumanization.

Baptist's account of institutional slavery in the United States describes how the slave was motivated and inspired to be productive in their work. Beaten to an inch of their lives within the cruelty of physical torture, African slaves either died as the result of punishment or they were frightened into working at a fast pace. Economically, Baptist's argument that the business of slavery represented an early version

of capitalism is compelling because he explains how the slaveowner used his access to money to further his business and revive it. Hence, the purchasing and selling of slaves represented an economic transaction on behalf of the slaveowner. While I do not consider Baptist's account of slavery as his way of taking sides with Black Americans, I recognize Baptist's historical accuracy in telling the story of slavery in a way that it has never been told. It can be argued American slavery was more so a white economic doctrine than it was a white racist evil. Meanwhile at home, racism and poverty continue to be greatest problems of the twenty-first century in the United States. Due to the fact that institutional slavery carried harsh economic consequences for the African slave, Black Americans have suffered greatly over the last 400 years. As the faces at the bottom of the American economic well and victims of systemic racism, Black people have lived and died at the hands of economic poverty.

Theologian, J. Deotis Roberts, states that, "Slavery has an economic history." "Slavery also speaks volumes about human history." For Roberts, "The mix of ideologies among the colonists in the United States was to lead an uneasy conscience. On the one hand, there were Puritans who saw God's hand in the brutal institution. Their mission was to "civilize" and "Christianize" slaves, once they were assured that they had souls. But with a platonic dualism in mind they were able to separate the destiny of the body from that of the soul. With a strong Calvinist theology to support them, they could see God's judgment and power manifest in this evil system". The mixing of religion, economics and politics paved the way for the white slave owner to exploit the African slave for the purpose of prosperity. The ideological intertwining of the slave owners' God-talk and the dehumanizing treatment of the slave's body provided enough substance to keep the majority of slaves in line.

Roberts writes that, "With the false notions of religious piety, economic charity and communal civilization firmly in place, the evil intentions of the "Jesus-loving" white interpreters were masked in the sacredness of their Bibles. Consequently, the white slave owners and slave masters saw every African as a heathen, and their task was to stamp out all African cultural survivals, religious or otherwise. Their mission was to prepare the Africans for heavenly rewards, with no regard for fulfillment in this life." One of the major strategies of the slave owner "was the creation of "slave missions": white preachers funded and regulated by white denominations, would be sent to black congregations. The proslavery sermons that slave missions delivered were the South's interior version of

the arguments that were to be, beginning in the 1830s, increasingly projected at the region's exterior critics. Ministers developed a theological argument that claimed that Christianity justified slavery. They leaned on the apostle Paul, with his admonitions to servants to obey their masters. Increasingly, they also argued that a holistic view of the Bible showed that slavery was not sinful. In fact, they said, God had ordained that the Israelites, and white people in general, could enslave allegedly inferior "Hamatic" peoples (supposedly descended from Ham, one of Noah's sons), such as Africans, so long as they treated the latter with paternalistic goodness." In his book, *12 Million Black Voices*, Richard Wright summarizes how privilege influenced the mission of the white slaveowner:

And the Lords of the Land created and administered laws in the belief that their God ruled in Heaven, that He sanctioned this new day. After they had amassed mountains of wealth, the white master compared of our lives with the calm gentility of theirs and felt that they were truly the favored of God. The lyrical mantle

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of prayer and hymn, accordingly, justified and abetted our slavery; whenever we murmured against the degradation of the plantation, the Lords of the Land acted against us with whips and hate to protect their God-sanctioned civilization. For the white slave owner, their teaching the slave that slavery was ordained by God carried both religious and political implications. In addition to the fact that they believed in the oppressive power of their white God, the slave owner also wanted the Black slave to understand the politics of what it meant to be the property of white people. Inclusive to state laws, economic power, social favor and financial ownership, the political hegemony of the white slave owner juxtaposed their religious rite. The white slave owner believed that the material circumstances of their human dominance would influence what the Black slave believed about them and God.

According to Roberts, "The people who established the first colonies, in what is now the United States of America, were mainly British. They came for "errand

in the wilderness” and with “a Manifest Destiny.” Like the Spanish, who led the conquest in the heart of South America, they had mixed motives, both religious and political.” These mixed motives have negatively affected the life of Black people living in the United States. The theological and economic entanglement of institutional slavery foreshadowed a legacy of racial (human) privilege and economic hegemony on behalf of the white slaveowner. Privilege, defined as the ideological mixture of motives within the practice of structural evil, not only affected the way slaves viewed their white slaveowner, but it also went a long way in defining how the slaves viewed themselves. Privilege for white folk meant that it would never be possible for Black folk to have cultural and human identities—only a physical identity. White privilege guaranteed the humanity of white folk in such a way that it unequivocally denied the possibility and purpose of Black humanity. Privilege was created as a means to the goal of racial dominance and cheap/free labor that financially prospered generations of white folk.

White Privilege and Black Poverty

Theologically, if “the moral burden of history requires a more direct and far more candid acknowledgment” of slavery’s legacy, then it is imperative that we acknowledge the role of white privilege in guaranteeing the poverty of Black people in the United States. Without these historical acknowledgments, our theological reflections are misguided. It must be stated that the religious dimension of institutional slavery carried theological and economic implications. Even in their suffering, people of African descent have always believed in a Transcendent God as their source of spiritual strength. Put another way, religious belief has always been a part of the African worldview. As part of their religious worldview, many blacks believed that the end of slavery was God’s liberating on behalf of oppressed people. Sadly, what Black folk came to realize was that the end of slavery was not the end of Black poverty. For many Blacks, the experiences of slavery and poverty followed them into the Reconstruction era and the twentieth century.

In his critically-acclaimed text, *The Roots of Black Poverty: The Southern Plantation Economy after the Civil War*, Jay R. Mandle argues that because the slave plantation was the main institution of civilized life in the southern parts of the United States, plantation agriculture was a hegemonic force in southern development up until the early to mid 1930s. According to Mandle, the poverty which plantation agriculture kept Black folk in gave way to many blacks migrating North for greater employment opportunities in the

industries. Mandle’s systemic understanding of how white economic control gave way to Black poverty in the South is nuanced in the dehumanizing oppression of slavery and the expansion of American capitalism. With the understanding that Black folk did not benefit from the practice of capitalism on slave plantation, Mandle is convinced that economic poverty represented white America’s plan for Black people. According to Mandle, the residual roots of Black poverty were found in the African slave’s experience on the master’s plantation. Pointing back to Mandle’s Post-slavery argument, Baptist proclaims that,

Because productivity was now declining instead of rising, and because of the political-economic situation that the South’s white rulers inflicted upon their region in order to protect white power, the South sank into subordinate, colonial status within the national economy. Although many southerners wanted to develop a more diverse modern economy that went beyond cotton, for nearly a century after emancipation they failed to do so. Despite constant attempts to industrialize, the South could only offer natural resources and

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poverty-stricken laborers. It did not have enough local capital, whether of the financial or the well-educated human kind, and it could not develop it. Although a textile industry sprang up in the piedmont of the Carolinas and Virginia, and an iron and coal industry in Alabama, they offered mostly low-wage jobs. Non-textile industries suffered in the competition with more heavily capitalized northern industries, which literally rigged the rules—such as the price structures that corporations used to ensure that Pittsburgh’s steel would cost less than Birmingham’s.

