

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics Volume 30, Number 4 Aggregate Issue 118 Fall 2020

Essays on: *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* by William A. Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen

- 2 **Antiracism Study in the White Church is Vital to America's Future** *By Judith McMillan*
- 4 **Evangelicals Insult My Grandfather's Legacy** *By Jerushah Duford*
- 5 **Fredrick Douglass, Malcolm X and the Vision of Reparations for Black Americans: An Ethical Conversation** *By Darvin Adams*
- 10 **The Future is not Inevitable, But the Way Forward is Familiar** *by Carol Harston*
- 13 **Temptation and Group Evil** *a Sermon by Lewis Brogdon*
- 17 **The Pivot in Preaching: Moving from Text to Life, *The Saga of Life* and *The Preaching Event...*** *Writings of John Claypool* *By Walter B. Shurden*
- 19 **Churches and Unions Together for the Common Good** *By Tony Campolo*
- 22 **The Power of Love to Find 'Hope in Troubling Times'** *Bishop Michael Curry*
- 23 **Has America Lost Its Ability to Laugh?** *By Lavonn Brown*
- 24 **White Too Long** *by Robert P. Jones* *Reviewed by Myles Werntz*
- 28 **Excising the Pain of My Family's Racism** *By Kerry Smith*
- 30 **Rape Culture...In the Church** *By Sammy Choi*

Antiracism Study in the White Church Is Vital to America's Future

By Judith McMillan

It is vital that white churches learn about the economic oppression and systemic dehumanization of the enslaved that began in the early 1600's so that we can understand, to some degree, how we got here.

And where is here? It is seeing Black people continuing to be killed by police in the streets. It is seeing some of our white citizens create a culture of hatred toward Black, Indigenous, and People of color (BIPOC). It is seeing voter suppression tactics being used to limit access to government. It is seeing the long effects of racism. It is like a net caught on a rock being pulled into the ocean with a strong tide that desperately needs to be cut free. That net of hate keeps America frozen. Learning about the real past from people who are descendants of and still affected by white supremacist policies can help us fight racism today. It is why we find ourselves marching in the streets and starting intentional anti-racism education, book groups and learning. It is because we are called to be a just church, a church who helps to liberate God's people, ultimately, liberating ourselves from the same racist oppression. We need to understand the racist net that was carefully crafted to oppress so that we can break free from its trappings.

This is difficult work. It will be emotional work. We are coming to a new reality where we are not the center of the story. Black Lives Matter. And we need to learn from them, and see what life has been like as a collective link to the past.

I am a Presbyterian clergywoman. I have come to love the PCUSA because of their advocacy work with indigenous peoples, with Black lives, with women and children, with the poor. On a trip to my first General Assembly, I recall a bus ride with a woman who was proud of the Witherspoon Society. She told me they were a group within the denomination fighting for social justice. In William Darity's *From Here to Equality*, I learned a little more about John Knox Witherspoon. While I knew he was the only college president (Princeton, 1768-1794) and clergy person to sign the Declaration of Independence, I did not know he was creating a family legacy enslaving up to 500 individuals. "When John Knox Witherspoon's son David died, David's human property and land were

passed on to his children. In his will, the younger Witherspoon also stipulated that three of the captives be leased out and that the income from their labors be used to pay the tuition and fees for his son John to attend Princeton."¹

This is one small portrait of one family who benefited from making Black bodies less than human. They created wealth and furthered the economic gap for those who endured being enslaved. It showcases how one family's legacy was able to build upon their wealth and grow it and thrive on the backs of Black bodies. What do you suppose are the stories of those 500 enslaved men, women and children? We should

This is difficult work. It will be emotional work. We are coming to a new reality where we are not the center of the story. Black Lives Matter.

want to know.

While hosting a book group in a mostly white congregation with all white participants, the question was brought up twice by the same person within two weeks. *Why do we need to study about the 17th and 18th centuries? Can't we move on and make it better now?*

We need to learn about the economic reality that built this nation so that we can make amends. "Some universities managed to establish fiscal stability by engaging in the direct buying and selling of enslaved blacks. In 1838, Georgetown University avoided bankruptcy by selling 272 persons owned by the Jesuit priests who were seeking to secure the institution's survival."² Many universities were built by the enslaved. Those universities would do well to study their documents and study reparations with scholarships for BIPOC.

