Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics Volume 30, Number 3 Aggregate Issue 117 Summer 2020

In Memorium . . .

Christian Ethics Today grieves the passing of our long-time friend and board member, Babs Baugh, even as we also celebrate a life well-lived. Babs has graced our presence with her boundless energy, great humor, unfailing grace and charm. Her ready, infectious laughter and positive attitude have left us with indelible feelings of love for her. She loved music and good company. I cannot think of her without smiling. She was a great friend.

She followed in her parents' footsteps, living up to the favorite Bible passage from Micah 6: "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." She did all of that, and her legacy is one of blessing that will live for a long time.

The influence of her personal generosity and her stewardship of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation has been a great support for *Christian Ethics Today*. Babs' daughters, Jackie and Julie, continue the work to support the Foundation's values and priorities first established by their grandparents, Eula Mae and John Baugh. The generosity of this family has, over the years, (and even now), been invested in the work of alleviating the injustices of hunger and disadvantage. They have provided support for hundreds of ministers and laypersons who were nurtured through Passport Camps; they have enriched the education of university and seminary students, enabled voices for truth and justice and supported progressive Christian values, and the list goes on.

We love you, Babs, and we will miss you. But we also celebrate your life and are happy that you live now without the pain and aggravation of disease. We are better because you lived among us.

Patrick Anderson, editor

Reading John Claypool: His First, Shortest, Most Formative and Influential Book, Tracks of a Fellow Struggler

By Walter B. Shurden

John R. Claypool, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler: How to Handle Grief* (Dallas: Word Publishing Co., 1974, 104pp.)

John R. Claypool, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler: Living and Growing Through Grief* (New Orleans, LA, 70182, P. O. Box 8369, Insight Press, 1995, 98pp).

In my judgment, the two most prominent and popular preacher/theologians among white, progressive Baptists of the South in the last half of the 20th century were Carlyle Marney (8 July 1916 - 3 July 1978) and John R. Claypool (15 Dec 1930 - 3 Sept 2005). Both were exceptional preachers. Marney was a "character." Marney stories, filled with both his witticisms and his wisdom, abound. And it is probably accurate to say that Marney was more popular among progressive preachers than with the Baptist laity.

A number of years ago, I preached for several Sundays at Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC, Marney's last pastorate. Marney had been gone for several years. In fact, I was preaching following the retirement of Marney's successor. In one of my sermons, I referred to Marney—a kind of obligatory toast to one I admired. After I had finished shaking hands in the narthex, I walked back down the aisle of the church to the pulpit to fetch my Bible and notes. An elderly man was collecting the worship bulletins from the pews. I stopped and greeted him, thanking him for his work. And as though he were still in my sermon, he jumped right into Marney. "Yeah, preacher, ole Marney," he said, "I loved him a lot." And then he paused and added, "But I never understood a word he said."

Claypool, by contrast, claimed the attention of both clergy and laity. His sermons and lectures, more accessible than Marney's, grabbed both heads and hearts. His sermons, or adaptations of them, were often heard in other pulpits! He served as pastor of three influential Baptist churches: Crescent Hill in Louisville, KY (1960-1971), Broadway in Fort Worth, TX (1971-1976), and Northminster in Jackson, MS (1976-1981).

After his resignation from Northminster in 1981, Claypool and his wife divorced. He spent the next year in a residency in clinical pastoral education at the Baptist Hospital in New Orleans. He then became an associate pastor for two years to Dr. Hardy Clemons at Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, TX. From there he, like so many other notable Baptists, migrated to the Episcopal Church. He concluded his parish ministry as rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Birmingham, AL. He taught preaching at the McAfee School of Theology of Mercer University, in Atlanta during his retirement years. He published 11 books.

Tracks is far and away the most influential book John R. Claypool ever wrote. Not one of his other 10 books comes close.

In his semi-autobiographical pastoral memoir, Diary of a Pastor's Soul, Craig Barnes said that "the only important thing a servant of the Church brings to the ministry" is the "pastor's soul" (p.13). Attentive parishioners, Barnes said, are grateful for glimpses into that soul. In his very first book, *Tracks of A Fellow Struggler: How to Handle Grief*, Claypool laid bare his "pastor's soul" for all his hearers and readers.

Tracks is far and away the most influential book John R. Claypool ever wrote. Not one of his other 10 books comes close. "This little book," as he so aptly dubbed it, had only 104 pages in its1974 edition, released by Word Publishing Company. By the time Insight Press produced a second edition in 1995, the book had sold one million copies! Other than making gender references more inclusive, the second edition is the same with one major exception. The sub-title of the book changed from "How to Handle Grief" to "Living and Growing Through Grief," something Claypool had obviously done himself.

On a "hot Wednesday afternoon," in1969 doctors in Louisville, KY diagnosed Laura Lue, the Claypools'

eight-year-old daughter, with acute lymphatic leukemia. Eighteen months later, she died on a "snowy Saturday afternoon" on January 10, 1970. That heart-wrenching event became the backdrop for much of Claypool's thinking, preaching, and teaching for the rest of his life.

"This little book" causes one to inhale the smog of human suffering and exhale the buoyant hope of the Christian faith. While written against the darkest of events, the book is life giving, as reflected in the vast number of copies sold. And it is hopeful because, even "after life works us over," as Claypool often said, it is life affirming. But how does one come out of this kind of excruciating heartbreak to affirm the goodness of life?

The book contains four sermons. Claypool preached three of the sermons at Crescent Hill Baptist Church. He preached two of these during Laura Lue's illness and one following her death. He preached the last sermon in the book three years after her death at Broadway Baptist Church. I will focus my comments on the first and third sermons in the book. They are the best known and most referenced.

The first sermon, "The Basis of Hope," is rooted in Paul's classic passage in Romans 8. Claypool preached it to his congregation in Louisville 11 days after Laura Lue's diagnosis. In the introduction to the sermon, he asked his congregation to "see me this morning as your burdened and broken brother, limping back into the family circle to tell you something of what I learned out there in the darkness."

What had he learned? First, he had learned that the challenge was to go on living "even though I have no answer or any complete explanation." Descartes was wrong: "I think, therefore I am." "We do not first get all the answers and then live in light of our understanding," said Claypool. He went on: "We must rather plunge into life---meeting what we have to meet and experiencing what we have to experience---and in the light of living try to understand." Claypool learned he could not quit living because he did not have all the answers.

Second, he learned to beware of superficiality and quick labeling, "of jumping to the wrong conclusions." Citing one of his most cherished Old Testament stories, the up-and-down life of Joseph, he uttered what would become one of his most oft-spoken lines: "Despair is always presumptuous." Just when it looked like old Joseph was all finished, an opening appeared and new future beckoned. James Dunn told me that Martin E. Marty caught him one day in genuine despair. "Dunn," Marty said, "You don't know enough to be pessimistic." Claypool somehow embraced that idea, even in his heartbreak.

Everyone that ever knew or heard John Claypool knew him to be a star. He was center stage, a winner in every way. But the death of his daughter put him on the losing side. He discovered, as do we all, that hurt hurts. So, we kneel at the bedside of an eight-year-old girl with leukemia, and we kneel without any answers. Empty-handed, as far as quick and pat answers, Claypool worked hard at not jumping to conclusions about the deep mystery of life.

The third thing that became of enormous value to Claypool, in light of his young daughter's illness, was his understanding of God. God, too, he said was acquainted with "evil and grief and suffering." He pointed to the crucifixion of Jesus. "Believe me," Claypool said, "out there in the darkness this companionship of understanding really helps." Claypool possessed a distinct mystical leaning, one not always recognized in him. He insisted then, as he did the rest of his life, that God's companionship brought strength in tough times.

In the introduction to the sermon, he asked his congregation to "see me this morning as your burdened and broken brother, limping back into the family circle to tell you something of what I learned out there in the darkness."

Claypool did not preach for a month after his daughter died on that cold Saturday afternoon in January. When finally he came back to the Crescent Hill pulpit, he broke that "prolonged silence" with a sermon that was the most widely known of all the sermons he would ever preach. He called it "Life is Gift." It was the pearl of his preaching and writing. He based it on that troublesome story of the proposed sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham.

He did not come with theological bravado. Admitting that he was in no position to "speak with any finality" about the tragedy that had bent him over and broken his heart, he said, "What I have to share is of a highly provisional character for, as of now the light is dim." He saw three alternative roads ahead "out of the darkness." However, two of these were dead ends. Only the third led to light.

The first road had been highly recommended to him. It was the route of "unquestioning resignation." Do not

question God, he was told. Simply submit and surrender, he was admonished. Accept the unfolding of life without murmuring. Claypool thought this approach closer to pagan stoicism than Christianity. God, he said, is more that brute power pulling the strings on every event of our lives. "The One who moves" through the pages of the Bible "is by nature a Being of love. We have every right to pour out our souls to God and ask, "Why?"

Claypool said the second road one could take out of the darkness was what he called "the road of total intellectual understanding." He confessed, to some of his parishioners' chagrin, that he had been "tempted to conclude that our whole existence is utterly absurd." But, he said, one cannot coerce life into one posture or attitude. One cannot organize all of our existence around a single principle.

Life is more complicated than that. To reduce life to absurdity is to overlook too much of the good stuff in life. "For you see," he said, "alongside the utter absurdity of what was happening to this little girl were countless other experiences that were full of love and purpose and meaning." Do not generalize in such a way, he urged his hearers that morning, "that either the darkness swallows up the light or the light the darkness. To do so would be untrue to our human condition that 'knows in part' and does all its seeing 'as through a glass darkly'."

The third road, the road that led to light and life, Claypool said, is the "road of gratitude." "Only when life is seen as a gift and received with the open hands of gratitude is it the joy God meant for it to be." The only way to descend from the mountain of loss is with gratitude. And then he added these crucial words: "I do not mean to say that such a perspective makes things easy, for it does not. But at least it makes things bearable when I remember that Laura Lue was a gift, pure and simple, something I neither earned nor deserved nor had a right to. And when I remember that the appropriate response to a gift, even when it is taken away, is gratitude, then I am better able to try and thank God that I was ever given her in the first place." Gratitude, he said, puts light around the darkness and provides strength for moving on.

Claypool closed that unforgettable sermon by asking his church members to help him on his way. "Do not counsel me not to question, and do not attempt to give me any total answer," he pled. "The greatest thing you can do is to remind me that life is gift---every last particle of it, and that the way to handle a gift is to be grateful."

This was not a preacher pretending to be strong. To the contrary, he frightened faithful Christians with the way he publicly shared his weakness. This was a Christian living out his understanding of the Christian vision, a vision that said, "Life is gift."

Claypool moved through the rest of his life with this same positive but realistic posture. On the Sunday after 9/11, he preached at the First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Ga. Calling his bewildered hearers that morning to hope, he said again and again in that sermon, "The worst thing is not the last thing."

In June 2003, doctors in Atlanta diagnosed John Claypool himself with multiple myeloma, a form of dreaded cancer. The next Easter Sunday morning, in 2004, I had a vivid dream. John Claypool and Ben Philbeck, one of the dearest friends I ever had, played central roles. Ben had died with a brain tumor 15 years earlier. The dream was obviously about these two friends, one who had died and one who was seriously ill. I called John on the phone later that morning. "John," I said, "I had a very bad dream last night, but you became a kind of Joseph. You got us out of a bad situation and led us to hope. After I told him the peculiar circumstances of the dream, he said to me in that confident, calming, and unmistakable voice, "Buddy, I have always been hopeful." ■

This was not a preacher pretending to be strong. To the contrary, he frightened faithful Christians with the way he publicly shared his weakness. This was a Christian living out his understanding of the Christian vision, a vision that said, "Life is gift."

A year later, on September 3, 2005, John Claypool died as he had lived, grateful and hopeful.

Walter B. Shurden is Minister at Large at Mercer University Macon, Georgia. He is a church historian and a very well- known connoisseur of good preaching. This article on the writings of John Claypool is the first of six dealing with Claypool's books that he will write for Christian Ethics Today.