Extractive industries, including coal mining and timber, devastated the landscape and depended on workforces oppressed with shocking violence. The continued small size and poverty of the nonagricultural working class also limited urban and middle-class development. Thus, in the 1930s, a lifetime after the Civil War, the majority of both black and white south-

erners were poor and worked on farms—often farms that they did not own.

These economic realities give credence to Black poverty being a theological problem. The outgrowth of a system of idolatry that forced slaves to work for low wages prospered the white slaveowner. This outgrowth of a system of idolatry has also kept Black people in poverty. Following slavery, Black people remained in deep poverty as their employment options were limited to farmwork and other forms of cheap labor. Here, the implication is that Black people have an economic history in the United States of America.

The history of poverty in the Black community is a history of social and economic deprivation for Black people. Black Americans have been intentionally deprived of economic resources. It is also a history that is ensconced in institutional slavery as the labor of African slaves developed the American economy, prospered the white slaveowner and put into motion an American capitalist practice that has ensured the poverty of Black people. When one thinks about the poverty of Black Americans, one must consider how the economic implications of institutional slavery formulate our perspectives on slave labor. The economic implications of institutional slavery formulate our perspectives on slave labor in four distinct ways:

1. They shed light on how African slavery in the United States dehumanized and tortured millions of Black people for economic and racial reasons.
2. They affirm that the totality of African slave labor developed and modernized the local, regional, national and world economies.
3. Within the exploitation of slave labor, they reference the practice of capitalism as the gateway to financial expansion and white economic hegemony.
4. They elucidate the fact that Black people's modernizing of the economy of the United States merits a particular type of economic treatment.

Repairing Systemic Black Poverty

Disappointingly, the economic treatment of modern-day, Black people does not line up with the work done by their ancestors in creating a profitable and valuable economy in the United States. Not only does the United States owe reparations to Black families for years of hard labor and infrastructural development, but there should also be financial relief in the form of economic resources and employment opportunities available for those inner-city Black families that suffer from economic poverty and post traumatic slave syndrome. Because of slavery's exploitation of Black people, there is an economic debt to be paid to the ancestors and families of the African slaves. While economic equality

is not the focus of Black Liberation Theology's treatment of institutional slavery within the conversation of Black poverty, the argument can be made that Black people in the United States are owed an economic debt of gratitude and financial support in the form of monetary services needed to live a decent life. In other words, America needs to repair what was done to African Americans. The call for monetary support presupposes the fact that white privilege has materialized itself in the form of white nationalism and economic hegemony. This makes it difficult for many white Americans to imagine how to do this.

Theologian Stephen G. Ray Jr., shows readers an approach to the issue of reparations that can result in material improvements in the lives of African Americans.

Shaping the reparations conversation proleptically makes its goals more realizable. Given the massive transfer of wealth capped by the *2017 Tax Bill*, there is simply not enough "public money" to give Black people what we are owed. There is, however, the possibility to restructure the way that the national economy functions. Specifically, we can affect the ways that it shapes local economies which give Black people some modicum of what the whole idea of reparations is about: namely, justice.

For Ray, "A significant problem for Black communities has been that the wealth accumulated in them, in spite of political and cultural barriers has been prey to economic forces whose sole purpose is the extraction of that wealth. Usually, these organizations parasitically attach themselves to those parts of Black economic life shaped by the forces of racism." This parasitic attaching of white racist organizations to the economic life of Black folk was birthed in institutional slavery. This is where white privilege has its roots.

The outgrowth of a system of idolatry that forced slaves to work for low wages prospered the white slave owner and kept Black Americans in poverty. Following slavery, Black people remained in deep poverty as their employment options were limited to farm work and other forms of cheap labor. Here, the implication is that Black people have an economic history in the United States of America. Due to the theological and economic entanglement of institutional slavery, religious scholars should have a greater understanding of how poverty in the Black community dehumanizes Black people and deprives them of economic resources. The theological and economic entanglement of slavery represents a form of structural evil in that both entities (Christian theological discourse and the systemic idolatry of economic gain) played a major role in destroying the livelihood of the slaves and their respective families.

This collaborative entanglement guaranteed the poverty of Black folk in the United States. When theology and economics are entangled for the institutional purpose of human oppression, more often than not, Black folk are the victims. Similar to the religious and political motives of the slaveowner, the conversation of theology and economics in the Black communities of the United States juxtaposes a particular type of Black economic condition. Poverty is the name of this Black economic condition. The history of Black people's residential presence on American soil confirms that a sizable amount of Black folk have lived and died in poverty.

Baptist and Roberts' statement on the labor of Black folk in terms of how it has helped to build the economic and physical infrastructure of the United States is compelling and true. The notion that Black people are still struggling racially, socially, politically and economically in the very place they were sent to build and develop is contradictory to the fact that just like all other races of people, Black Americans are human beings made in the image of God. But yet in many regions of the United States Black folk are still considered as less than human and unworthy of educational advancement and economic self-sufficiency. Where there is idolatry, heresy and racism, there is also Black poverty. Very similar to material and structural poverty, the idolatry of white nationalism is a theological issue for humanity and the Christian church. What this means is that white privilege has materialized itself in the form of white racism and economic hegemony.

So what does this particular treatment of institutional slavery mean for readers and the aims of The Angela Project? I will offer two perspectives. It is my understanding that The Angela Project aims to assist Black institutions and promote prosperity amongst Black and brown people, and in 2019 will commemorate the 400th anniversary of Black enslavement in the United States. In The Angela Project's promotion of modern-day Black advancement and its commemoration of Black enslavement in the United States, therein lies the need for theological transparency when it comes to discussing privilege and reparations. In other words, the deep-seeded, generational damage that is associated with Post Dramatic Slave Syndrome and other forms of human oppression needs to be unpacked in a systemic fashion. As Black Americans who are often time identified as sub-human and foreign immigrants, we must have a basic understanding of what institutional slavery in the United States did to us and our families. This essay is designed to demonstrate how torturous pain and the threat of death forced Black people to develop and modernize the American economy through cheap labor. And as a result of this infrastructural and economic modern-

ization while enduring the irreversible harm of living and dying in poverty, Black Americans are owed reparations and other forms of financial support for their hard work and free labor.