The Church is called to confess her sins, to name them specifically. Even if we did not profit individually from the enslaved in our direct lineage, we did so collectively. And collectively, we continue to reap the

benefits of this country's past. Since the PCUSA supports academic institutions, we too should reflect on the origin stories of our institutions and provide scholarships and reparations. We can choose to read, quote and follow all white authors or learn from BIPOC. We can choose to isolate ourselves from the news of those being killed. We can even choose to say "stop protesting in my neighborhood," because we carry the sin of individualism, classism, racism; and, by doing so, we promote a white-washed view of history. This needs to end in the almost-all-white denomination of the PCUSA. We need to admit the sins of the past and understand how racist policies are tangling life for Black people in carefully crafted policies today.

The "end of slavery" didn't end racism.³ The idea of white supremacy created a tiered system of economic and social oppression that continues today. "Suffice it to say that in the United States, slave ownership was a white affair and enslavement was a black affair, and the benefits and damages were distributed accordingly." ⁴Enslaved peoples were enslaved for almost 250 years.

Then there was the initiation of black codes, convict leasing, lynchings, Jim Crow segregation, ghettoization, redlining, mass incarcerations and killings by police. The fight for civil rights took place in the 60's because of mass incarcerations, policing, poll taxes and literacy tests for people of color. Black men and women were finally granted the protection and right to vote in 1965! Think about why we needed a voting rights act in this country. Racism, poll taxes and literacy tests made it unlikely Blacks would vote. The VRA "gave African Americans the legal means to challenge voting restrictions...and vastly improved voter turnout."⁵

So why is it important to study slavery and its effect—something that existed more than half the time America has been a country? Because white supremacy and racism built this country. Until we intentionally sit with, listen and learn from the Black community what life has really been like, we can never understand the pain and suffering that built America. We need to confess this reality daily before we can hope for something better.

I find liberation from God in listening to the real stories and practices of people who survived the harshest of hate. I find hope in understanding and learning what really happened. I don't want to forget that America is the place of the Trail of Tears and the lynching of Black men simply because they were Black. I don't want to forget the mob mentality and the hatred that can be taught because that it is happening now. People are dying in the streets because of racism. And until

America faces the racism, and understands the white racist pillars this country was built on: economic advancement at the expense of the enslaved, dehumanizing practices to keep people oppressed, limiting access to government and the like, then, no, we cannot move to next steps.

Part of our white heritage is the pain and suffering our ancestors caused others. Part of our learning is to acknowledge and make reparations. To study reparations! To enact legislation to make a way for BIPOC to excel and succeed in this country.

The need to protect the white narrative of our nation is not important. Those are ideas that were taught to us, but we didn't learn the whole truth. Because of those who wrote the textbooks, we didn't hear from the descendants of slaves. My first slave narrative was shared in seminary, graduate school. Before then, I didn't know about Harriet Tubman. And my life was diminished because I did not know. As a pastor, I am called to preach and teach truth in love. And to be in love with God's creation is to love Black lives and to care to know their truth.

Part of our white heritage is the pain and suffering our ancestors caused others. Part of our learning is to acknowledge and make reparations.

White Church, let's not be afraid to do our homework. Chapter three summarizes where we are now: "The sale and forced labor of black bodies drove the commerce of the United States from the earliest days of the nation and made possible the world we inhabit today."⁶

Let's have faith in the call to follow the One who fights for and deeply cherishes those who have yet to tell their story. Why do we study the 17th and 18th centuries? Because God calls us to. We study the 1st century Jesus, and we study the Holocaust, and we study human sin. If we do not care to know the truth, we are not free from the net of racism, but are caught in its oppression. Church, let's listen and seek a better way to be. For Black Lives Matter to God. ■

Footnotes can be found by using the Search tool at www.christianethicstoday.com

Rev. Dr. Judith McMillan is Presbyterian pastor, artist and avid cyclist living and serving in Michigan.

Evangelicals Insult My Grandfather's Legacy

By Jerushah Duford

As a proud granddaughter of the man largely credited for beginning the evangelical movement, the late Billy Graham, the past few years have led me to reflect on how much has changed within that movement in America.