"Equity: A Divine Imperative."

By Paul Robeson Ford

In 1971, Gustavo Gutierrez published *A Theology of Liberation*, a groundbreaking work which argued that God had a preferential option for the poor; and that the work of Jesus Christ as represented in the Gospel record demonstrated that God stood alongside the poor of the world in radical solidarity, working for them and on their behalf. God's positioning in this way is made most clear by the final fifteen verses of Matthew 25, where Jesus declares in no uncertain terms that our treatment of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the stranger, and the incarcerated will - literally - determine our entrance into eternal life or eternal punishment.

God's concern for the poor and oppressed is reiterated in Jesus' inaugural sermon in Luke 4:18-19, but also in Mary's Magnificat, that praises God for lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things; and still further, in the Beatitudes which declare that "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." God's preferential option for the poor demands that we imitate that same preferential option in the public sphere and in our communal relationships.

Jesus teaches throughout the Gospels about how hard it will be for the rich to gain entrance into heaven and eternal life because of how attached they are to the material possessions of life and the comforts that they bring; in effect, he suggests that the rich more often than not slip into idol-worship, with material wealth and luxury being the god (with a little 'g') to whom they bow down and serve.

If we were to compare the haves and the have nots, we would observe that those who have are typically guilty of worshipping mammon (wealth) - and Jesus is clear that mammon is an idol that is at odds with God. The problem with idol worship is that it becomes entrenched across succeeding generations; it becomes a part of the culture of the rich and powerful; the comforts associated with it seem to be necessary and required for happiness and contentment and one is taught that the only way to live is to live in excess and splendor, even while so many others live in (relative) poverty and squalor.

If you accept Guitierrez' reading of the biblical text, then it becomes abundantly clear that equity is not a choice among other equal choices, but in fact, it is a divine command for the lives of those who love God. As Jesus stands with the poor, *so must we*; as God steps in on behalf of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the stranger, and the incarcerated, ***so must we*** . It is an imperative, and we should move with a sense of urgency as we see to this work and to this mission.

What is required for this present age is a theology of equity that recognizes this imperative - this command - and the revolutionary implications that it has if we consider the fundamental ***inequity*** of the present circumstances that surround us. If we embrace a theology of equity, it requires us to "turn the world upside down" (as the Apostles were accused of in the Book of Acts); it requires to co-labor with God in upending the status quo. The Old Testament Prophet Zephaniah positions God as this sort of actor: "I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth." This verse prophecies divine intervention on behalf of equity; it asserts that God WILL save the marginalized and render judgment on those who pushed them to the margins.

As Jesus stands with the poor, so must we.

It is important to note that the preferential option for the poor is not intended to suggest that rich people are less important in the eyes of God; this is a tragic misunderstanding that has characterized how some have received Gutierrez work; instead, the preferential option for the poor seeks to compensate for the fact that the world treats the poor AS IF they are less important here and in the hereafter; the preferential option for the poor seeks to balance a set of scales that have been imbalanced for at least two millennia.

The late Dr. James Hal Cone said that the purpose of the gospel is to comfort the afflicted - i.e the poor - and afflict the comfortable - i.e. white people, specifically the rich and the privileged; the premise of a theology of equity is that God intervenes on behalf of those who have been systematically victimized and intentionally dispossessed by a world that is characterized by an "intentional architecture" of inequity; simply put: this

world is not inequitable by accident - it is inequitable by design.

The record of human history (and certainly the history of the United States) makes clear that those who ***have*** realized that they could not ***have*** unless there were also those who ***have not***; it makes clear that the structures that support inequity in this nation have been ***built that way*** in order to support what Kelly Brown Douglas has called the "Anglo-Saxon Myth," the idea that a particular people whose origins lie in Western Europe were superior to all other types of people, and that these people were intended to have dominion over all of the earth. This mindset justified the genocide against the indigenous people of this country, it justified the enslavement of Africans and the four hundred years of continuing oppression that we mark in 2019, and it justified the conquest of foreign lands and people, by force or by intimidation, by outright takeover or by covert overthrow.

If we were to consider our history against the balance sheet of moral credibility, we would see that our net worth is negative - we are in the red and we have been for centuries, because the liabilities of our history are greater than the assets of our past and present. This is a fact if we are honest about that history, and if we are willing to examine that history holistically, and not just through rose-colored glasses that benevolently consider the perspective of the ***victors*** while disregarding the lived experience of the ***victims***.

A theology of equity judges the powers that be as guilty; guilty of orchestrating and violently enforcing the marginalization of the poor, the black, the brown, and the indigenous. And inasmuch as the rest of us have been complacent in response to this inequitable reality, we are all guilty and we need to repent, we need to seek God's forgiveness, and we need to turn from our wicked ways. The priorities that are emphasized by a theology of equity must become our own priorities too.

A theology of equity is about God's movement in and relationship to a world that is plagued by structures of oppression and practices that marginalize entire groups of God's children who have been made in the divine image (imago dei). A theology of equity asserts unapologetically that the God who we serve is a God who is FOR THEM - for the oppressed, for the marginalized, for those who are "living with their backs against the wall," in the words of Howard Thurman; the God who we serve is a God who is *most present* with those who feel like the world is *least present* with them.

That idea should not be a threat to anyone who understands that God's love is available to all. It should not be a threat to anyone who is familiar with the passages that I have referenced, who is acquainted with the politics of Jesus, and who sees a clear set of principles articulated by the work of the Holy Spirit in this world.

You do not have to be poor to embrace a theology of equity; you do not have to be black, or brown, or indigenous. A theology of equity is both a lens through which to look at the world as it is, and it is also a set of principles that any believing Christian - or for that matter, any person of faith - can make their own. A theology of equity is for the white, and it is for the rich, and it is for the privileged. It is for the middle-class and it is for those who live in the "First World." Anyone can endorse a theology of equity and seek to make meaning of it for their own life.

A theology of equity presents an important distinction, about which I must be clear: <u>equity is NOT</u> <u>the same as equality.</u> We have been disserved in this country by a discourse about equality, and equal access, and equal opportunity, and 'equal pay for equal work.'

A theology of equity is about God's movement in and relationship to a world that is plagued by structures of oppression and practices that marginalize entire groups of God's children who have been made in the divine image (imago dei).

But that's not enough, and it never has been; it leaves a void in the quest for justice that only equity can fill. This void has been felt acutely in the context of public education and the quest to ensure that all children - especially those who are poor and black and brown - achieve at the same level as their more privileged peers. Writing in a 2014 post for the Education Trust, Blair Mann explained the difference between equality and equity this way:

"Should per student funding at every school be exactly the same? That's a question of equality. But should students who come from less get more in order to ensure that they can catch up? That's a question of equity."

He goes on, offering an example that should resonate with all of us here who are working to change the local school system:

"The students who are furthest behind — most often

low-income students and students of color — require more of those resources to catch up, succeed, and eventually, close the achievement gap. Giving students who come to school lagging academically (because of factors outside of a school's control) the exact same resources as students in higher income schools alone will not close the achievement gap.

But making sure that low-income students and students of color have access to exceptional teachers and that their schools have the funding to provide them with the kind of high-quality education they need to succeed will continue us on the path toward narrowing that gap."

If a theology of equity is implemented in its fullest expression relative to public education, then we should see a day when predominantly black and brown and poor schools would be so heavily flooded with resources that privileged white folks would want to send their kids to those schools. This is what Blair Mann was talking about, and this is what a theology of equity calls for: ***a radical restructuring of resources that is targeted not at making things equal, but making things right.*** Equality is an unhelpful myth of American history, and while the language of equity may be new, resistance to the rhetoric of equality is not.

In response to a question by a white reporter in May 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., exposed just how obtuse the rhetoric of equality had always been: "... when white Americans tell the Negro to "lift himself by his own bootstraps, they...don't look over the legacy of slavery and segregation. I believe we ought to do all we can and seek to lift ourselves by our own boot straps, but it's a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps."

Too many of our students have been bootless for a long time.

For a bootless people, equality is not the solution to equipping them to run the race of life; equity is.

A theology of equity demands an Equity Agenda, one that is broad-based & universal. It demands that we flood - *and I mean a flood of biblical proportions* - our schools that are predominantly black and brown, and predominantly populated by students who receive free lunch, and historically underperforming (or outright failing) - that we flood those schools with resources that ***far exceed*** the resources that are currently given to other schools. This agenda is not and should not be preoccupied with desegregation of the races; instead, we need to advocate for the ***desegregation of resources*** and for the wholesale ***reaggregation*** of school funding writ large.

This focus should inform advocacy at the federal, state and local levels of government, where public revenue is collected and resources are allocated. It should fundamentally alter (and altar) the public discourse about what is required to finally fix our education system. It should reorient the way that we think and talk and act around questions of opportunity, access, and achievement.

A theology of equity begins with the way things ***are***, and casts a vision for the way things ***ought to be***. All that remains for each of us is a decision: do we believe in this God, and do we have the will to work with God to make things right? Are we ready to stand in radical solidarity with "the least of these my brothers and sisters"? I hope that the answer is yes. ■

*This agenda is not and should not be preoccupied with desegregation of the races; instead, we need to advocate for the **desegregation of resources** and for the wholesale **reaggregation** of school funding writ large.*

Paul Robeson Ford is Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church (Highland Avenue) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He born and raised in New York City and grew up at the Riverside Church under the leadership of Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr. He is a Candidate for the Ph.D. in Theology at the University of Chicago, developing a theology of liberation regarding mass incarceration in the United States.

On Behalf of a Thin Theology

By Robert Baird

With appreciation for the piece in the previous issue of Christian Ethics Today by Professor Rob Sellers on "The Parliament of the World's Religions," I offer a word on behalf of a thin theology.

Most, probably all, readers of this journal have a theology. It may not be systematic, but most readers of *Christian Ethics Today* have thoughts about the nature of God, how God relates to the world and, specifically, how God relates to human beings. Your theology may be thick and detailed, with precise beliefs about God and God's relation to creation. It may be thin. God may be the word you use for the mystery which seems to underlie all that is—a mystery which lures you into the future in ways that seem right and good, a mystery which gives you hope that in the end, all pain, suffering and tears will be redeemed, hope that in God's good time all will turn out well. Or, perhaps your theology is very, very thin indeed. For you, God may be a mystery that elicits silence in the face of it all, especially silence in the face of questions about how divine goodness and power are compatible with the pain and suffering in the world.

At any rate, anyone with a religious bone in his or her body (which surely includes the agnostic who puzzles about it all, and maybe even the atheist who, after good faith struggle, denies it all), has a theology ranging somewhere on a continuum from really, really thick to very, very thin.

Early on, the Christian story got complicated, giving birth to some very thick theology. The *Gospel of John* says that "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God." (So, we seem to have two—God and the Word.) But then the gospel adds, "the Word was not just with God, the Word was God." (So, it turns out that they are not two, but one.) Then Jesus, near the end of his life, says: "When I go I will send the Spirit, the Comforter to you." (So, now we have three.) In the language of Christian tradition, we have God the father (or mother), God the son (we don't seem to have the option of "or daughter"), and God the Holy Spirit. And we are on the road to a very thick theology. Indeed, some are so committed to a thick trinitarian theology that they never refer to God (That's too vague, too inclusive.); they always refer to the Triune God.

In the history of the early church, fights emerged over an increasingly thick trinitarian theology. Hard questions were raised about how God could be three *and* one. Arguments ensued, battles fought, and councils called to settle the questions, to quiet the arguments, to still the fighting.

In the Fourth Century, the Athanasian Creed tried to settle matters. Here is one translation of a passage from that Creed: "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost . . . the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible . . . . They are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible . . . ." The creed concludes:

In the history of the early church, fights emerged over an increasingly thick trinitarian theology. Hard questions were raised about how God could be three and one. Arguments ensued, battles fought, and councils called to settle the questions, to quiet the arguments, to still the fighting.

"He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity."[1] Now, that is a thick theology.