Secondly, because there is opportunity for corrective action toward justice and reconciliation in the areas of race and economics in the United States, academic scholars and religious leaders alike must lift up their voices for the sake of social awareness and moral agency. Put simply, we must take advantage of these sacred moments. The conversation of slavery in the United States is painful and liberating. It is a conversation that must be undertaken in the emerging spheres of theological holism, historical studies and the Christian church. Because white privilege still provokes and undergirds the rampant mistreatment of Black folk in the United States, we must consistently look to the hills of institutional slavery for a better understanding of how God-talk and money, historically speaking, were entangled for the evil purposes of using, abusing and destroying Black people. In this essay we see the ethical importance of advancing Black America and commemorating the human experiences that have made us who we are. ■

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But How Will We Repair? Practical Legal Approaches

By Chris Sanders

Will America ever look its sins of the past square in the eye? Or will we, as usual, just “move on,” as though moving forward and never looking back is a greater good? But how will we ever become whole unless we repent and repair?

Wholeness is a healthcare term. An analogy: The legacy of American slavery is an old, old cancer that has permeated the body politic, causing deep damage and incapacitation with occasional outbreaks of symptoms, all the while defying a cure and forcing occasional responses to those outbreaks of symptoms. The victim lies in intensive care long-term, mostly forgotten except in response to outbreaks.

By comparison and contrast, the body politic is responsive to the meningitis of attacks on the most recent of its immigrants and refugees. Whether DACA “Dreamers” or children separated from their parents at the southern border, they are young and were relatively healthy in the morning of the last presidential administration. But without immediate treatment, they could be dead by night. So, the entire healthcare system springs into crisis response, filing lawsuits and using lots of resources and goodwill to save the innocent patients.

Meanwhile, the long-suffering victims of the cancer of slavery lie in the next bed in intensive care, in view of the doctors and nurses scurrying around the little victims of Trump’s meningitis. Blacks are unnoticed and ignored, with only the occasional pitying glance, as though the immigrants have it worse and are more perfectly innocent. Meanwhile, the situation for the blacks gets worse as the years pass, with we outsiders blaming these victims for their plight.

What will it take to put black people on everyone’s list of the innocent persecuted? Why is our view of pure victimhood lacking? Why is this narrative messy and complicated, instead of simple and compelling? Must Trump deport black people for them to be included among the persecuted? What must government do that so overtly puts black people in the Other, that white people again clearly see blacks as persecuted? Must we put literal walls around black communities as gates to keep them out? What is it that can put blacks currently in the cross-hairs? Is an obviously disparate impact enough? Can we make people see with

new eyes so that the injustice is new and current once again?

Where does a sense of responsibility for the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow originate? A better question: Why do so many white people feel no sense of responsibility for the current situation founded upon past events? Do white people feel no “people-ness” under American individualism that we cause us to feel responsibility for what was done by white people in the past? Any white people? All white people? Are white Americans so individualistic as to avoid recognition of our own privilege?

Why don’t people white like me feel responsible? Is

Meanwhile, the long-suffering victims of the cancer of slavery lie in the next bed in intensive care, in view of the doctors and nurses scurrying around the little victims of Trump’s meningitis.

the fleeting recognition of massive responsibility so hard to dwell upon that we reject it? And in kneejerk rejection, we avoid it and then rationalize it away? Psychologically, that’s fear and flight. If so, how do we turn to, face and accept responsibility?

I don’t think that enough of us will. It’s too much to expect a mass change of heart, through education, evangelism or otherwise. Even a substantial minority isn’t enough to make change; the goodwill of some alone will not do it. Compassion alone will not do it. Liberal intentions will not do it. Activist drive alone will not do it. Prophetic witness alone will not do it. The willingness of even significant numbers of people with a variety of motives to offer improvement in order to achieve closure will not do it. None of these alone--or even all of these in concert -- will lead to major change. For years, decades and centuries, we are still not there.

To create space for change, there must be an inevitable reckoning with justice on the near horizon --- looming in the not-too-distant future. Another analogy:

The need for reparations is like a long-running dispute that finally ends up in litigation. To resolve the case through trial or settlement, the judge sets the case for trial. The judge orders the parties to try to settle. The trial date looms and hangs over the heads of the parties involved. The parties work against time under an order to attempt to settle before an inevitable decision arrives.

A date certain with destiny for reparations is essential to “tee up” the controversy. Otherwise, reparation languishes for decades more. And we don’t have decades left.

A certain date creates tension for everyone with a stake in the outcome. And almost everyone in America does. It puts the controversy on America’s agenda, and everyone with a stake in the outcome must get in motion, or be changed involuntarily. It’s a date with destiny.

How do we get to a date with destiny? I totally agree with the economic and political assessment of slavery as the foundation of American capitalism. Two hundred and forty-six years of slavery was horrendous and captures the imagination. But the biggest problem with legally challenging the horrors of the past is that they are in the past. Yes, the effects and results are felt in the present. But litigation requires live controversies, current damage and recent indignities and incidents.

Statutes of limitation built into federal, state and local law are archaically called statutes of repose. That’s repose -- as in sleep. Let the past stay in the past; you can’t bring it to court. Don’t try to visit the sins of the many-times-removed fathers (and mothers) upon the present generation. The courts aren’t for that. Bring it to the public eye through education and rhetoric. Bring it via direct action. Bring it to the private sector, politely asking for its good graces in conviction, repentance and compassionate goodwill. Bring it to government through partisan elections, budget allocation and legislation. But don’t bring it to court.

Some cases were brought to court in the early 2000s seeking massive reparation for U.S. slavery. The claims were against the corporate and banking interests built on slavery that thrive today from their vicious beginnings. The courts dismissed them as untimely: slavery began in 1619, 400 years ago, and ended in 1865, over 150 years ago. Most statutes of limitation require claims to be brought within six months, or one year, or two to five years, or at most 15 years. The courts opined that such claims were rhetorical and political, thus not proper live controversies, and dismissed them to that realm. International claims in other countries, despite very different legal systems, to make reparation for the Atlantic slave trade have

similarly ended.

The hard-handed message to us is, “Don’t bring claims to court, unless it’s for something that happened recently.”

Fine, we won’t seek repair from the earliest atrocities to the present quandary, back to front, earliest to latest. We won’t ask the law to fix the problem from its early roots to the present day. We’ll start with present controversies and imminent damage.

Go after mass incarceration, with two million imprisoned, way too many of them the descendants of American slaves. That’s a huge spike in American incarceration in the last 20 years as a result of cash bail requirements that fall hardest on the black poor. It is caused by the school to prison pipeline; caused by private prisons which are a lucrative business; caused by recent statutes, like the “three strikes” provisions of 1994; caused by the politics of winning elections by blaming “super-predators” in the mid-1990s. Mass incarceration is a metastasizing cancer that should be excised through litigation now.

We won’t ask the law to fix the problem from its early roots to the present day. We’ll start with present controversies and imminent danger.

Go after redlining, a nefarious practice begun under federal law in the 1930’s that is with us still today. Simmons College of Kentucky in Louisville is actively challenging redlining. America needs a national redlining center, and Simmons may be just the place to do launch it. (Simmons, a Historically Black College rising from decades of oppression, named after its second president, a former slave, would be a great institutional beneficiary of a history-driven remedy.) We need research papers and books; congressional hearings on current real estate and insurance practices; a change of heart toward mandating first-refusal rights in economic development for long-term communities; litigation under the Fair Housing Act of 1968 to break the disparate impact of redlining on black communities.