I have spent my entire life in the church, with every big decision guided by my faith. But now I feel homeless. Like so many others, I feel disoriented as I watch the church I have always served turn its eyes away from everything it teaches. I hear from Christian women on a daily basis who all describe the same thing: a tug at their spirit.

Most of these women walked into a voting booth in 2016 believing they were choosing between two difficult options. They held their breath, closed their eyes and cast a vote for Donald Trump, whom many of us then believed to be “the lesser of two evils,” all the while feeling that tug.

I feel it every time our president talks about government housing having no place in America's suburbs. Jesus said repeatedly to defend the poor and show kindness and compassion to those in need. Our president continues to perpetuate an us-versus-them narrative, yet almost all of our church leaders say nothing.

I feel this tug every time our president or his followers speak about the wall, designed to keep out the very people Scripture tells us to welcome. In Trump's America, refugees are not treated as “native born,” as Scripture encourages. Instead, families are separated, held in inconceivable conditions and cast aside as less than...

...The gentle tug became an aggressive yank, for me, earlier this year, when our country experienced division in the form of riots, incited in great part by this president's divisive rhetoric. I watched our president walk through Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C., after the tear gassing of peaceful protesters for a photo op.

He held a Bible, something so sacred to all of us, yet he treated that Bible with a callousness that would offend anyone intimately familiar with the words inside it. He believed that action would honor him and only him. However, the church, designed to honor God, said nothing.

It seems that the only evangelical leaders to speak up praised the president, with no mention of his behavior that is antithetical to the Jesus we serve. The entire world has watched the term “evangelical” become syn-

onymous with hypocrisy and disingenuousness.

My faith and my church have become a laughing stock, and any attempt by its members to defend the actions of Trump at this time sound hollow and insincere... We can no longer allow our church leaders to represent our faith so erroneously.

I have given myself permission to lean into that tug at my spirit and speak out... At a recent large family event, I was pulled aside by many female family members thanking me for speaking out against an administration with which they, too, had been uncomfortable. With tears in their eyes, they used a hushed tone, out of fear that they were alone or at risk of undeserved retribution.

How did we get here?... Why do we feel we must express our discomfort in hushed whispers in quiet corners? Are we not allowed to stand up when it feels

My faith and my church have become a laughing stock, and any attempt by its members to defend the actions of Trump at this time sound hollow and insincere... We can no longer allow our church leaders to represent our faith so erroneously.

everyone else around us is sitting down?... If a plane gets even slightly off course, it will never reach its destination without a course correction. Perhaps this journey for us women looks similar... I chose to listen to my spirit to speak out. Not because doing so feels comfortable, but because it feels like the right way to leverage the voice God has empowered me with. Now I am asking all of you who feel as I do, to embrace your inner tug, and allow it to lead you to use the power of your God-given voice and not allow Trump to lead this country for another four years. ■

This is excerpted from an article that appeared in *USA Today* on August 27, 2020.

Jerushah Duford is a member of Lincoln Women, a coalition of women in the Lincoln Project. Follow her on Twitter: @jerushahruth

Fredrick Douglass, Malcolm X and the Vision of Reparations for Black Americans: An Ethical Conversation

By Darvon Adams

Where this is no vision, the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he (Proverbs 29:18, KJV).

Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it (Habakkuk 2:2, NKJV).

The conversation of reparations for slavery and the improvement of Black communities in the United States is one of supreme importance. Monetary reparations owed to Black Americans for their ancestors' labors in making the United States a rich and powerful country is one of few genuine conversations that includes the liberating reflections of Fredrick Douglass and Minister Malcolm X. Often referenced as two of the most influential leaders in American history, what Douglass and Malcolm X have in common is that they both grew up in poverty. Both endured a rough life as children within families that knew what it meant to be deprived of material goods and economic resources. Both valued the communal sacredness of being formally educated—particularly with reading, writing and interpretation. Both Douglass and X were keenly aware of the denial of Black educational opportunity in the eras of slavery and Jim Crow. Both were outstanding public orators and great critical thinkers. Both witnessed firsthand the blatant killing and lynching of Black bodies as economic acts. Most important, both Douglass and X are considered to be experts on how racism and discrimination have denied Black folk any form of economic self-sufficiency. Put in another factual way:

Racism and discrimination have choked economic opportunity for African-Americans at nearly every turn. At several historic moments, the trajectory of racial inequality could have been altered dramatically. Perhaps no moment was more opportune than the early days of Reconstruction, when the U.S. government temporarily implemented a major redistribution of land from former slaveholders to the newly emancipated enslaved. But neither

Reconstruction nor the New Deal nor the civil rights struggle led to an economically just and fair nation. Today, systematic inequality persists in the form of housing discrimination, unequal education, police brutality, mass incarceration, employment discrimination, and massive wealth and opportunity gaps. Economic data indicates that for every dollar the average white household holds in wealth, the average black household possesses a mere ten cents.¹

But neither Reconstruction nor the New Deal nor the civil rights struggle led to an economically just and fair nation.

In response to these horrific facts, a turn to the analytical work of William Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen is most appropriate. In their new volume, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, Darity, Jr. and Mullen confront these injustices head-on and make the most comprehensive case to date for economic reparations for U.S. descendants of slavery. Their text is essential for any form of conversation on the need to fund meaningful large-scale reparations in the contemporary context. After opening the book with a stark assessment of the inter-generational effects of white supremacy on black economic well-being,² Darity and Mullen look to both the past and the present to measure the inequalities borne of slavery. As a result, they systemically propose a detailed program of monetary reparations to be paid by Congress, to perhaps 40 million black descendants of slavery.³

According to Darity and Mullen, "Slavery's 'hot-house effect.' they write, created 'vast national wealth.'"⁴ It spurred shipbuilding and other industries, created the need to feed and clothe millions of

enslaved blacks, and provided laborers to work plantations and help build railways and subsidize universities.”⁵ Using innovative methods that link monetary values to historical wrongs, they next assess the literal and figurative costs of justice (financial assessments) denied in the 155 years since the end of the Civil War. On my read of Darity and Mullen, they “offer a detailed road-map for an effective reparations program, including a substantial payment to each documented U.S. black descendant of slavery.”⁶ Taken individually, any one of the three eras of injustice outlined by Darity and Mullen—slavery, Jim Crow, and modern-day discrimination—makes a powerful case for Black reparations. Taken collectively, it would be impossible to ignore the harm, pain, suffering, oppression and dehumanization that is associated with white supremacy in the United States. From this supernumerary girth of information, Part One of *From Here to Equality* affirms the important fact that there is a political history associated with America’s Black reparations movement.⁷ This important history leads to their unpacking of what Darity and Mullen call the “Myths of Racial Equality” and the theoretical questioning of “Who Reaped the Fruits of Slavery?”

In examining the historical trajectory of the Black reparations movement in the United States and demonstrating the consistent denial efforts to establish a comprehensive program of compensation, White America seems to have been blinded by an ongoing analysis of the effects of slavery on the nation’s economic and political development. This is precisely why Darity and Mullen’s text is critically important; it identifies the strategic beneficiaries of slavery both in present and future terms. In examining the key role that slavery played in American economic development, Darity and Mullen explain why Americans are simply wrong about the magnitude and the causes of racial wealth disparities. In response to this historical and theological wrongness, I have come to some critical conclusions. When I desire to have the critical conversation on the institutional effects of American slavery, I engage the work of Fredrick Douglass. When I feel the need to talk about about American Apartheid as founded in the demonic idolatry of 20th century Jim Crow, Minister Malcolm X is my primary conversation partner. When I think of the present-day forms of economic oppression, I become even more settled into the theological fact that we desperately need a godly vision of reparations for Black folk in the United States. We all must write the vision and know the facts that undergird our visions.

Fredrick Douglass (Institutional Slavery in the

United States)

Darity and Mullen proclaim that, “Black abolitionists, uncharacteristically, initially were unenthusiastic about the ‘free land for blacks’ strategy. As early as 1853, in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fredrick Douglass complained that once freed, former slaves would not take eagerly to agriculture unless coerced. He also argued that the very nature of slavery robbed freemen of sufficient self-reliance to be successful as independent farmers.”⁸ However, Douglass later came to regret this break with the Radical Republicans. By 1876, before the Republican National Convention, Douglass observed that the ongoing plight of the ex-slaves was due, in large measure, to the failure to grant them land. He favorably invoked the Russian land reform that followed the emancipation of the serfs: “When the Russian serfs had their chains broken and were given their liberty, the government of Russia—aye, the despotic government of Russia—gave to those poor emancipated serfs a few acres of land on which they could live and earn their bread. But when you