In 1553, John Calvin and others burned Servetus, a Spanish theologian, at the stake in Geneva because he denied the Trinity. That is thick theology gone mean.

To be sure, there are important and creative efforts to interpret the Trinity that are quite meaningful to some. I acknowledge that. Others, however, for many reasons have difficulty with theological thickness, not the least of which is the awareness that from earliest recorded history, individuals have disagreed about the nature of God. Over time, those disagreements have only been magnified.

Bright, inquiring, and sincere religious believers around the world disagree about the nature of God or ultimate reality; therefore, we have Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and the list goes on.

Bright, inquiring, and sincere Christians disagree about the nature of God; therefore, we have Catholics (Roman and Greek Orthodox) and Protestants; and within Protestantism, we have Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and the list goes on.

Bright, inquiring, and sincere Baptists disagree about the nature of God; therefore, we have Southern Baptists, American Baptists, the Alliance of Baptists, The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Landmark Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Primitive Baptists and the list goes on.

Compounding the epistemological problem is another matter mentioned so often that it may seem tiresome, but its relevance never ceases. One's religious group is almost certainly determined by family of origin. Born into a Catholic family, one becomes Catholic. Baptists give birth to Baptists, Episcopalians to Episcopalians, and Muslims to Muslims. Not always of course, but almost always. To be raised a Christian or a Jew, a Muslim, a Daoist or a Hindu is to be raised in a community that has already interpreted ultimate reality. This is as basic as the fact that we learn words from our community, words like God, Allah, Dao and Brahman.

Many college students first encounter this challenging thought reading John Stuart Mill's 19th century essay, *On Liberty,* in which he famously (or infamously, depending on your point of view) argues that "it never troubles him [the religious dogmatist] that mere accident has decided which of these numerous . . . [faith positions] is the object of his reliance, and that the same causes which make him a churchman in London would have made him a Buddhist or Confucian in Peking."[2]

In his book, *God is Not a Christian*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu refers to this truth as an overwhelmingly simple one: The contingency of where we were born largely determines the faith to which we belong. "The chances are very great that if you were born in Pakistan you are a Muslim, or a Hindu if you happened to be born in India, or a Shintoist if . . . Japan, and a Christian if . . . born in Italy."[3]

Years ago, when my wife and I were in California, we attended Christmas Eve services with our daughter's family. There was a traditional pageant, with young children playing the roles of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the angels, and the wise men. Even Jesus was played by a new-born, who finally got overwhelmed by it all and had to be rescued by his mother sitting poised on the front row. Witnessing it, the thought struck me that it was virtually assured that those children would grow up with the Christian story as part of the very fiber of their beings. Then it also occurred to me that on that very day, thousands of little children in India were becoming immersed in the Hindu tradition, learning to interpret reality through such words and concepts as Brahman and Krishna and karma, growing up with the world of the *Bhagavad-Gita* as a part of the very fiber of their beings, just as we would have had we been raised in that culture. That all of this is true is simply to acknowledge, as philosopher Simon Blackburn notes, that we are embodied creatures.[4]

But what follows from all of this? What conclusions should be drawn from this sociological or cultural fact? Let me mention two in passing and then, third, make a proposal which takes us back to the piece by Sellers on "The Parliament of the World's Religions."

First: One conclusion that does *not* follow, a point importantly and forcefully made by philosophers Peter van Inwagen[5] and Alvin Plantinga[6] is that because one's beliefs are influenced or even determined by the environment in which one is born, one should *for that reason* reject the truth of the belief. Under such epistemological guidance, most of our beliefs would go by the boards, for we inherit most of them. If such beliefs guide us well, if they seem to get us in touch with and keep us in touch with reality, to reject them on the grounds that they were learned from our environment would be epistemological folly.

But, second, awareness of religious differences that also give birth to loving lives should elicit some level of epistemological humility, some level of awareness of and appreciation for the possibility that religious traditions other than one's own may offer insight into the nature of ultimate reality. Barbara Brown Taylor's marvelously titled and insightful book, *Holy Envy,* published last year is a testimony, as the subtitle of her book puts it, to *Finding God in the Faith of Others*. Having illustrated this repeatedly throughout the work, she concludes: "The more I learned about the religions of the world, the more I became convinced that they were all pointing to the same sacred mystery beyond all human understanding."[7] John Hick (1922-2012), the philosopher perhaps most associated with a pluralistic understanding of religion, argued that "if it is rational for the Christian to believe in God on the basis of his or her distinctively Christian experience, it must by the same argument be rational for the Muslim . . . for the Hindu and the Buddhist [to hold their beliefs] . . . on the basis of their own distinctive forms of [religious] experience."[8]

So, then, third, here is a proposal. It involves affirming and cherishing a thick theology in one's private devotions, in worship, and in fellowship with one's

own religious community. At the same time, "moving in the direction of a thinner theology"[9] can be a rationally and emotionally satisfying way of appreciating the varieties of religious experience and of relating to the broader world of religious communities. Compare, by the way, the insights of perhaps the greatest work ever published in the philosophy and psychology of religion, William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.[10]

What would such an approach look like? Here are some intimations.

Fred Craddock (1928-2015), Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Emory University's Candler Divinity School, told the following story on himself. Craddock read Albert Schweitzer's *Quest for the Historical Jesus*; his response was negative. The theology, the Christology, in the book was so weak, so thin, says Craddock, that he was convinced that it could not keep the Church alive. As Craddock put it: "There are not enough [theological] calories in this to last two weeks."[11] He then heard that Schweitzer was going to play the organ in a dedicatory service in a large church in Atlanta, and that he would be available for questions after the service. Craddock says he prepared. His copy of Schweitzer's book was thoroughly marked-up. His questions were well-formulated. He sat on the front row, eager to critique Schweitzer's weak, thin theology.

Then, Schweitzer appeared. In Craddock's words: "Schweitzer got up and said, 'I thank you for your hospitality, for your gracious reception of me; but I have to go back to Lambarene in Africa. My people there are dying. They are sick and they are hungry. If any of you have in you the love of Jesus, come help me.'"[12] I looked at my questions, says Craddock and, in that context, they were "stupid silly stuff."[13]

In that moment it seems to me, Craddock experienced a thinning of his theology, by which I mean he put aside theological details for the affirmation that the creative source of all that is, is love, desiring that we love too. Thin, as theologies go, many would argue, but powerfully thick in another way: "My people there are dying. They are sick and hungry. If any of you have in you the love of Jesus come help me."

Harvard philosopher Hilary Putnam (1926-2016), committed to "his belief in a single personal God," rejected the notion of giving up his own religious tradition for some universalistic religion. But he was also committed to religious pluralism because, as Putnam expressed it: "I am . . . convinced that whether one has the right or wrong view on theological questions is far less important to God (or to the Compassionate Buddha, or to what some Buddhists call 'the other shore,' or to what Chinese refer to as Heaven) than whether one shows compassion, cheerfulness, and makes a contribution to enriching human spiritual and material life."[14]

Sounds right out of the Old Testament book of Micah: "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk in quiet fellowship with your God." Micah emphasizes not what one believes, but who one is and what one does.

The same point is made repeatedly by referencing the New Testament passage from Matthew in which the sheep are separated from the goats, not on the basis of beliefs but on the basis of who feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and visits the imprisoned. The distinction made between the sheep and the goats has nothing—nothing—to do with the religious language of either the sheep or the goats. And, by the way, Barbara Taylor reminds us that we miss the point of that passage if we fail to recognize that there is some of the sheep and some of the goat in all of us.[15]

Putnam concludes that not only are there forms of spirituality other than his own of great value, but that "the world is a better place –and God is better served-- . . . because there are a variety of perspectives on the divine."[16]

A Christian, a Jew and a Muslim on the road together fell into debate. The Christian tried to persuade the Jew that he had rejected the final revelation of God in Christ. The Jew tried to convince the Muslim that his community was blocking the establishment of the one true faith in Jerusalem. The Muslim tried to convince the Christian that since the seventh century, Christians had mistakenly opposed the fact that there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet.

On that same day, another Christian, another Jew and another Muslim fell into conversation. The Jew spoke of his religious life, of the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. The Christian testified to his faith in Jesus and of the remarkable lives of Peter and Paul. The Muslim recounted his commitment to Allah and of Mohammed's fateful journey from Mecca to Medina. They were joined on the way by a Buddhist who spoke of Siddhartha Gautama and of a revelation under a Bo tree. And, in the spirit of the Parliament of the World's Religions as recounted by Professor Sellers, they appreciated the valuable lives growing out of one another's poignant stories. ■

All references and endnotes are on the website version.

Robert Baird is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Baylor University

We Can't Stay Here Anymore: The New Era of Racial Estrangement and Separation

By Lewis Brogdon

Moving can be exciting. The promise of something new; new opportunity; a new place to put down roots and call home; new places to see; and new friends. And then there are the boxes, moving vans, and travel as you set off for somewhere new. However, moving is not always exciting because it is not always going to a new place. Sometimes it is bittersweet because it is a return home. There are times in life when a move does not work out the way you expected.

The new place does not turn out to be what you had hoped for and needed. When this happens, some people return home. The words, "We are moving back home," or "We can't stay here anymore," can be bittersweet as it means a return to the familiar, but at the expense of something hoped for but not realized.

One of the difficult aspects of a move like this is that there is little to no time to grieve. From a societal standpoint, attention and pressure are given to what lies ahead and not what was left behind. We are a "full speed ahead" kind of nation. Even churches admonish people to forget the past and embrace the future, using verses like Philippians 3:13. While there is a tremendous amount of value in this, there is a hidden danger when we do not value the grieving process. In our attempt to dive into all things "new," we neglect to give attention and space for the grief involved in letting go of or losing something cherished. This must change because people need time to grieve loss.

An Era of Racism and Retreat

I believe moving back home can teach us a few things about the racial climate in which we find ourselves today and, particularly, what it means to be pastoral and supportive to family and friends experiencing loss. Many of us – black and white - but particularly blacks, moved away from mono-racial spaces with hopes of integrated and inclusive churches, relationships, businesses, neighborhoods, and lives with people of different races and ethnicities. The move was difficult because mono-racial spaces are so important and have buoyed our communities for years. But moving away was a choice to write a new chapter in our national history and was the actualization of Dr. King's dream of a beloved community for all peoples. This aspect of moving away was characterized by excitement and promise. But the excitement is waning as racism re-asserts itself in our public life and people retreat to mono-racial and segregated spaces.

Today, under the clamor of our public discourse, there is a silent trail of pain long ignored by churches, its theologians, pastoral care givers, and people of goodwill. Amidst the retrenchment of racial animus and violence, the re-emergence of overt racism, and the appalling silence of people we thought were partners and friends, there has been a steady retreat to racialized spaces. Racism has re-emerged and intensified across the nation, and individuals and families have faced the cold, hard, and bitter realization that they cannot stay "here" any longer.

Racism has re-emerged and intensified across the nation, and individuals and families have faced the cold, hard, and bitter realization that they cannot stay "here" any longer.

Where is here? "Here" are those multiracial and integrated spaces created after the collapse of Jim Crow. What happened? Black people (and white people of goodwill) have had their eyes opened to the realization that this country has not made the progress we thought. We have been surprised by the silence of white friends as white supremacist and white nationalist groups parade themselves openly in our streets and recruit others to their cause. We have been disappointed by the refusal by white friends to speak out against police brutality and injustice in the criminal justice system when one "not guilty" verdict is followed by another. We also felt betrayed by white evangelicals for supporting a presidential candidate who ran on a racially charged platform of "making America great again." Then, there is the grief we feel as we observe the spectacle of strife and violence that has engulfed our nation. Social media feeds and news sources report the collapse of a society where being "in Christ" and a citizen of a country where people are believed to

be "endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights" meant that we could transcend the power of racism. In the wake of such profound loss, we do not have the necessary space to grieve. This is the time in which we live, a time of neglected grief that is a part of the fuel that is raging and engulfing this nation.