Here’s a live controversy that’s in court under the Fair Housing Act now. Look at the attack on black communities in the run-up to the subprime mortgage scandal that drove America into the Great Recession only 10 years ago. Some subprime mortgage lenders violated the 1968 Fair Housing Act by willfully targeting and/or disparately making predatory mortgage loans to minorities. They knew that those loans were

destined to fail, that they likely would result in default and then foreclosure. The loans thus denied the borrowers their housing, the only wealth most Americans ever have. That damaged the communities they live in.

Predatory lending places the financial interests of the lender far above the best interests of the borrower. In the mortgage lending context, these practices generate mortgage loans that are unsustainable and are destined to fail. They include:

- Targeted marketing of mortgage loans on unfavorable terms to vulnerable borrowers who are unsophisticated or without access to traditional credit sources;
- Steering credit-worthy borrowers to more costly loans;
- Incorporating unreasonable terms, excessive fees, pre-payment penalties and/or yield spread premiums to the loan broker (i.e. kick-backs);
- Basing loan values on inflated or fraudulent appraisals;
- Repeated refinancing of loans that do not benefit the borrower and often jeopardize the property (loan flipping);
- Lending based on the value of the real estate asset collateralizing the loan and not the borrowers' ability to repay ("equity-stripping"); and
- Inclusion of other loan terms and conditions that make it difficult or impossible for a borrower to reduce their indebtedness.

Subprime lenders had every incentive to make these loans, whether or not they were in the best interests of the borrowers and irrespective of the borrowers' ability to repay. The lenders earned more money to do so through higher fees, passing the risk of loss onto third parties by securing and selling the loans. Every participant in the subprime mortgage lending and securing process had enormous financial incentive.

Lenders obtained many willing borrowers by targeting their direct and wholesale lending activities to communities with high concentrations of minority homeowners. These are the quickest and easiest ways to make such loans, since those borrowers traditionally lack access to competitive credit choices. Subprime lenders further enabled the process with willfully bad

underwriting and falsification of appraisals.

The Fair Housing Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601 et seq. protects communities (and the individuals residing in them) from discriminatory acts, policies and/or practices that make housing unavailable or establish terms and conditions in real estate-related transactions, including real estate financing activities, that discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity or gender. Sections 804 and 805 of the Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 3604 and 3605, respectively, are designed to prevent predatory lending practices using "reverse redlining" – the targeting of an area based on its socio-economic or racial make-up – or other discriminatory practices.

There are cases active around the country now to combat reverse redlining. Cities and counties chockfull of vacant and abandoned properties have sued major Wall Street financial firms for the targeting of just a dozen years ago. Since foreclosures in black communities are still active, the cases are timely. Communities paying for police and fire protection, property maintenance and more are pursuing their rights. Cities are

Mass incarceration, redlining and more are just a few ideas for "front-to-back" litigation challenges to the legacy of North American slavery.

entitled to the many millions of dollars sucked away from middle America to Wall Street coffers.

Mass incarceration, redlining and more are just a few ideas for "front-to-back" litigation challenges to the legacy of North American slavery. The sins visited upon God's children today with their teeth set on edge by the sour wine of years of brutal practice by the generations before must be addressed. Seek a reckoning now. ■

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The Elephant in the Room: Examining the Impact of Systemic White Supremacy on the Work of Racial Reconciliation

By Carey Ruiz

“Racism is the water, not the shark” -Drego Little (2017)

In yet another racist incident evaluated in the court of social media, this past January, a white, teenage boy from an elite private school, wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat, confronted a Native American while the teen’s friends laughed and chanted. While longer versions of the initial video indicated a much more complex interaction between those involved, the underlying sentiment of white entitlement and superiority did not seem to change. However, at once, conversation about dynamics of racism, ethnocentrism, and divisiveness became reduced to whether or not the kid featured in the video was racist or a victim of racism. In a twist of irony, the incident occurred over the Martin Luther King holiday and while social media was saturated with King’s quotes of love, peace, and social justice, it was also peppered with calls for “seeing both sides of the situation” and “getting all the information” before ruining the lives of the innocent teenage boys who were involved in the incident. And yet again, what was lacking was any regard to a broader conversation about why people of color might find the incident offensive in the first place.

I am a white woman, but I am always struck by the tendency of many white people to try and “explain away” incidents punctuated by racism. Many white people profess egalitarian attitudes but feel ambivalent when it comes to social programs aimed at improving the life chances of those who are not white (Gilens 2000; Neubeck and Cazenave 2001; Biernat and Crandall 1999). Further, they are at times quick to justify an incident with racial overtones as something other than racist (DiAngelo 2018). Many white people have a very limited understanding of racism, perceiving it as something personal, as an inherent defect within an individual. This perception blinds people to structural relationships that shape race prejudice and racism. Racism and white supremacy are structural phenomena. (DiAngelo 2018). They are interwoven into our cultural tapestry; they are the background noise of our social institutions. Still, while most people abhor racism on a case-by-case basis, they fail

to see its structural pervasiveness. In this essay, I am going to discuss the way in which white supremacy and racism are created through social structure. Focusing solely on personal prejudice and intention as the only impediments to race relations is not enough when it comes to racial reconciliation. This essay will briefly describe some examples of the social construction of white supremacy and racism and how these create obstacles when it comes to racial reconciliation.

The Social Construction of Race, Racism and White Supremacy

Focusing solely on personal prejudice and intention as the only impediments to race relations is not enough when it comes to racial reconciliation.

Social scientists have long been aware of the relationship between individual perception and social structure. We gain knowledge about the world and we impart knowledge to others through social contact and our social relationships (Mead 1934). It is this knowledge- what Mead (1934), calls the knowledge of the “generalized other”- that enables an individual to engage in abstract thought, using an awareness of others’ attitudes to shape one’s individual response. Knowledge of the generalized other comes from two types of social relationships. The first relationship is that which an individual directly belongs and of which has firsthand knowledge; the second, however, is that social group to which an individual is indirectly associated (Mead 1934). Participation in both types of social relationships allows an individual unlimited access to knowledge about different classes, subcultures, and group; thereby, allowing many, if not all, people in a community the opportunity to engage in a social relationship of one type or another. As we engage in these social relationships, however, we simultaneously create meaning around those interac-

tions (Mead 1934). Meanings manifest for individuals in a way that both connects them to the larger society while allowing a person room for individuality. These meanings also help us create an understanding about our society.