In examining the key role that slavery played in American economic development, Darity and Mullen explain why Americans are simply wrong about the magnitude and the causes of racial wealth disparities.

turned us loose, you gave us no acres: you turned us loose to the sky, to the storm, to the whirlwind and, worst of all, you turned us loose to the wrath of our infuriated masters.” Subsequently, Douglass repeated, time and again, the phrase “the serfs of Russia... were given three acres of land,” contrasting this with nothing being given to formerly enslaved blacks in America. On August 1, 1880, in a speech given in Elmira, New York, at a celebration of West Indian slave emancipation, Douglass observed:⁹

He who can say to his fellow-man, “You shall serve me or starve,” is a master and his subject is a slave. This was seen and felt by Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and leading Republicans stalwarts; and had their counsels prevailed the terrible evils from which we now suffer would have been averted. The negro today would not be on his knees, as he is, abjectly supplicating the old master class to give him leave

to toil. Nor would he be leaving the South as from a doomed city, and seeking a home in the uncongenial North, but tilling his native soil in comparative independence.¹⁰

In a September 24, 1883, speech before the National Convention of Colored Men in Louisville, Kentucky, Douglass repeated the same themes, saying explicitly, that the ongoing “poverty and wretchedness” of blacks across the South would have been attenuated had the nations heeded the Radical Republicans’ call for land distribution to freedmen.”¹¹

As an abolitionist, Douglass understood that the owning of land defined one’s humanity. In other words, to be human during the 18th and 19th centuries meant that one must be of European-American descent and financially able to own their land. Black people were disqualified from both realities as they were considered less than human and racially inferior. However, what Douglass realized was that there is supreme value in one’s owning of land. Douglass understood that the depository en-gifting of land was a critical part of the Black reparations package. Not as an action against slavery per se, but viewing Black reparations as a tool that was to be used for the equality for his people.

Minister Malcolm X (American Apartheid/Jim Crow)

Where Fredrick Douglass might have fallen short of stating clearly his entire intentions for Black people to receive some type of financial compensation for their developmental labors in slavery, Minister Malcolm X provided a more systemic declaration. In 1963, Malcolm X, while still a minister with the Nation of Islam, issued a call for black reparations at Michigan State University. He demanded, foreshadowing the ambitions of the RNA, that the U.S. government grant land and resources that would enable black Americans to establish a separate territory under black control:¹²

He [Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam] says that in this section [of the United States] that will be set aside for Black people, that the government should give us everything we need to start our own civilization. They should give us everything we need to exist for the next twenty-five years. And when you stop and consider the—you shouldn’t be shocked, you give Latin America \$20 billion and they never fought for this country. You send billions of dollars to Poland and to Hungary, they’re Communist countries, they never contributed anything here.¹³

This is what you should realize. The greatest

contribution to this country was contributed by the Black man. If I take the wages, just a moment, if I take the wages of everyone here, individually it means nothing, but collectively all of the earning power or wages that you earned in one week would make me wealthy. And if I collect it for a year, I’d be rich beyond dreams. Now, when you see this, and then you stop and consider the wages that were kept back from millions of Black people, not for one year but for 310 years, you’ll see how this country got so rich so fast. And what made the economy as strong as it is today. And all that, and all of that slave labor that was amassed in unpaid wages, is due someone today. And you are not giving us anything.¹⁴

Malcolm’s thoughts were further explained in his posthumously published book, *By Any Means Necessary*:

If you are a son of a man who had a wealthy

In other words, to be human during the 18th and 19th centuries meant that one must be of European-American descent and financially able to own their land. Black people were disqualified from both realities.

estate and you inherit your father’s estate, you have to pay off the debts that your father incurred before he died. The only reason that the present generation of white Americans are in a position of economic strength...is because their fathers worked our fathers for over 400 years with no pay...We were sold from plantation to plantation like you sell a horse, or a cow, or a chicken, or a bushel of wheat....All that money... is what gives the present generation of American Whites the ability to walk around the earth with their chest out...like they have some kind of economic ingenuity. Your father isn’t here to pay. My father isn’t here to collect. But I’m here to collect and you’re here to pay.¹⁵