A Painful Period of Silence and Betrayal

What happened that led to deep breaches in interracial friendships, relationships, churches, businesses, and other networks? During the decades of the 90s and into the first decade of the 21st century, white Christians were talking a lot about racial reconciliation. There was the "miracle in Memphis" and the Promise Keepers Movement in the 90s. Denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention issued apologies for their support of slavery and racism. Numerous books were written on reconciliation and the church's troubled history around such issues as a new generation seem resolved to correct the sins of the past and build a better future.

But something changed. In 2008, Barack Obama became the 44th president of the United States. Obama was the first African American president and his ascension to the White House unleashed a new wave of racial hate. Many people wanted to believe America had entered a new era where of the old evils of racism were finally behind us. We were wrong. When some semblance of a new day dawned, black Americans were surprised how many of their white brothers and sisters were not happy about it. In fact, they were angry and resentful.

Even though President Obama clearly and forcefully articulated his faith in Jesus Christ and was a baptized Christian, he was often called a Muslim. Although he was a happily married man and committed father who conducted himself with class and dignity, he was called names like ape, baboon, monkey, and yes, the "N" word. He was criticized for being too intellectual and for race baiting when he spoke the truth about the racial realities emerging everywhere around him in the country. Signs, jackets, and posters saying things like "let's keep the White House white" were proudly worn. To our dismay, many white Evangelical and even some mainline Christians went out of their way to support the obstructionist efforts of the Republican-led house and senate and rarely had a positive word to say about this black Christian man. Worse yet, as the uglier and more violent forms of racial hatred paraded the streets, white evangelical leaders looked the other way and did not expose, rebuke, or use their moral authority to challenge these things. After Obama's two terms came Donald Trump and a wave of white backlash still being felt in communities everywhere.

In 2020, the signs of racial hatred abound. Marches in cities and communities, signs with racist messages and racial epithets litter the national landscape, and video evidence of white Americans openly expressing racial animus and, in some cases, resorting to violence against persons of color inundate social media and the news. Countless numbers of lives have been lost at the hands of white Americans drunk on the wine of racial hatred - Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, Freddie Gray, Samuel DuBose, Walter Scott, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Ahmad Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. These are but a few names of those lives lost during this very troubling recent period in our history.

In addition to these well-known killings, many African Americans were being subjected to verbal violence and other discriminatory practices as emboldened "Tea Party" and "Trump-supporting" whites attempt to take their country back and make it great again. Blacks are profiled by the police and now more whites call the police on black patrons in stores, restaurants, and hotels, having them kicked out and arrested for no reason. There are increasing incidents of blacks being arrested in their homes under suspicion of being criminals. Black people today are under assault as the leaders and friends who spent decades talking about forgiveness, racial reconciliation, and a new future are supporting the very practices that sustained evils in the past. Scores of white Christians refused to speak out against slavery and segregation, evils that caused great suffering and death. Now scores of white Christians today are doing the exact same thing. They are even willing to support a leader who regularly says racially insensitive things and engages in dog whistling.

But something changed. In 2008, Barack Obama became the 44th president of the United States. Obama was the first African American president and his ascension to the White House unleashed a new wave of racial hate.

In addition to this, many white Christians and churches continue to believe and falsely claim that America does not have a race problem. Worse yet, instead of being agents of challenge and change, most

bury their head in the sand and do nothing, a response that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., mentioned decades earlier in his famous *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. I have been so greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership…I felt that the white ministers, priests and rabbis of the South would be some of our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of the stain-glass windows…I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at her beautiful churches with lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlay of her massive education buildings. Over and over again I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave the clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when tired, bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest? Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment, I have wept over the laxity of the church.[1]

King reminds us that this kind of disappointment is not new.

In the past two years as the country has grappled with the 400-year history of blacks in America and a new wave of unrest emerged over the summer, we have witnessed only one national anti-racism and reparations campaign launched by a white denomination – the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. There have been initiatives and public statements released by white mainline denominations, but no major actions taken to correct structural racism. The largest predominately white congregations rarely, if ever, weigh in on the issue of racism and escalating violence. Some of these churches have over 5.000 members and so their influence could be significant. Many wealthy and influential white churches and institutions are silent. For example, many were quiet after the Mother Emanuel killings in Charleston and quiet after the Charlottesville march that turned into a riot.

I cannot adequately put into words how painful this collective realization has been for many African Americans. We feel betrayed by people who call themselves Christians and worshipers of the one and only God. These things raise deeper questions for our consideration. Why do white churches refuse to speak up and speak out on this issue? Why the persistent and dogmatic denial of a problem with race in America? How is it spiritually and humanly possible in the face of so much evidence of a deep racial problem for churches to be quiet? Why not use its moral voice and authority to address these issues head on? Questions like these and others have led to painful breeches and separations.

Neglecting the Fallout from Racism's Re-Emergence

Much of our theological attention has been given to why overt racism has made such a strong and open comeback and to the many justice issues related to systemic racism. However, little attention has been given to the fallout in the everyday world of interracial families, friendships, relationships, churches, and networks of varied kinds that have been woven together for decades that are now being severed and lost, sometimes for good. I believe it is reckless for churches to advocate for justice while neglecting to care for the brokenness and pain racial estrangement causes in families, friendships, relationships, churches, and communities.

It is an era of profound communal grief with estrangement, loss, anger, sadness, acceptance, and retreat. It is one of the top pastoral care issues of our day, and I wonder who is going to attend to and care for those in pain because they have lost friendships and relationships across the lines of race.

Today, we are living in a period of retreat, of moving back to safe "racial" spaces. There may not be literal empty houses and full moving trucks, but more people than we can number have realized they can't stay "here" any longer and have moved. We live in an era of unprecedented loss – marriages, relationships, friendships, church memberships, jobs, opportunities, and new possibilities are being lost as people move back "home" to families, friendships, communities, churches, and jobs that are deeply racialized. It is an era of profound communal grief with estrangement,

loss, anger, sadness, acceptance, and retreat. It is one of the top pastoral care issues of our day, and I wonder who is going to attend to and care for those in pain because they have lost friendships and relationships across the lines of race.

Moses and Moving: Models for Pastoral Care, Theology, and Preaching

Earlier I said that one of the most difficult aspects of moving is the absence of time given for grief. Sadly, the church and the theological academy are following the lead of society and failing to give space for people to acknowledge and deal with the loss of friendships, relationships, and opportunities for a different racial reality. Mono-racial churches have opened their doors and hearts to people, but have largely ignored the pain the people brought with them. Churches have been naïve about the complexity of returning home. Going home or going back to mono-racial or cultural spaces is never easy because the person or family that returns is not the same and will never be the same person that left. There are also factors like the resentment and anger of blacks who stayed in mono-racial relationships and neighborhoods toward those who left and now find themselves returning.

There is a story in the Bible that speaks to the experiences of moving away and returning to one's home or people. It is the story of Moses in Exodus. He was born a Hebrew, son of enslaved people. He grows up in Egypt as a member of the house of Pharaoh, but he comes to a point where he can not stay in Egypt. As an adult, he returns to his people, and it is a messy, complex, and far-from-happy ending. Moses' life offers a helpful parallel experience for churches, pastors, and mental health professionals to consider as they wade into this neglected issue. I conclude with five recommendations I hope will be considered as we take up this work in our communities.

Pastoral care counselors and other mental health professionals and researchers need to study the effects of racial estrangement and loss on the mental health of people;

Churches need to invite mental health professionals to explain the dynamics of grief and provide services to people who may need it;

Pastors need sermons and sermon series that speak specifically to the complex issues of estrangement, loss, and movements back to racialized space;

Churches and community groups or organizations should sponsor support groups for people to talk about loss and pain. People need to be able to give voice to these things.

Churches and community groups should consider holding healing services and developing resources like prayer books and reflection journals that enable people to process grief and open themselves to a process of healing from the acute pain of racial estrangement and loss. ■

Dr. Lewis Brogdon is a Visiting Professor of Preaching and Black Church Studies at the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky in Louisville, KY.

1 Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Letter from a Birmingham Jail," *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* James Washington, ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), 298-99

Miracles and the Moon

A sermon, by Chris George

Text: Psalm 8

My wife, Jen, must have two things in her possession when she goes any place. Would you like to guess what those are? Purse? No, she can live without a purse. In fact, she rarely carries one. She prefers to use my pockets. Credit card? No, honestly, she is not much of a spender.
Smartphone? No, she is far less attached to her smartphone than most in our world.

Think simply. First, she needs lip balm or Chapstick. And I say that word "need" intentionally…If she doesn't have it, she will immediately go into a state of panic. "Pull over," she will say, "and help me look for it."

"For what," I ask? "For my Chapstick."

So, if we are ever late for an event, just know, it is not because we took too long to get ready…It is because we lost the Chapstick on the way.

And, second, Jen ALWAYS needs to have a pair of sunglasses. "But, it's raining dear," I might say.

"It doesn't matter; it will be sunny soon. Can't leave home without sunglasses." She probably owns about 15 pairs of sunglasses, but somehow, we never have one with us. So, we buy another.

Ironically, I never wear sunglasses. I find them unnecessary and annoying.. "Why do you wear them, Jen?" I ask. Her response, "So, I can see."

Maybe, Psalm 8 serves the same purpose. The writer wants to help us to see. This psalm is a hymn. It is a poem. It is a prayer.

You have set your glory above the heavens. Look at the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than the angels, and crowned them with glory and honor (Psalm 8:4-6).

It is not a psalm meant to be whispered. It is one to be sung or shouted.

The writer seems to scream, "OPEN YOUR EYES!"

Friends, I think this is really the message of the movement now taking place across our country. The image of George Floyd on the ground with a knee against his neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds, saying, "I can't breathe," and calling for his "Mama" before he is killed has opened more eyes than any single event in my lifetime.

Of course, it is not a single event. This past spring, we have had the incident of Ahmaud Aubrey, the young black man who was chased and killed by armed white residents. Race was not *a* factor in the shooting. Race was *the* factor. In the state of my birth, Kentucky, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old African-American healthcare worker was shot in Louisville.

These are only three of the names being written on the signs of many of those who are protesting.

And the psalm echoes in our ears: "Remember their names. Open your Eyes."

In the last weeks, I have received many emails and messages from people who are expressing righteous anger and genuine fear, demanding justice and advocating for change, and asking if the people of God will remain silent.

If we open our eyes, what will we see?

Former President George W. Bush says, "Laura and I are anguished by the brutal suffocation of George Floyd and disturbed by the injustice and fear that suffocate our country. This tragedy—in a long series of similar tragedies—raises a long overdue question: How do we end systematic racism in our society? The only way to see ourselves in a true light is to listen to the voices of so many who are hurting and grieving. Those who set out to silence those voices do not understand the meaning of America—or how it becomes a better place."

I know that many in our congregation are struggling with these same feelings. They have told me so. I share the words of a few with their permission.

One woman wrote, "This has been a very emotional week for me! When I watch the video of George Floyd being murdered, I see my son-in-law who also is African-American. I see my grandsons. It breaks my heart and scares me at the same time. This racial injustice and anger affect my family. And it just seems worse now than ever."

It sounds as though her eyes were opened…

A man in our church wrote, "I have never demonstrated for or against anything. I have lived my life in quiet 'whiteness' with respect toward people of color publicly, while privately laughing at racial/ethnic

humor. I am sad to admit this and repent of my racism and my unwillingness to get involved, as if to say, 'This is America's problem, not mine.' What? I am an American and I must do something about the endemic problem of racism. Okay, I'm 78-years-old. What can I do? I'm probably not going to protest in public demonstrations as many do. But I applaud those who are willing to make that choice and peacefully protest as to their positions and beliefs. But there is something I can do: I can be vocal and I can choose to speak out in public."