Specific racial meanings can and do change over time. What remains, what seems a permanent fixture in U.S. society, however, is a system of racial formation based on white supremacy (Omi and Winant 1989). For example, the Civil Rights Act abolished much of the old Jim Crow caste system in the United States (along with many blatant forms of racism on individual, religious, and academic levels). However, Michelle Alexander (2010) argues that the mass incarceration of black and Latino men created a new caste that is no less racialized. Moreover, in that such a creation has enabled certain political interests to achieve its goals, it has been deliberate and to the benefit of a white status quo. Alexander (2010) outlines her argument this way: Post Civil Rights Era achievements led to the dissolution of blatant discrimination as Jim Crow laws were overturned. As more and more black people gained rights and became increasingly politically mobile, economic injustices began to come under scrutiny. Multiracial coalitions began to form and increasing criticism toward the status quo grew. Those interested in upholding the old world order had to find new ways of pursuing their political interests. Overt discriminatory language was no longer politically correct and using race as a justification for discrimination is now illegal. A new way of discussing “otherness” in political discourse emerged by framing it as an interest in “law and order,” and “otherness” was framed under the context of criminality with the criminals in question having a particular racial look (Alexander 2010: 40).

As Alexander’s research on race and the criminal justice system shows, race and ideas about race are created through social structure. Race is not biology but rather a way in which people organize the world around them. Race provides context and shapes meaning in our interactions with one another. Race helps provide a group identity and provides “cues” about other differences (Omi and Winant 1989). It affects us as individuals, and we have an individual response and values; however, the construction of meaning around race is entirely social, driven by societal, economic, and political forces that have shaped racial meaning over time to the advantage of white groups (Omi and Winant 1989). Since racism is a social construct, individuals take their cues regarding the social acceptance of certain racialized behaviors from society, particularly, the groups to which they belong. While we gain

meaning through a process of interaction with others and with society, this interaction generally occurs in groups. Groups maintain social order. They are integral to society running smoothly. Group belonging, to whatever group we belong, provides all of us with a sense of identity. However, while a group is composed of individuals, its existence is not contingent on particular individuals. Groups develop their own boundaries, identities, and ways of doing things, and even its own identity so that individual identity is often directly linked with group identity (Simmel 1898). This helps explain why many people (who identify as “non-racist”) will act in ways that defend the status quo (to the detriment of other races) if it suits their group interests (Wellman 1993).

Racism is Beyond Individual Prejudice

Few people are comfortable being called a racist; nor do many people want to belong to a group that is considered racist. George W. Bush reported that Kanye West calling him a racist was an “all-time low” point in his presidency (Chappell 2010). Of course, one

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could point to actions or inactions taken by Bush, such as the Iraq war and/or the delay in aid to Hurricane Katrina victims, as true low points. However, even when Bush was pushed on those very points in an interview, he still maintained that the lowest point of his presidency was being called a racist (Chappell 2010). With this revelation, the former president is illustrating an awareness of the generalized other in alluding to a cultural condition in the United States: perceptions of racism are worse than actual racism. Our awareness of the generalized other (Mead 1934) informs us that in modern society, overt racism is distasteful. Having an identity of racism is bad; whereas actual racist events or situations tend to be morally negotiable (i.e.: George Zimmerman had a right to defend himself; Tamir Rice’s toy gun looked real). In an attempt to avoid giving someone a label of “racist,” our culture is willing to ignore the racism embedded in a social situation.

Racism and white supremacy exists externally to the individual (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Or as DiAngelo

(2018) points out, white supremacy describes our culture, not an individual mindset. In a culture that has been built on and permeated with white supremacy (Anderson 2016; Alexander 2012; Omi and Winant 1989), the knowledge one gains about the world around is predominantly white supremacist. Moreover, race itself is what Omi and Winant (1989) call a socio-historical concept, indicating that social and cultural understandings of race have evolved over time and with a substantial amount of influence by social institutions. As Carol Anderson (2016) suggests in her pivotal work, that with every gain made by people of color, white obstruction has impeded the progress. A racial hierarchy has always existed in U.S. society in some capacity (Anderson 2016; Omi and Winant 1989). At a basic level racism has not changed but rather changing social constructs are used to justify it (Omi and Winant 1989). In other words, it is the same song being played to a different tune. However, the constant change around the meaning of a “racialized situation” does allow people the opportunity to ignore the racism that accentuates the situation (as what occurred during the exchange between the Native American protestors and the group of teens at the Washington Mall last January). So then racism and white supremacy are preserved through transformation of meaning around a social situation. These transformations assist in allowing white denial of white supremacy. Those interested in racial reconciliation must first recognize that racism in this country has received moral, legal, and intellectual support from its inception. Social structures implement racist policies, with little pushback from white people in general. Moreover, structural support for white supremacy has not changed, at least not much. As DiAngelo (2018: 129) discusses, because our culture is embedded with a white supremacist world view, the question of racism and white superiority is not a question of “if” it exists but rather “how” it exists. In this regard, racism then becomes a broader conversation as opposed to “you either are or you’re not.” The focus must be on the social patterns that perpetuate white supremacy (DiAngelo 2018), and the way in which those patterns are recreated in our interactions with other individuals, as well as our social institutions. These white supremacist patterns impact the way in which we interpret and think about the world around us. Despite our personal motivations and intentions, we simply cannot remove ourselves from the patterns and messages that permeate society, especially if we are unwilling to acknowledge them.

Because race, racism, white superiority, etc., exists external to individuals, to be intentional about race

reconciliation is to acknowledge that racial reconciliation exists outside the social norm (DiAngelo 2018). We deny the normalcy of racial hierarchy because we do not wish to identify with a group who benefits from it. As previously stated, we develop our understanding about our social world through our interactions with others. We interpret and reinterpret social situations and create meaning around them. Whiteness becomes the norm when our world itself is predominantly white. Further, when we receive cultural messages through school, religion, the media, etc., that contributions of people of color have been minimal, it creates a cultural narrative that is white supremacist, despite the personal opinions individuals may have. One’s own moral code can tell us to shun ideas of white superiority and racism; however, we should not deny its existence in the world around us. White identity is formed in a world in which white people are the standard. A mindset of “treating everyone equally” is not enough to overcome the lifelong socialization in a culture of racial hierarchy in which whiteness and white

Those interested in racial reconciliation must first recognize that racism in this country has received moral, legal, and intellectual support from its inception.

superiority are the norm, and all else is exceptional (DiAngelo 2018). To be white engaged in racial reconciliation means one must constantly check oneself against the privilege of being white in a white dominated culture.

Racial Reconciliation

Racial Reconciliation in which white supremacy is the norm means one must be willing to accept social pushback from violating such norms (DiAngelo 2018). Beverly Tatum (1997) illustrates this point in her work on identity when she describes the reactions of her white students to a white antiracist activist who spoke to her class. Many of the white students were concerned about losing friends or significant others if they spoke up and sought advice from the activist regarding what to do when they found themselves in situations in which they encountered racism. Nonracist identity becomes a negotiation with what is considered acceptable and unacceptable, in not only mixed race company, but same race company, as well. Oftentimes

individuals will avoid engaging in reconciliatory work not only out of concern about making a racial “mis-step” with someone of a different race but also a fear of being perceived too radical, liberal, muck-raking, etc., by individuals of the same race. Our awareness of general social attitudes inform us that in modern society, overt racism is distasteful. Most people are willing to recognize and express disapproval with regard to abstract or extreme situations of white supremacy. However, when discussions question white privileged position, such as whether or not the calls of Black Lives Matter are legitimate or whether or not Kaepernick should kneel, accusations of divisiveness abound. True racial reconciliation involves listening to the critique of white supremacist culture with empathetic understanding, not a reflexive reaction to a perception of an “attack” on a particular race. When it comes to speaking about racism, the onus is typically on people of color. People of color are expected to take risks when it comes to sharing their experiences and opinions; white people should also be willing to take risks when it comes to speaking out against racism and white supremacy.

Moreover, it is not fair to expect people of color to share their racial experiences without first building trust (DiAngelo 2018). Trust does not happen simply because the dominant group wants it to. In addition, social contact must be something other than superficial in order to diminish racist ideology (Allport 1944). Research suggests that a substantial indicator of diminished racism is having witnessed a racist event and becoming upset by it. In addition, recognizing racism is mediated by whether or not a respondent had a close friendship or dating relationship with someone of a different race. Therefore, it is not merely an awareness of what racism or white supremacy is, or even knowing individuals of other races, that diminishes racist ideology, but rather when it “becomes personal” (Ruiz 2012). Inter-racial interactions are much more impactful in racial reconciliation than peoples’ professed attitudes toward other races (Ruiz 2012). However, such interactions and relationships should be authentic. Building genuine relationships means more than simply “adding and stirring” people of color into your church, organization, projects, etc. Allport’s (1944) contact hypothesis suggests that it is not that mere contact that reduces racism, but rather the meaning contained within the contact. Forging deeper relationships with people of different races has the potential to yield real social change when it comes to addressing racial hierarchy in our society, but only if the relationships are authentic. Authentic relationships require openness, and a willingness to risk discomfort. Moreover,

to be authentic requires all white people to take ownership of white supremacist ideology embedded in our culture. The goal for white people interested in racial reconciliation is not to convince others that one is “not a racist;” the goal is to disrupt white supremacy (DiAngelo 2018).

Conclusion

As I think about the aims of **The Angela Project**, I want to offer some concluding reflections for readers. Real relationships require effort. Those interested in racial reconciliation should enter into spaces where racial reconciliatory work is already being done rather than expect the work to come to them. Oftentimes, there is an expectation that inviting people of color to join in the projects of white people will be sufficient. Or, white people avoid racial reconciliatory work altogether. When white people avoid spaces in which they are a minority, or where white supremacy will be acknowledged and addressed, in an effort to maintain control and/or avoid discomfort, this cre-

Moreover, it is not fair to expect people of color to share their racial experiences without first building trust.

ates inauthentic dialogue between racial groups and perpetuate the misinterpretations regarding racism and white supremacy that abound in our culture (DiAngelo 2018). If racial reconciliation exists outside social and cultural norms, going against those norms will feel unfamiliar. There will be pushback; or, one may say or do something racially insensitive. That does not mean, however, one should be unwilling to engage in the work. There is a dialectical relationship between our understanding and experience of our social world and not only our personal attitudes toward racism, but whether or not we will engage in action to help diminish white supremacy in general society—thereby changing our social climate. Individuals need to have a deeper meaning or interpretation of the situation in order for racism to diminish. Therefore, if we are interested in creating real change, white people must be willing to enter into spaces and engage in dialogue that may not be comfortable. When we, as white people are confronted with white supremacy, we should lean into the discomfort rather than attempt to diminish or justify it. No one individual created white supremacy; however, individuals can begin to dismantle it. First, we must acknowledge its existence and its impact

on all our lives. As is apparent through **The Angela Project**, we in the United States have come a long way with regard to racial reconciliation, but we still have a long way to go. In the end, that is the gift **The Angela Project** gives the church, the opportunity for us to tell and then come to know the truth. For in knowing the truth, “we shall be made free” (John 8:32). ■

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Philanthropic Tokenism Today

by Chris Caldwell

Hollywood will never make a movie about Curt Flood, the black man who arguably did more for professional African American athletes than Jackie Robinson. In 1969, Flood, having fulfilled his contract as an all-star centerfielder with the St. Louis Cardinals, defied Major League Baseball's "Reserve Clause" by demanding the right to negotiate with any team he chose. He lost a year's salary, was largely blackballed by baseball, but ultimately opened the door to free agency as we know it in professional sports. Few know his story, while everyone knows the powerful story of Jackie Robinson. Sadly, more people know the name of Branch Rickey (the white man who hired Robinson) than know the name of Curt Flood. That's a telling little piece of information.

Permit me a moment more on the history of my favorite baseball team. (And God's favorite baseball team, too. "Cardinals." Think about it.) Few know the story of the 1964 champions from St. Louis. As David Halberstam tells in his wonderful book, *October 1964*, baseball maintained a firm unwritten policy of tokenism for 17 years -- 17 years after Robinson joined the league. Yes, teams could have one black player, maybe two; but for 17 years, teams remained almost completely white by design. The 1964 Cardinals broke ranks and fielded a team featuring not only Curt Flood, but also fellow black players Bob Gibson, Lou Brock and Bill White. Their team defeated the Yankees in the 1964 World Series, and the days of tokenism were over in Major League Baseball. All teams were forced to either hire on the basis of talent, regardless of race, or fail to successfully compete with teams that did, like the Cardinals.

Why do we remember Robinson and forget Flood? Why do we remember the man who broke down the color line, but forget the team that finally brought real integration to baseball? For me, the answer is the powerful hold tokenism still has on the white mind. When it comes to race, we love stories of black exceptionalism and personal agency because those stories inoculate us against the urgent need for conversations about the deeper issues of structural racism and the ongoing economic oppression of American descendants of slaves.

Jackie Robinson opened the door. But for 17 years after his groundbreaking integration of professional baseball, baseball swung the door open just a crack for only one or two people at a time. Robinson is remem-

bered as a smiling gentleman who rose above the ugliness and vitriol he endured from white bigots both in the stands and on the field. But it was a righteously angry black man, Curt Flood, armed with a good lawyer, who brought structural change to professional baseball. And it was black right-handed fastball pitcher Bob Gibson, who notoriously threw at the head of any player who disrespected him, who led the Cardinals to the championship. Again, Hollywood is never going to make a movie about Curt Flood or Bob Gibson although I wish they would. Why? Because although Hollywood chooses more often than not to help theater audiences escape reality, it is easier for viewers to feel good about Jackie Robinson than it is to face the damning statistics and realities of the sordid history of "America's Pastime." That sordid history reflects so

"The Green Mile," and "The Green Book" play well with white audiences. They enable us to face racism while at the same time we can celebrate a noble white person helping to save the day.

much in American society that cries out for reparations and structural change.