It sounds as though, his eyes were opened…

Attorney Stephen Reeves, CBF associate coordinator of partnerships and advocacy, is one of our church members. He wrote a piece this week called, "Justice: You Decide?" He asks, "Will anything change this time? Will we look back on 2020 as the time when America radically changed for the better? Will the arc of the moral universe be bent toward justice?. That's up to you. You say something has to change? No. That is far too impersonal. *You* have to change. *I* have to change. *White* Americans have to change or nothing will change."

Racism is a sin. Too many Christians will say, "I am not racist." But too few will say, "I am antiracism."

Do you see the difference? One of those statements is passive; one is active. If we believe racism is a sin, we must oppose it with all of our strength. We must not sit in silence, but we must speak out and speak up against even subtle racism.

The problem is big—so big that we may be almost paralyzed if we simply stand and stare at it.

So—what can I do?

The Psalmist says, "Open your eyes. See the moon and see the miracles of God."

Some of you will remember. It is September 12, 1962. John F. Kennedy makes this famous speech. He looks at the sky and, instead of being overwhelmed or paralyzed, he is inspired:

"We choose to go to the Moon! We choose to go to the Moon. We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things—not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win, and the others, too."

When he finished this speech, he was mocked in many circles. It was quite a declaration to make that by the end of this decade, people could set foot on the moon. "It would require a miracle," others remarked.

But as you remember, Kennedy was assassinated and would not be there to see it. But in July 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin set foot on the moon's surface after landing in the Sea of Tranquility. Armstrong stepped out first and uttered those famous words: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

You may not be aware of this additional fact. The astronauts left something behind—a small grey silicon disc sealed in an aluminum capsule. At the top of the disc is the inscription, "Goodwill Messages." As if offering a return address, these words are written around the rim: "From the Planet Earth—July 1969." And in tiny type etched into the surface are messages from 73 world leaders. Most are inspirational, although a couple are a bit arrogant. Some are short, while others are rather lengthy.

The Vatican was asked for a submission. Do you know what was sent from there? It was Psalm 8.

Solving the problem of systemic racism will take a miracle. But I believe in miracles.

Stephen Reeves says, "How do you start? Listen and learn. Educate yourself. Get okay with being uncomfortable; you won't be changed if you are unwilling to be challenged. Work to build cross-cultural relationships of mutual respect and trust. Hear the stories of others. Believe them!"

We ask: Can it happen? The answer is a resounding "Yes!"

How does it happen? It happens one conversation, one protest, one person at a time.

While all these protests were happening on the ground, something rather amazing happened in the air. Some might even call it a miracle. Doug Parker, the CEO of American Airlines, took a flight on Southwest. Now, while that probably surprises you, it doesn't qualify as miraculous. But Doug brought a book on board that flight called, "White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism." (As an aside, this is a book worth reading for all who want to be part of this conversation.) During this trip, JacqueRae Hill, an African-American flight attendant, sat down beside him and asked, "How's the book?" He answered, "It is fantastic and challenging—although I am only about halfway through." He then went on to point out how important these conversations on race are.

At that point, the flight attendant broke down in tears. JacqueRae remembers, "I'm pretty sure I startled him by seemingly dumping all my emotions on him. But his reply was, 'I'm so sorry. And it's our fault that this is like this.' We continued to talk and I tell you it was everything that I needed. I went on to tell him about my prayer on my way to work that day and that he had answered that prayer for me with this conver-

sation. As our conversation came to an end, he asked my name and then said, 'I'm Doug Parker, the CEO of American Airlines.'"

At the end of the flight, he gave her a note that read, "Thank you so much for coming back to speak to me. It was a gift from God and an inspiration to me. I am saddened that we as a society have progressed so slowly on an issue that has such a clear right-versus-wrong. Much of the problem is that we don't talk about it enough. Thank you for talking to me and sharing your emotion."

Do you know what happened on that airplane? It was a miracle. Someone's eyes were opened.

If we are to solve the problem of racism, to ensure justice for all, it will require lots and lots and lots of little miracles like that one.

You know, since I refuse to wear sunglasses, I often find myself squinting. And Jen will be beside me, smiling. And, like the old cartoon character, Mr. Magoo, I am sitting there squinting when I am trying to look at the sunrise or sunset…

So, the question comes again: "Why do you wear those again?" And the answer comes back, "So, I can see."

I think I am going to buy some sunglasses. And, I think I am going to try to look at this world through a new lens—to see people that I have looked past; to see the personal sins that I have ignored. And I am going to remember these names: George, Breonna and Ahmaud.

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, that I may see. ■

Chris George is the senior pastor of Smoke Rise Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, GA. This is a sermon he preached there on June 7, 2020.

Infinite But Not Forever

by Jim Rapp*

God, we're told, was wise
enough that from a ball of
naught he made all things.

Man, we're told, is wise
enough to see that what God
made is infinite.

Infinite, we're told,
but not indestructible;
not our patch at least.

It may soon be that
our patch will no longer keep
its bargain with us;

cease to bear mankind's
wanton ways, cease to forgive
adam's sins against it.

It may be, we're told,
that God's infinity will
again be made naught,

and again made new,
free of adam's hand, effacing God's perfection. ■

**James Rapp is a retired school teacher and pastor, living in Wisconsin. You can see much more of his poetry on his blog, The Cottage on the Moor.*

Faith-based 'Violence Interrupters' Stop Gang Shootings: With Promise of Redemption for At-risk Youth – Not Threats of Jail

By Deanna Wilkinson

The July 4 weekend was one of the deadliest in recent U.S. history, with 160 people, including several small children, killed by gun violence in Chicago, New York, Atlanta and beyond.

And the body count keeps rising. Columbus, Ohio, where I teach and study violence prevention, had 13 homicides in the first 26 days of July, according to police data – 46% higher than July 2019. Many shooting victims are from the same Black neighborhoods in cities that have borne the burden of American gun violence for decades.

Urban gun violence is an entrenched but not intractable problem, evidence shows. Since the 1990s community anti-violence initiatives – many of them run out of churches – have reduced crime locally, at least temporarily, by "interrupting" potential violence before it happens.

Preventable violence

One such program is Cure Violence, previously called Chicago CeaseFire. Founded in 1999 with Illinois state funding, CeaseFire employed community members with street credibility – that is, status in their community – to identify those at highest risk of being shot or being a shooter, then intervene in feuds that might otherwise end with fatal gunfire.

Working with churches, schools and community groups like the Boys and Girls Club, CeaseFire also helped gang members and at-risk youth move beyond street life by finishing their studies, finding a job or enrolling in drug and alcohol treatment.

A National Institute of Justice evaluation found that between 1991 and 2006, CeaseFire helped shootings decline 16% to 28% in four of the seven Chicago neighborhoods studied.

Variations of the CeaseFire program run by law enforcement, public health experts and hospitals have also substantially reduced gun violence in Cincinnati, New York, Boston and beyond. However, many of these successful initiatives, including Chicago CeaseFire, were ultimately scaled back or terminated due to a lack of sustained funding.

Restorative justice

That's what happened to CeaseFire Columbus, an Ohio program modeled after Chicago's program but with a religious orientation.

CeaseFire Columbus was run by Ministries for Movement, an anti-violence community organization founded in the deadly summer of 2009. After 20-year-old Dominique Searcy became Columbus' 52nd murder victim that year, Dominique's uncle, Cecil Ahad, teamed up with local youth and the former gang leader Dartangnan Hill for a "homicidal pain" march through their community of South Side Columbus.

Evidence shows young people trapped in a cycle of violence are often willing to drop their guns for the chance of a better life: a high school degree, say, or a job offer in a field of interest.

A local pastor, Frederick LaMarr, offered his Family Missionary Baptist Church to host the group's anti-violence work, giving rise to Ministries for Movement. In 2010, having studied Columbus' crime data, I invited the group to implement a local CeaseFire program.

CeaseFire Columbus adopted many of Chicago's violence interruption tactics, but the guiding philosophy of Pastor LaMarr and Brother Ahad was to meet everyone with compassion and openness, whether they were a grieving mother or a gang member.

To convince high-risk young people to stop killing each other, they used positive motivation – not threats of jail time, as some CeaseFire programs do. Evidence shows young people trapped in a cycle of violence are often willing to drop their guns for the chance of a better life: a high school degree, say, or a job offer in a field of interest.

LaMarr and Ahad also encouraged perpetrators of violence to take responsibility for their actions. Sometimes, that meant turning themselves in to

authorities. Other times, it meant making amends through community service.

Ministries for Movement has helped several hundred young Columbus residents escape gangs. My evaluation for The Ohio State University found that between 2011 to 2014, CeaseFire Columbus helped to reduce shootings by 76% in our 40-block target area. For one 27-month period, no one was murdered.

The first homicide after those two years of peace was heartbreaking. The victim, 24-year-old Rondell Brinkley, had been turning his life around with the help of Ministries for Movement. Days before his murder, Brinkley had inspired attendees at a community event with his personal story of change.

Gardening for change

Violence interruption works, but it takes intensive and sustained effort. That can be difficult with a volunteer staff.

CeaseFire Columbus achieved its best results after getting US$125,000 in grants to expand its street outreach, community mobilizing, public health messaging and conflict mediation. Funding came from The Ohio State University, the Ohio attorney general's office and the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Ohio.

Ministries for Movement is still active in South Side Columbus: It leads a healing march on the first Sunday of each month, among other activities. But CeaseFire became a casualty of lost funding and city politics. With gun violence quieter in our area but spiking in other parts of Columbus, Ministries for Movement is now sharing its approach with community members and faith leaders in those areas.

It is also trying something new to stop the violence: gardening.

In 2015, with Department of Agriculture funding, I worked with Ohio State to launch the Urban Gardening Entrepreneurs Motivating Sustainability program and planted a garden at Pastor LaMarr's church, replacing the overgrown rusty fence line of an abandoned neighboring house.

Urban Gardening Entrepreneurs Motivating Sustainability helps young people build skills, strengthen social connections and improve health in their communities by growing and selling fresh food. Many of the program's 300 participants have witnessed gun violence and deaths. Many say they find gardening therapeutic.

Surveys I've conducted find that Urban Gardening Entrepreneurs Motivating Sustainability improves participants' eating habits, problem-solving and leadership skills, persistence and workforce readiness.

"Personally, it has taught me a lot of things: How to eat healthier, how to grow produce," said Nasir Groce, who is now 13 years old, back in 2017. "It's taught me that I can do anything I put my mind to." ■

Deanna Wilkinson is Associate Professor. Department of Human Sciences, The Ohio State University. *This article first appeared in The Conversation on July 28, 2020 and is reprinted here with permission. Professor Wilkinson receives funding from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, US Department of Agriculture, under award number 2015-41520-23772. She has previously received funding from The Ohio State University, the Ohio Criminal Justice Services which distributed public safety dollars from the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio's office. She is an active partner in Ministries for Movement.*

Ministries for Movement has helped several hundred young Columbus residents escape gangs. My evaluation for The Ohio State University found that between 2011 to 2014, CeaseFire Columbus helped to reduce shootings by 76% in our 40-block target area. For one 27-month period, no one was murdered.

Thinking the Unthinkable
Buying and Selling Human Organs

by Simon Haeder

By most every most every metric – and soon, we all hope, by the pace of development of a Covid-19 vaccine – technological progress in medicine has accelerated in the past few decades. Many pathologies that relatively recently amounted to death sentences, or, at best, chronic morbidity, can now be cured or held at bay. Our increasing ability to transplant human body parts with a high probability of success certainly falls into this category. In recent years, transplantation has progressed to hands, faces and even penises and scrotums. Yet, while we have been largely able to figure out the technology, candidates for transplants too often die waiting because the supply of compatible organs is inadequate. And, at least in some cases, the barrier is not a literal scarcity. What gives?

Here, I explain how the U.S. organ transplant system, particularly as it relates to kidneys, has been constrained by an ethos built around altruistic donations. The chasm between what could be done and what is being done is wide and will likely continue to grow. I think it is time to rethink the unthinkable and – with appropriate safeguards – venture into the generally unspoken: the "commodification" of organs.

Transplant centers have been known to game the system by misrepresenting the urgency of specific patients' transplant needs.

The Path to Now

For most of human history, chronic kidney disease was a one-way ticket across the River Styx. This began to change with the invention of the hemodialysis machine in the late 1940s. Improvements to the equipment made it practical to open the first U.S. dialysis clinic in 1962. At about the same time, surgeons began transplanting kidneys. Yet despite these developments, few Americans suffering from chronic kidney disease saw immediate improvements in their lives.

For one thing, both dialysis and transplantation remained expensive and lacked a dedicated source of funding, since most insurers did not cover "experimental" therapies. Dialysis clinics were driven to establish what really did amount to death panels to decide which patients would obtain treatment.

Transplants, for their part, were severely curtailed by the lack of availability of viable organs. Half a century ago, the threat of rejection by the new host's immune system mostly limited transplants to donations from close relations – ideally, identical twins. Meanwhile, though transplants remained small in number, they raised big ethical and legal issues ranging from property rights in cadavers to the extent to which government could and should make demands on dying potential donors and grieving families.

The invention of respirators and heartlung bypass machines gradually expanded the potential supply of organs by allowing hospitals to keep organs viable after patients died. Yet this created a new challenge: if physicians must wait until the heart and lungs stop to declare death, the organs may not remain viable. This led to the development of the concept of brain death, a complex diagnosis that to this day eludes consensus definition among professionals. But with transplant candidates whose time was running out, there was no way to avoid confronting the intangible.

With organ rejection and financing troubles largely mitigated, one major barrier remained: there still were not enough organs of any kind – but particularly not enough kidneys.

Washington asserted the government's interest by making grants to a small number of hospitals to create the infrastructure to procure kidneys. Grants supported the establishment of a small number of private dialysis centers, while dialysis also became available through the gigantic government-financed VA hospital system. Yet the amount of money involved was but a drop in the ocean.

That was about to change. Lobbying by patient-advocate groups culminated in 1972 amendments to the Social Security Act that, almost without precedent, guaranteed treatment to sufferers of a single malady: dialysis for end-stage renal disease that would help keep the window open for a subsequent transplant. Yet despite the federal commitment, kidney transplants would not become a common procedure until the

development of more effective immunosuppressant drugs in the 1970s and 1980s.

With organ rejection and financing troubles largely mitigated, one major barrier remained: there still were not enough organs of any kind – but particularly not enough kidneys. Stakeholders were not sitting by idly. By now, a number of informal organ-sharing networks, supported by further federal grants, had developed among transplantation centers to rationalize organ allocation. One such nonprofit network based on the East Coast, known as the South-Eastern Organ Procurement Foundation, established itself as the leader.

Spurred on by the media and advocacy organizations, Congress eventually developed a more coherent national policy – after all, it was already footing the bill. The National Organ Transplantation Act of 1984 provided assistance to organ procurement agencies and set up a task force to hash out a policy on transplants. Crucially, the act created the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) to maintain the national registry for organ matching, a job delegated to the private sector. Finally, it banned the sale of organs, a prohibition maintained to this date.

The contract to run the network was awarded to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), a nonprofit that had evolved out of the aforementioned South- Eastern Organ Procurement Foundation. The task force report reemphasized the view that donations should only be motivated by altruism. The governance of the system was thus set by the late 1980s.

Congress subsequently strengthened the emerging institutions by requiring membership in OPTN in order to perform transplants, and by requiring hospitals to follow OPTN rules or risk losing all Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements – even those unrelated to organ transplants. UNOS, whose membership includes a diverse set of stakeholders ranging from health care providers to hospitals to patients to the National Kidney Foundation, quickly took advantage of its leverage as the private regulator of organ transplantation policy. This included setting the standards for center staffing, provider qualifications and facilities. Note that none of these far-reaching quasi-regulations was issued via the standard federal rulemaking process.

Supporters of this not-quite-government administration system see it as the best of both worlds, avoiding political and bureaucratic entanglements while harnessing the expertise of stakeholders. Critics, on the other hand, have raised concerns about its lack of transparency and firm basis for judicial review.

Since its inception in the 1980s, the mechanics of the U.S. organ transplant system have largely remained static. After registering for the waiting list, needy individuals are entered into a nationwide database that is connected to a corresponding database for organs as they become available. Patient priorities are ranked by a sophisticated algorithm based on the UNOS-established criteria for each organ. In addition to weighing medical factors, the allocation system for kidneys takes into account such considerations as waiting time, immune system compatibility, pediatric status, distance to the hospital and survival benefits. Patients' surgeons make the final decision whether to move forward. If a surgeon elects to wait, the organ is offered to the candidate ranked below, and so forth.

While seemingly steeped in science and expertise, organ allocation has not been without controversy. This should not come as a surprise, as donations can be zero-sum games: if Peter obtains the organ in question, Paul goes without – and he might die as a result. It should be equally unsurprising that the vast inequities of American society in general and the health care system in particular have crept into organ transplantation.

For one thing, suspicions of racial and ethnic bias shadow allocation decisions. Moreover, individuals with money and expert help can register with multiple transplant centers to increase their probability of obtaining an organ. To make things worse, transplant centers have been known to game the system by misrepresenting the urgency of specific patients' transplant needs.

If Peter obtains the organ in question, Paul goes without – and he might die as a result. It should be equally unsurprising that the vast inequities of American society in general and the health care system in particular have crept into organ transplantation.

Allegations of favoritism were front and center in the high-profile case of Robert P. Casey, then governor of Pennsylvania, who received a heart-liver transplant after only one day on the waiting list, and in the case of Mickey Mantle, who had to wait just a few hours longer. More recently, the 2013 case of Sarah Murnaghan, who suffered from cystic fibrosis and by virtue of her age (10 years) was initially denied access to new lungs, raised questions about both the allocation of organs to children and UNOS's lack of accountability to the public. Yet, all things considered,

the hybrid regulation system has proven to be a pretty good steward of the nation's transplant organs. At the very least, it is highly questionable whether a fully government-run entity, subject to lobbying and political whims, could do any better.

The Quest to Procure Organs

Surveys show that well over 90 percent of Americans support the concept of organ donation. That's just as well, since a large pool of potential donors is crucial: only three in 1,000 deaths yield organs that are candidates for donation. Yet public support in the abstract translates incompletely into action; tens of millions of adults are not registered as organ donors.

With the supply of organs from cadavers well below demand, the organ transplant system has increasingly turned to living donors. Obviously, this practice is mostly limited to kidneys – pretty much everybody can make do with just one of the two they have – and overwhelmingly relies on donations by close relatives. Creative approaches to maximize live donations by utilizing so-called paired exchanges or donor chains have made a big difference. Here the formidable problem of local organ incompatibility is overcome by effectively broadening the pool. (Incidentally, a Stanford University economist named Alvin Roth won a Nobel Prize in 2012 largely on the strength of his pioneering algorithms for managing kidney donor chains.)

Maximizing the numbers of donors is impeded by a number of challenges. For one, the most suitable donors – young and healthy individuals – often refuse to think about their own deaths and hence put off registration until it is too late. Moreover, a large number of Americans presume (usually falsely) that their religions discourage them from donating. Even donations from individuals who have registered are problematic because family consent is usually sought, and is often difficult to obtain, before removing organs.

With the supply of deceased donors well below demand, the system has increasingly turned to living donors. Pretty much everybody can make do with just one of the two kidneys they have.

One of the main reasons families refuse organ donation is that the potential donors failed to communicate their preferences before death. Another barrier prevails among racial and ethnic minorities, who too often believe that whites get preference as organ recipients. Last but not least, a surprising number of people worry that the prospect of reaping organs gives their physicians an incentive to prematurely pull the plug.

Yet another issue exacerbating organ shortages is, ironically, gains in unrelated technologies. Safer cars have reduced highway deaths among prime potential donors – particularly young ones. Then, too, improved stroke care and prevention of hypertension have reduced the availability of organs undamaged by wear and tear.

The United States has done well compared to other industrialized countries in sustaining donation rates. The catch here is that better than other countries isn't good enough. Today, 15 percent of Americans suffer from chronic kidney disease. Of these, roughly 800,000 have progressed to end-stage renal disease, where kidney function has been reduced to 10 to 15 percent of normal capacity. Most of them – half a million or so – require regular dialysis, and eventually a transplant, to survive.

Dialysis sustains life, yet it is far from a perfect substitute for normal kidney function. It is a time-consuming process that often leaves patients fatigued, with increased risks of infection and sepsis, and subject to a number of other ailments. What's more, dialysis is very expensive, with an average annual cost of $90,000 that is largely underwritten by government.

For one, the most suitable donors – young and healthy individuals – often refuse to think about their own deaths and hence put off registration until it is too late.

In 2018 alone, Medicare spent $114 billion on chronic kidney disease patients, with the end-stage renal disease population, which makes up a meager 1 percent of the total Medicare population, accounting for more than $35 billion. And this figure does not include spending by private insurers or patients' out-of-pocket payments.

Kidney transplantation is superior to dialysis in every way. It not only increases the quality of life for patients, but also substantially decreases long-term costs of care for patients with ESRD. All told, a kidney transplant is worth on the order of a half-million dollars to kidney disease sufferers and those who share the cost of dialysis. Transplants are also head and shoulders above dialysis in terms of life expectancy. While the five-year survival rate for end-stage renal disease is 35 percent, it increases to 97 percent for those receiving transplants.

One unsurprising result of the explosion in end-stage renal disease is that kidney procurement has consistently failed to provide enough organs for transplants.

The waiting list for kidneys has ranged from 76,000 to 87,000 over the past decade, as more than 20,000 individuals are added to the rolls each year. And with demand increasing at around 10 percent annually, a lot of those in need are just out of luck. On average, 13 people die each day waiting for kidneys (and another seven die waiting for other organs). It is highly unlikely that more effective appeals to the kindness of others will solve the shortage long term. It certainly hasn't so far.

Of course, in health care, one person's cost of treatment represents someone else's income. And no matter whether it's dialysis or transplants, chronic kidney disease is a profitable endeavor. The two biggest dialysis providers, DaVita and Fresenius Medical Care, generate almost $30 billion in annual revenue combined. Prescription drugs are also a hefty part of the treatment bill: Medicare Part D spending is about $5,000 annually for chronic kidney disease beneficiaries and exceeds $13,300 for those with end-stage disease.

Transplants, while more cost-effective than dialysis, are by no means cheap, either. The average billed for a kidney transplant is more than $400,000 – still a bargain compared to $1.4 million for a heart, $810,000 for a liver and $1.2 million for a double lung transplant. In short, treatment for kidney failure in the United States, like all other health care for the chronically ill, is big business.

A first target is the slippage created in obtaining consent from families. Medical providers don't like to ask, but there's every reason to make the asking mandatory – and to enforce it. Second, individuals could be legally required to state their preferences while alive. Or, better yet, make registration for donations an "opt-out" system in which everyone is presumed to have given consent unless they take the affirmative step of declaring their unwillingness to donate.

Some countries – Israel, for one – make living donation more attractive by offering preferential treatment should a donor need an organ themselves down the road. All told, though, none of these approaches appears to have the potential to fully meet growing long-term demand.

Another avenue for increasing supply is to break the commitment to voluntary donation, making donation from cadavers mandatory – a final obligation to society. This would certainly make a difference, though it would not be an easy political sell in a country in which individual liberty is seen as a higher value than the commonweal. Either way, even harvesting every potential organ in this fashion would likely fall short.

This leaves the third option, which for want of a better word is called commodification. The weakest forms of commodification solely focus on offsetting the expenses of live donors, who, in addition to risking morbidity and even death, face the hardship of losing incomes from lost work days or increased outlays for child care while they are on the mend. A precedent here that ought to make this sort of reward more palatable: most states permit prospective adoptive parents to cover the living expenses of birth mothers while they are pregnant.

Then, one might dip a toe in the fiscal-incentive waters by providing modest common- sense rewards for donation – for example, a contribution to funeral expenses to families consenting to organ harvesting. Or – and this is a big "or" – one might go the full monty, offering willing donors, dead or alive, the full net social benefit of their organs in the form of cash.