Don't get me wrong, Jackie Robinson was a great man, and his story is compelling and important. If you drive down Main Street in Louisville, you will see a huge photo of Louisville's Pee Wee Reese with his arm around his black teammate Robinson. The photo celebrates diversity, as it should. It also celebrates a white person who helped to make it happen for a black person. We whites like to celebrate any positive role one of us may have had -- a bit too much, I think. Stories like Robinson's, stories like Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and movies such as "Hidden Figures," "The Help," "The Green Mile," and "The Green Book" play well with white audiences. They enable us to face racism while at the same time we can celebrate a noble white person helping to save the day. Also note that none of these stories depict heroes who took on oppressive structures in society beyond a personal level. They are not the stories of reformers really attacking the roots of the economic racism that persists

today. They are stories of black exceptionalism and their white friends. They are movies we white people can enjoy while at the same time living in a large wealthy neighborhood with one black family in it.

Some would say my take on movie tokenism is too harsh. Don't these strong black characters push back against injustice? Don't they (with the help of their white champions) push their way through the front door and into the dining room? Yes, they do. They find their way to the tea and sandwiches, as it were, but the money's not in the dining room. The safe is in the back of the house, and the tea and sandwiches, while appreciated, aren't the real issue.

Consider how tokenism masks real issues by thinking for a moment about, well, tokens. The genius of tokenism is that it influences us precisely because we fail to notice it. Consider the "free" tokens children get at pizza parlor game rooms. These pennies from heaven just appear at the end of the birthday party. It's amazing! Free stuff. And if we play our tokens right, we get even more valuable free stuff, such as plastic alligators. To the child, it's a wonder; but to the parent, it's a racket. It's 75 cents of free entertainment and kitsch in return for Mom or Dad paying \$10 dollars for \$2 dollars-worth of food.

So it is with tokenism and race. Token programs, token seats at the table, token characters -- all of which make us feel better about race, but which also, at one level at least, make it less likely that we will deal with the damnable ongoing effects of deep structural racism. So am I opposed to stories about Jackie Robinson and "The Green Book"? No. But my point is that we must not let such entertaining stories be destinations. They are points along the way; but if we don't move beyond such points, we are left feeling better than we should about ourselves as whites, and American descendants of slaves are left on the current road to negative wealth as a people.

In other words, we do well to see the danger in the overt racism of Donald Trump and the white nationalists who follow him. But it behooves us also to see the dangers in an inconsequential liberalism that feels too good about itself. In the prescient words of Benjamin Mays, in his final address to Morehouse College students in 1967:

The Negro's battle for justice and equality in the future will be against the subtlety of our "liberal friends" who will wine and dine us in the swankiest hotels, work with us, and still discriminate against us when it comes to money and power. The battle must be won because, for a long time, the wealth of this nation will be in the hands of white Americans and not Negroes. The abolition of economic, political, and philanthropic

discrimination is the first order of the day, not for the good of Negroes alone, but for the nation as a whole. (*Dr. Benjamin E. Mays Speaks*, p.171-172).

The 1967 version of Benjamin Mays knew 2019 white liberals better than most 2019 white liberals know ourselves. We live in a time when white liberals feel better than we should about racial progress, even as we overlook profound racial injustices. My city, Louisville, Kentucky, is a case in point. Louisville is a moderately liberal city that prides itself on its compassion and inclusivity, while at the same time being one of the most racially segregated cities in America. Let me offer two examples of my city's inability to see beyond its own tokenism.

First, consider the Filson Historical Society which exists to document and teach the history of Louisville. The Filson, as we call this institution celebrating black history, exudes a moderate liberalism befitting its Louisville home. It has a solid and growing collection of local African American materials and, during Black History Month, it had some fine lectures that drew

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small crowds to its lecture hall downtown. So far, so good. But the big, high profile lectures, with authors flown in for the occasion, are held in overwhelmingly white east Louisville, where I live. Three recent lectures drew around 300 people each, around 10 times the number who saw the Black History lectures downtown. The topics were: 1. Women who worked as code breakers during World War II; 2. Dwight Eisenhower; 3. "The Heirs of the Founders," about the generation of leaders after American founders. All of these are worthy topics that would be of interest to American descendants of slaves. Women code breakers? Consider "Hidden Figures" and its popularity as a movie. Eisenhower? Consider the high percentage of African Americans in our military. Founders? Consider "Hamilton." Yet, here's the thing: About 900 people attended these three events combined; but as I searched the crowd each time for black people, I believe I saw one black person at one event. That's 0.1% in a city that is 22% African American. My point is not that the Filson is a discriminatory organization. My point is that I see my fellow whites come and

go from these events unfazed by the way the crowd reflects the deep economic and housing discrimination that persists in our city in 2019. The Filson and we whites assume all is well due to some progressive steps. But we are far too comfortable with the segregated status quo that reigns in our city.

Or consider one Louisville example of the “philanthropic discrimination” Benjamin Mays mentioned. We have in our city The West End School, a small private school in the heart of overwhelmingly black west Louisville. It educates a small number of elementary and middle school young men. Its website states that its graduates have received \$2 million dollars in scholarships to “many of the top private schools in the state.” Founded in 2005 in a truly selfless act of service by someone who walked away from a high paying job at a private school, the school is meeting an important need. One of my students at Simmons College had a son who attended The West End School, and the father is very thankful for all the school did for his son. I appreciate the school and wish it all the best.

Consider, however, the school’s limited mission and limited effect. Millions of dollars have poured in, surely almost all of it from outside west Louisville. These dollars are funding a white-led school to serve black kids, and the statistic they cite to measure success is scholarships to move their students into exclusive white private schools. It’s not wrong for parents to want this expensive and exclusive education for their kids. High school degrees from such schools can provide a key step in helping a small number of young black men to gain the credentials needed to thrive in the dominant white culture that is our economic and cultural engine.

But what troubles me is the degree to which I’ve seen white Louisvillians view The West End School as some sort of magic remedy. For 15 years I was pastor to a wealthy white congregation in east Louisville. There I tried to draw attention to the racial and economic injustices in our city, especially the plight of west Louisville and its overwhelmingly black population. Along the way, I lost track of the number of times my parishioners responded to my preaching on this topic by dropping the name of The West End School and their support of it. God bless the West End School and the 50 or so students it helps. But what about the tens of thousands in west Louisville who attend public schools? What about the underprepared students from west Louisville who graduate each year, students

I see consistently showing up in my classrooms at Simmons College of Kentucky? The West End School is helicoptering kids out of the devastation that is west Louisville, and white people flock to support their efforts, but what about the deep economic and racial issues that created and sustain the devastation?

For a few semesters, I taught Introduction to Sociology at Simmons, covering the main two schools of thought in sociology. The first is the functionalist approach of Durkheim which understands society as an organism where life prospects rise by improving the opportunities for people to exercise their personal agency within the system. Functionalism can lead to social change, but is the more conservative school of thought. The second, juxtaposed against Durkheim, is the conflict theory espoused by Karl Marx and others. This branch of sociology (with roots in Marx’s thought, but is not Marxist) assumes society is a competition, not simply an organism. I helped my students to see the power in both schools of thought while I steered them more in the direction of conflict theory. “If you want to know how a society works,” I would say, “Follow the power, and especially follow the money.”

Curt Flood followed the money and brought his lawyer with him. His is not a feel-good story for white people. But his story demonstrates how to bring deep and lasting structural change to an inherently discriminatory system. Reparations are not a feel-good topic for white people. Reparations move us beyond tokens of cordiality in the front living room to where the money is, at the back of the house where only close friends and family may enter.

Kevin Costner, the frequent white hero character in movies, will undoubtedly never be cast in a more accurate movie that lays bare what was done and what is still being done to black descendants of American slaves in America. But feel-good movies, tea and sandwiches, and token changes are not enough. Not by a long shot. My students don’t need Americans to watch “Remember the Titans.” They need a level playing field, and a fair chance to show the world their capacities. They need and deserve real investment in black-led institutions and in black communities. Tokens are not solutions. ■

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Epilogue

By Dr. Lewis Brogdon

For nearly 400 years, the church in America has struggled and mostly failed in its attempts to address racism within its own ranks and to give witness to the gospel in a way that significantly improves race relations. My thinking along these lines is influenced by a question from Howard Thurman raised back in 1949:

Why is it that Christianity seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race, religion and national origin? Is this impotency due to a betrayal of the genius of the religion, or is it due to its basic weakness in the religion itself? The question is searching, for the dramatic demonstration of the impotency in dealing with the issue is underscored by its own inability to cope with it within its own fellowship.¹

For years, I have thought about the question raised by Thurman and how best to answer it. I have wondered why Christians in America are so stymied and impotent in dealing with racism.² When I use the word “racism” here, I am not talking about individual prejudice against blacks, but rather systemic racism that is a product of the legal enslavement of millions of Africans for over 240 years followed by over a century of legal discrimination.

I see two big problems that contribute to the impotence of Christianity in America regarding race and racism. First, white Christians continue to think racism is synonymous with prejudice. Many sectors of white Christianity still do not understand how to think of racism as a form of systemic injustice. Second, because of their lack of understanding about systemic racism, many white Christians have not grappled earnestly with the benefits and privileges centuries of slavery and racism have given them.

As a result, much of the theology and preaching suggesting solutions to the material impact of this history of injustice on black Americans mostly revolves around using the language of reconciliation. Then, while ignoring or misunderstanding the effects of history while offering apologies or confessions, nothing is offered to address the damage done. There is rarely, if ever, substantive theological reflection and solutions that involve repairing the effects of this history.

This is why **The Angela Project** is so prophetic and important for the church. It represents the first time

that multiple Baptist denominations have carefully examined our nation’s history of slavery and discrimination with the intention of repairing what was done. This three-year process of examination is a critical first step in a new four-hundred-year trajectory in race relations. Leaders of **The Angela Project**, such as the Rev. Dr. Kevin Cosby, who envisioned this, along with the Rev. Joe Phelps, the Rev. Dr. Suzii Paynter and members of *EmpowerWest* in the city of Louisville, challenge Baptist churches and the nation to chart a new path. After all, it was the church that taught the country how to divide over and justify injustice. So it is the church’s responsibility to show the country how to unite over justice.

As a scholar who is a part of this movement, I have

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sought to help the church understand its role in this history in supporting the enslavement and disenfranchisement of African Americans.

The church’s support of this injustice has come in the form of using the Bible to defend slavery.³ The more pernicious forms of support come in the form of neglect and the refusal of white churches and theological institutions to assess its complicity in the suffering of African Americans and the ways their support benefited white Americans.⁴ Concomitantly, they have also failed to develop theologies and methods of reading the biblical text that model ways to repair what was done. I am honored to play a small role in this great movement and to offer my gifts as a scholar of the Bible and religion to unpack this history and articulate a biblical and Christian response to the history of slavery and racism.

The theme of this special edition of *Christian Ethics Today* is **Privilege and Reparations**. The essays aimed to teach readers how to think biblically and theologically about two seminal issues related to the history

of slavery and racism: privilege and reparations. The reason for the dual focus is because understanding privilege and how to respond to it are the keys to moving the church to reparative measures in the coming decades. Dr. Patrick Anderson and I reached out to scholars, pastors, and other Christian leaders to write essays that unpack privilege and reparation for readers. We also gathered essays that stress the absolute importance of understanding systemic racism and its manifold implications before wading into justice and reconciliatory work. Too often, “well-meaning Christians” have been too quick to rush toward forms of reconciliation that do not take seriously the systemic and ongoing nature of racial disadvantage and an accompanying unwillingness to relinquish the advantages slavery and legal discrimination affords white Americans. In other words, they want reconciliation without changing the system that injures and exploits people of color and reconciliation without giving up white privilege. Contributors stress the hard work that white Americans must take up and the important work of addressing racial disadvantage by doing justice as a precondition for racial reconciliation.

I am sure readers are challenged not only by the connections these writers make to the painful history of slavery and racism, they will be challenged to think about privilege and reparations in a Eucharistic sense. In fact, The Angela Project is a thoroughly Eucharistic project during a time of increasing racial polarization and violence. The words of Paul spoken to a church where there were divisions and people being excluded by fellow believers ring true of our time today. Paul responded by calling the Corinthians to the Eucharist, to the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of

you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:23-32, NIV).

What Paul wanted the Corinthians to see was the connection between Christ’s body and the people around them. Because the Corinthians failed to see this important connection, they were comfortable excluding and mistreating one another, which was why there was weakness, sickness, and death among them. Think about this. Their own actions were bringing condemnation on themselves and releasing sickness in the body they were a part of as believers. Paul called it “sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (11:27). Their sin was making them weak, sick, and deathly. Therefore, by lifting up the command to partake of the bread and the cup and to remember the example of Jesus, Paul called the Corinthians to *self-examination in relation to the other* as the primary expression of a Eucharistic and “self-giving” faith. That is exactly what American Christianity needs today and what **The Angela Project** is calling for in the coming years. We cannot number the ways we are making our churches and this country weak, sick, and deathly by our intentional mistreatment of people of color, members of Christ’s body. These essays call for “self-examination in relation to them” and lay before us opportunities to give up privilege, repair damage done, and move toward the realization of healing and reconciliation.

Our hope and our prayer is that God will use these essays and **The Angela Project** to give witness to God’s vision of justice and righteousness for the world and the gospel of Jesus the Christ that liberates the oppressed and transforms the world. ■

1 Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), preface.

2 Lewis Brogdon, *Same Name Different God? White Christianity and the Question of Idolatry* (Unpublished Manuscript), 15-16.

3 Lewis Brogdon, *A Companion to Philemon* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018); “Reimagining Koinonia: Confronting the Legacy and Logic of Racism by Reinterpreting Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” in *Ex Audito* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 27-48; *Not a Slave but a Brother: An African American Reading of Paul’s Letter to Philemon* (Germany: Scholars Press, 2013).

4 Lewis Brogdon, *Same Name Different God?*

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