The devil, as always, is in the details. But the idea of some sort of remuneration has been kicking around long enough to have generated creative proposals to deal with many of the logistical challenges. For example, offering relatives no more and no less than the market price for an organ right after a loved one has succumbed seems both crude and cruel – and also not fair to the deceased donor, who could have used the cash before death. It is also inefficient, because the clock would be ticking on the viability of organs while the relatives decide.

On average, 13 people die each day waiting for kidneys (and another seven die waiting for other organs). It is highly unlikely that more effective appeals to the kindness of others will solve the shortage long term. It certainly hasn't so far.

But forward-looking institutions would mitigate these problems. Some have suggested arrangements like mutual insurance pools in which the payout for cadaver donations would be determined by multiple organ bidders over some period of time. Others have proposed the creation of a futures market for donations, in which potential donors could make their decision in their lifetimes. Most of these proposals envision government regulation to enforce contracts, although alternatives like self-regulating futures exchanges are plausible.

Concerns about exploitation of the poor also don't

hold up well under scrutiny. A market for organs would disproportionately benefit the poor by creating a new source of income.

The very idea of putting prices on body parts infuriates many by besmirching the ideal of altruistic donations. Of course, the altruism in the current transplantation process stops with the donor, the recipient and their families – everyone else is getting paid. Moreover, proponents rightfully point out that we already allow compensation to individuals for donations of blood plasma and for providing surrogate motherhood services, so the expansion to organs would be a change in degree only.

Concerns about exploitation of the poor also don't hold up well under scrutiny. A market for organs would disproportionately benefit the poor by creating a new source of income. And even if that notion seems overthe- top Dickensian, the fact remains that the poor who would never be willing to sell organs might still indirectly benefit from a change in the system that increased the availability of organs and thus made transplants less expensive. In any case, drawing the line here seems a bit hypocritical. We have long been perfectly willing to exploit the poor by paying them to enroll in potentially dangerous prescription drug trials – and, most importantly, by encouraging them to put their lives on the line by joining the military.

Allowing sales of organs does conjure some repellent cases. There are strong indications, for example, that China has been relying on executed prisoners to restock its organ supply – or to line the pockets of corrupt officials engaged in trafficking. But the fact that some people and some nations debase the miracle of transplantation doesn't seem a good enough reason to claim the moral high ground for an altruism-based system that leaves thousands to suffer and die unnecessarily every year.

Set aside ethical considerations for a moment. As suggested earlier, opponents raise an important question about the unintended effects of commodification of organ supplies. Would altering the incentive structure by introducing monetary elements discourage some donors?

If one considers this a significant drawback, the issue might be addressed by limiting commodification to narrow categories, like covering funeral expenses, that are less likely to change attitudes toward voluntary donations. Of course, truly altruistic individuals should not be affected by the ability of others to sell their organs, because they could still donate their organs for free – or donate their remuneration to charity.

To Pay or Not to Pay

It's worth repeating: the gap between supply and demand for organs isn't going to be closed by some clever change that makes the current altruism-based system more efficient. While there is still much that can be done in this regard – changing the current opt-in system for donors to an opt-out system is a big one – there is no true fix in sight. Covid-19 will only exacerbate the shortage in the near term, reducing voluntary donations and increasing the demand for organs by recovering victims of the virus.

Nor do I believe we could expect a straightforward meeting of the minds sometime down the road, in which goodwill and rationality prevail to produce some sort of well-regulated commodification. A lot of people with religious or ideological objections flat out reject the utilitarian view that the end of saving lives justifies the means.

Adding to the opposition to commodification is the reality that any change that sharply increases the supply of organs would create losers as well as winners. We don't know how dialysis providers would respond to any sort of commodification proposal, but we can guess. The two largest providers have not in the past shied away from making their views known: they've spent $75 million in campaign contributions and lobbying since 2011.

And in the case of the transplantation system, change has natural allies in the growing numbers who will need transplants and won't be able to obtain them.

Arguably the best hope for meeting future demand is the sort of incremental reform discussed above, which introduces commodification in an unthreatening way and slowly modifies public opinion. For all the handwringing about the difficulty of institutional reform in America, it does happen, and sometimes fairly rapidly – think of the success of the movements for marijuana legalization and gay marriage. And in the case of the transplantation system, change has natural allies in the growing numbers who will need transplants and won't be able to obtain them. ■

Simon Haeder teaches in the School of Public Policy at Penn State. *Published July 30, 2020 in the Milkin Institute Review and is published here with permission.*

When Is It Time to Tear the House Down, Rather Than Remodel

By Patrick Anderson, editor

My good friend, Frank Broome, is very skilled at remodeling houses, reconstructing furniture, and rebuilding dilapidated things. Me, not so good. It seems to me that more often than not the prudent thing to do with crumbling buildings is to put wrecking balls and bulldozers to good use. Clean up the mess and build something new. Frank's approach is better than mine in most cases.

In the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer the city council acted quickly to advance plans to dismantle the city's long troubled police force department. Other cities and jurisdictions have followed suit. Of course, a considerable backlash has also formed to resist any wholesale changes in policing and we will see where this all leads. But American policing is not the only institutional structure facing calls for radical do-overs.

For instance, in a strongly-worded open letter signed by hundreds of health professionals throughout the United States and addressed to "America's decision makers", Dr. Ezekiel Emmanuel the Public Health Campaign's Director of the Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG), was printed and reported by most news organizations. It gained considerable attention. The title of the letter is "Shut it down, start over, do it right".[1] The doctors said that the tragic COVID-19 pandemic which has devastated America's economy and caused the deaths of more than 160,000 Americans cannot be fixed, it is too far gone. The nation's effort to combat the disease "have fallen short of what the moment demands" the letter states.

Similarly, a Minneapolis historian and co-founder of the University of Minnesota's Mapping Prejudice Project, Kirsten Delegard, has uncovered the "darker truths about the city" the city's racial barriers to home ownership and the impact those racial barriers have had on segregation in the city.[2] Every city in America has a similar legacy of purposively cordoning off citizens of color from the predominantly all-white neighborhoods where much celebrated civic parks and other institutions prevail. Using racially restricted home ownership covenants, the city decreed that property owned by white citizens "shall not at any time be conveyed, mortgaged or leased to any person or persons of Chinese, Japanese, Moorish, Turkish, Negro, Mongolian, or African blood or descent." Now the city is faced with a system of segregation which is structured in such a way to cause dramatic inequities in income, home ownership, educational opportunities, health care, and a great deal more. Not surprisingly, the entire system of urban planning is in need of reform.

An extremely evil system was put in place informally after Lincoln's assassination and the end the Civil War by the newly elevated President Johnson, a son of the south and Vice President under Lincoln. Johnson inherited an extremely divided country, even after the war. He strongly believed in "states' rights" and gave southern white political leaders too much power. He ordered the Union troops removed from the south and granted southern states the power to "oversee" the Reconstruction. Throughout the last decades of the 19th century, and well into the 20th, under the banner of "states' rights" the system of Jim Crow effectively maintained the supremacy of white people and the diminishment of the rights of freed slaves. Laws that affected only black persons, called Black Codes, were enforced by white enforcers who became the early police in the south, with the aid of the KKK.

Despite the enormous barriers, freed slaves quickly took advantage of their freedom and successfully created schools, businesses, churches, banks, and other institutions.

Despite the enormous barriers, freed slaves quickly took advantage of their freedom and successfully created schools, businesses, churches, banks, and other institutions. Black persons were elected to city, state, and national government offices. The successes of those enterprises flummoxed many whites, causing resentment and enflamed racial animosities. In the early years of the 20th century, mobs of white citizens effectively destroyed the advances which had been

made. Throughout the south, notably in cities such as Wilmington, NC and Tulsa, OK entire neighborhoods of black citizens were destroyed, hundreds of black people killed and buried in mass graves, and a new order of "white only" became the law of the south. Police in the south were assigned to enforce the segregated order, to keep blacks in their place. The role police had in blocking black citizens from voting is long remembered.

Police were not the only instigators and enforcers of white supremacy. The institutions of society, both public and private, worked to disadvantage and limit the success of black citizens. Public schools, public health systems, banks and other financial institutions, public transportation, housing zoning, recreational venues, business permitting and professional licensing, and virtually every institution followed the path to maintain racial inequality. Some of those systems are still in place.

America has a poor legacy of living up to our founding documents and ideals. We have not lived up to statements such as "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence, and the 14th Amendment to the Constitution which states in part,

> *All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

Most Americans understand the need for radical change. America's original sin, slavery, was the immediate catalysis for much of the institutional racism that has characterized the American experience. We have never adequately addressed, much less corrected, that sin. Each part of our structured society needs a new examination of how and to what extent each institution has facilitated or hindered the struggle for racial justice.

The highly visible role America's police have had in protecting our racial hierarchy, does not tell the full story of our current predicament, but their presence in volatile situations places a spotlight on them. The slow and often grudging integration of America in the second half of the twentieth century, along with public unrest and protests, resulted in a militarized police presence. The black friends I have been blessed to have tell of personal police harassment, aggressive stop-and-frisk techniques, and other forms of life and death threats to themselves and their communities. One of them is the Rev. Dr. Kevin Cosby, pastor and college president, who was stopped by Louisville police recently as he and his wife were driving home from church. The officer gave no reason for stopping them other than to ask: "What are y'all getting' into tonight?" (see his story below.)

The most dramatic cause of the discontent with police is the killings of people of color by police officers. The rate of people killed by the police in the United States in 2019 was 46.6 killings per ten million residents. The source of this information, Mapping Police Violence, reported America's rank of police killings of citizens between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (47.8) and Iraq (45.1), two of the most violent countries in the world. By contrast, citizens in other, more settled and peaceful countries, were found to be much less likely to be killed by the police. Some of their rates per ten million in 2019 were Japan (0.2), The Netherlands (2.3), United Kingdom (0.5), Norway (1.9), Germany (1.3).

Most Americans understand the need for radical change. America's original sin, slavery, was the immediate catalysis for much of the institutional racism that has characterized the American experience. We have never adequately addressed, much less corrected, that sin.

It is understandable that many voices call for efforts to "shut it down, start over, do it right." For many white Americans recent events have shattered the blindness they have had to carefully bottled realities which characterize much of America. Black Lives Matter has resonated at last with a large swath of white Americans in ways that help them understand the discontent many black citizens have with American life, especially American policing.

So, do we re-hab the current institutions, including the police, or raze the structure and build something new? I understand how difficult it is to change an institution or bureaucracy, and I am attracted to the appeal of "tear it down, start over, do it right", but while we continue to work toward the creation of a new and better police system I recommend the following minimum

changes we should work for immediately:

1. Abolish the "limited immunity" of police. Police officers have operated in America with impunity due to the phrasing in a 1985 Supreme Court decision, *Tennessee v. Garner*, in which a 14-year-old black boy was shot in the back while running away from Memphis police. While ending the widespread practice of police shooting to kill "fleeing felons," the decision also gave permission for police to shoot to kill if they were in fear of their personal safety. Police shootings have increased dramatically, followed by the lack of official corrective action either through legal or administrative mechanisms.
2. Revise completely the police training system. Police training in America is too short, too focused on techniques of force, only superficially addresses de-escalating volatile encounters, and is often negated by "training officers" in the field. A person can become a police officer in less time than a person can become a licensed cosmetologist. In Germany two and a half to four years basic training is required.
3. Empower community choice in the employment of police officers. Training is not the end-all be-all. The wrong person trained, is still the wrong person. The selection of people we empower with the awesome responsibility of policing must be dramatically improved. Much more community involvement is needed. Prospective police officers who are too eager to impose their authority, prone to confrontation, inclined to exercise their authority to impose racial and other biases must be eliminated from the job. Background investigations and interviews by neutral, non-police professionals should be the norm.
4. Re-direct police budgets to programs to help communities and citizens. Part of the movement to "abolish" or "defund" the police is really focused on re-directing public money to alleviate the conditions which lead to violent encounters. Behaviors involving mental health problems, drug and alcohol addiction, domestic violence, and a great deal of other matters should not be part of the police responsibilities.
5. De-militarize all police agencies. Restrictions must be strengthened regarding police use of deadly weapons, combat mentality, choke holds, and other techniques of force and control. The infusion of grenade launchers, tanks, military arms, and other surplus war material must be undone and prohibited. ■

Patrick Anderson is the editor of Christian Ethics Today. In addition to an MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, he earned a PhD in criminology from Florida State University. He has written criminal justice textbooks and scholarly articles, trained police, provided expert witnessing and consulting services in numerous federal court cases dealing with the deaths of people in police custody, and is professor emeritus of criminology at Florida Southern College.

So, do we re-hab the current institutions, including the police, or raze the structure and build something new?

1 See:https://uspirg.org/resources/usp/shut-it-down-start-over-do-it-right

2 See: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-01-08/mapping-the-segregation-of-minneapolis

Police Treated Me Like a Criminal During Traffic Stop

By Kevin Cosby

Imagine contracting a buzzard as a real estate speculator to give you an assessment on a piece of property you are interested in purchasing. The buzzard flies over the property, does an investigation, and submits a report on the property. The report contains only one sentence: "The property in question has a lot of dead rabbits."

You pass on buying the property based on the report and someone else buys the land. You later find out that the buzzard was right, but his report left out some significant details. There were a lot of dead rabbits, but there were also rolling hills, picturesque lakes, and beautiful flowers peeking through carpets of green grass.

The problem with the buzzard's conclusion was that the bird could only see what it had been programmed to see. Canadian literary critic Robert Davies once said, "The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to see."

Like the buzzard, we human beings are astonishingly disposed to missing what is obvious to the eye. When we look but fail to see, or we fail to see stimuli in plain sight, psychologists call this phenomenon "perceptual" or "inattentional" blindness. When you're programmed to look only for dead rabbits, you miss all the other things going on in the scenario.

The recent stop of my wife and I by Louisville police officers is a real-life example of this truth. On Saturday, Sept. 15, around 10 p.m., Barnetta and I were headed home from a dinner date with two friends who had presented at the National Angela Project conference hosted by St. Stephen Baptist Church. We drove down Jefferson to Market Street and then turned left on 22nd Street, which is a one-way street going south. Several blocks later we turned right, headed west on Muhammad Ali Boulevard.

As soon as I made that right turn, the blue lights of two police cars were flashing behind us, signaling us to pull over. Immediately, what crossed my mind was, 'Why am I being stopped, and by two squad cars, no less'? I knew I was not speeding, nor had I run the stop sign when I turned onto 22nd Street. I knew that I had turned right on Muhammad Ali while the light was green. I knew that even if the light had been red, I could have made a legal right turn onto the street after stopping.

Before the policeman reached my car window, I already had compiled a punch list of possible infractions to warrant the stop and mentally crossed each of them off. I could not figure out what I had done wrong.

When the officer approached me, instead of identifying himself and explaining the reason(s) why I had been pulled over, he created more uncertainty. After telling me to keep my hands where he could see them, he asked my wife and I, "What are y'all getting' into tonight?" I thought, 'Hopefully, the bed,' because I had five sermons to deliver the following day.

The officer's question wasn't meant to be disarming or friendly; rather, it had an accusatory tone. My wife and I both interpreted his question to infer that we were engaging in something criminal or nefarious. At the time, I wondered if he thought I was a suburban resident driving an expensive European car who had ventured to the West End looking for a prostitute or drugs.

Our vehicle was under the guarded eyes of three law enforcement officers, yet I still had no idea what I had done wrong.

My hypothesis was further validated after he asked both Barnetta and I for identification. I knew that it is not customary police procedure to ask a passenger for ID on a routine traffic stop. I could only conclude the officer suspected that my wife and I were doing something illegal. While the officer queried me, the officer from the second squad car had stationed himself at the passenger's window and was peering down at my wife with his flashlight shining. Additionally, a plain-clothes officer stood in the distance watching the entire episode unfold. Our vehicle was under the guarded eyes of three law enforcement officers, yet I still had no idea what I had done wrong.

At this point, I processed anything the officer asked me as an interrogation to prove criminality. The officer, noting the Simmons College of Kentucky insignia on the shirt I was wearing, asked me what was Simmons College. I felt insulted and humiliated by his question about Simmons. Can you imagine a police

officer asking what's U of L? What's Spalding? What's Bellarmine? It's not like Simmons only recently opened. The college was founded in 1879 by former slaves. Simmons is the only private black college in the commonwealth, and the only college located in west Louisville, the area that the officer was policing.

It was not until he asked the insensitive question about Simmons that I identified myself by name and informed him that I am the president of Simmons and senior pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church. Although he now knows who I am, he still does not identify himself or give a reason for the stop.

I asked him whether it was necessary for him to see my wife's license; he confirmed that it was not necessary. However, he stressed that I had to give him my license. My wife voluntarily gave him her license. She wanted to verify that she was my wife, so that he would not think that she was a prostitute or some random woman I had picked up.

In our later discussion about the incident, Barnetta shared with me that she didn't want it reported that I was in my car with an unnamed woman who refused to give her identification to the officer.

After the officer returned to his squad car with my license, I deemed it wise to pull out my phone to record the remainder of the encounter. A few minutes later, the police officer returned to my car window and said, "Everything checks out. This is your car and you do have insurance."

The officer still had not identified himself nor told me what I had done to be detained. He told me that we were free to go.

It was then that both Barnetta and I asked him what I had done to warrant a traffic stop. Only then did he tell me that I had made an "improper turn" on an unspecified street. He did not define what the improper turn was. He also said that the license plate frame around my license tag from the dealership is illegal.

He said, "I am going to give you a warning this time," and with that I was free to go.

Many people who have read about the incident have accused my wife and I of acting like victims and making false claims of racial profiling. District Maj. Eric Johnson has said, "Rev. Cosby isn't immune from traffic violations." And to this I say, "Amen!" Like most citizens who live in west Louisville, I am not asking for preferential treatment.

But we do, however, want to be free from prejudicial treatment.

No one should be above the law, but all citizens have a right to expect equal protection under the law. The way citizens are treated in one area should be the same way they are treated in other areas — regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or socioeconomic status.

The protocol for a moving violation traffic stop is for the police officer to first introduce himself or herself and then tell the driver why he or she was pulled over. Then the officer is to ask for the driver's license and proof of insurance. Nowhere in the Louisville Metro Police Department's procedural manual does it instruct an officer to initiate dialogue with, "What are y'all getting' into tonight?"

Proper protocol does not entail saying, "Let me see both of your license," and attending both sides of the vehicle merely because the driver made an undefined improper turn and had a license tag frame that even the fraternal order of police sells on their website!

I am a firm supporter of our police officers; they lay their lives on the line for our safety each and every day. Jesus said in John 15:13 that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for another. In supporting our officers, I also issue this appeal: Don't treat a person like a criminal over a routine traffic stop and then wonder why a black person might conclude he has been racially profiled.

My elders taught me long ago, as a young black man, that if I am ever stopped by the police to always be respectful and cooperative."I can get you out of jail,"they said,"but not out of the cemetery."

The subsequent conversation around this event revealed to me just how much many in our community see the world like the buzzard. Some cannot perceive of a police officer making a mistake or making a biased judgment call. Many automatically are programmed to see only good in the police and victimology in black men.

Like the buzzard, we are all wired toward what we have been conditioned to see. Implicit bias against blacks is real and implicit bias favoring the police is equally real.

The Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: Who can know it?"* That's the Bible's way of saying that most prejudiced and biased people have deceived themselves into believing they are impartial. Or, as James Baldwin once said, "You can't fix a problem if

you don't face the problem."

The issue of police bias must be faced so that it can be addressed. I'm not so naïve to think that every person's voice will be heard like Kevin Cosby's. And because I know that I have been given this voice, I am compelled to speak for those who will never be heard.

Since the police department has an internal investigation to review incidences of improper police behavior, I decided it was my duty to engage my right as a taxpaying citizen of Louisville to seek further investigation of the matter for the sake of those who do not know their rights.

I did not allow the video of the incident to be posted online to draw attention to myself, or to condemn and embarrass the police department. I did it to garner empathy for the many blacks in West Louisville who routinely and anonymously receive this kind of disregard at the hands of law enforcement. And as a result of sharing this episode, St. Stephen has been flooded with calls from people who have had similar encounters with police officers.

By sharing the video publicly, it is my hope that our city's officers are more empathetic and compassionate toward all citizens. In addition, I want people, especially African Americans, to see an appropriate and safe response to law enforcement officers, even when you feel you have been falsely accused. At no time did my wife and I show disrespect to the officer's authority. We respectfully and patiently complied with everything he told us to do.

My elders taught me long ago, as a young black man, that if I am ever stopped by the police to always be respectful and cooperative. "I can get you out of jail," they said, "but not out of the cemetery."

It is my sincere hope that this video will motivate the police department to establish a standard, universal policy for engaging citizens during routine traffic stops. No one should be asked, "What y'all gettin' into tonight?" ■

The Rev. Dr. Kevin Cosby is president of Simmons College and pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church. This op-ed was published in the Louisville Courier-Journal October 3, 2018 and reprinted here with permission.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY FOUNDATION

Post Office Box 1238
Banner Elk, NC 28604

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

"We need now to recover the prophethood of all believers, matching our zeal for the priesthood of all believers with a passion for the prophethood of all believers."
—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

MISSION

The Christian Ethics Today Foundation publishes *Christian Ethics Today* in order to provide laypersons, educators, and ministers with a resource for understanding and responding in a faithful Christian manner to moral and ethical issues that are of concern to contemporary Christians, to the church, and to society.

PURPOSES

- Maintain an independent prophetic voice for Christian social ethics
- Interpret and apply Christian experience, biblical truth, theological insights, historical understanding, and current research to contemporary moral issues
- Support Christian ecumenism by seeking contributors and readers from various denominations and churches
- Work from the deep, broad center of the Christian church
- Address readers at the personal and emotional as well as the intellectual level by including in the Journal narratives, poetry, and cartoons as well as essays
- Strengthen and support the cause of Christian ethics

Christian Ethics Today was born in the mind and heart of Foy Valentine in 1995. From the beginning the purpose of the Journal has been "to inform, inspire, and unify a lively company of individuals and organizations interested in working for personal morality and public righteousness."

Christian Ethics Today is published four times annually and is mailed without charge to anyone requesting it, and will continue to be so as long as money and energy permit. The journal is also available online at www.christianethicstoday.com

We do not sell advertising space or otherwise commercialize the journal. We are funded by the financial gifts from our readers which is greatly needed, urgently solicited, and genuinely appreciated.

The Christian Ethics Today Foundation is a non-profit organization and operates under the 501 (c) (3) designations from the Internal Revenue Service. Gifts are tax deductible.

Contributions should be made out to the Christian Ethics Today Foundation and mailed to the address below.

Your comments and inquiries are always welcome. Articles in the Journal (except those copyrighted) may be reproduced if you indicate the source and date of publication.

Manuscripts that fulfill the purposes of Christian Ethics Today may be submitted (preferably as attachments to email) to the editor for publication consideration and addressed to: drpatanderson@gmail.com

Dr. Patrick R. Anderson is the current editor. He earned a BA from Furman University, MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and PhD from Florida State University. He is a professor, criminologist, pastor and writer. He and his wife, Carolyn, have been intimately involved in the development and operation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as well as several non-profit ministries among poor and disadvantaged people.

OUR CONTACT INFORMATION

Pat Anderson
P.O. Box 1238
Banner Elk, NC 28604

Cell (863) 207-2050
E-mail Drpatanderson@gmail.com

VISIT US ON OUR WEB SITE: **www.ChristianEthicsToday.com**