In believing that Black nationalism could represent a systemic response to Black poverty and the other harms that continued to destroy Black Americans,

Malcolm bravely called for monetary reparations. In addition to the land that was owed to Black folk, Malcolm felt that back wages for slave labor were due to the descendants of African slaves. Because a mass relocation back to Africa was not possible, Malcolm called for Black Americans to receive some type of financial back pay for their unpaid wages. In the mind of Malcolm, these wages would ensure Black people a permanent place in the very society they helped to build. In this vein of leadership thought, Ossie Davis says that, “Malcolm kept snatching our lies away. We kept shouting the painful truths we whites and blacks did not want to hear from the housetops. And he would not stop for love nor money.”¹⁶ One of the greatest lies told about the history of Black people is that American slavery somehow benefited the enslaved laborer. Knowing that the lack of money was the foremost reason for Black suffering in the United States, Malcolm did not allow money for himself to be his primary motivation. Malcolm wanted reparations for the Black masses. Not for the sake of himself. But for the economic sake of those descendants of slavery.

Other Conversations (Contemporary Modernity)

Reparations are defined as: the act of making amends, offering expiation, or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury. Something done or given as amends or satisfaction. The payment of damages, indemnification specifically, compensation in money or materials payable by a defeated nation for damages to or expenditures sustained by another nation as a result of hostilities with a defeated nation¹⁷ (Numbers 5:7-8, Proverbs 14:9). In his article, “The New Black Awakening,” William Reed courageously declares that it is reparation time in the United States. Reed writes, “This system was built based on Blacks providing free labor. It’s also time we each demonstrated on behalf of the descendants of slaves and against the U.S. government for its complicity in the slave trade and the impoverishment, misery, distress and bigotry that continue to this day.”¹⁸ Reed is convinced that the paying of reparations to the descendants of slaves *is* the new Black awakening.

Isn’t it time to make the American and European governments accountable for stealing human beings off of the continent of Africa and enslaving them for 400 years? The debt from that period is simple: more than 100 million Blacks lost their lives; at the same time, white-run nations that acquired wealth and power from one generation to the next continued to

thrive; while slaves and their descendants lived in wretched chattel squalor. Sadly, most Blacks seem satisfied with the status quo.¹⁹

Whether we live on Malcolm X Boulevard, or in a gated community, it’s time to represent descendants of the slave trade against the injustices that destroyed Blacks and their forbearers’ lives. Isn’t it time that concerned Black Americans admit that nothing is improving for us under this system?²⁰

In 2016, a United Nations panel said the U.S. owes reparations to African-Americans. As recounted by PBS, a report by a United Nations-affiliated group called the U.N. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, said that, “compensation is necessary to combat the disadvantages caused by 245 years of legally allowing the sale of people based on the color of their skin.”²¹ The U.N. group pointed out that the U.S. has yet to confront its legacy of “racial terrorism.” The report suggested reparations in a variety of

The call for reparations amongst the American descendants of slavery is a call that will not go away. It is a vision from God that must be put into action by the people of God.

forms, including educational¹⁷ opportunities, psychological rehabilitation, debt cancellation, and formal apologies. “Contemporary police killings and the trauma that they create are reminiscent of the past racial terror of lynching,” the report said. It is no secret that reparations would help to close the wealth gap. The fact is the wealth gap developed for a number of reasons and the roots go back to slavery. Reparation experts declare that this gap was effectually birthed in slavery. The assumption that those debts are owed by and to people now deceased ignores all the money, property and other wealth white Americans alive inherited from their forebears, including slave owners and many others responsible for depriving Blacks of economic and educational opportunities through discrimination.²²

Reparations in Closing

The call for reparations amongst the American descendants of slavery is a call that will not go away. It is a vision from God that must be put into action

by the people of God. The call for reparations is a call that must be answered. In answering the call for Black reparations in the United States, we must write the vision and then follow through on what we know to be God's instructions for the economic development of Black people. The implications are chilling in that reparations will provide Black Americans a form of economic opportunity. Strategically, I believe the financial payouts need to be divided among individual families. As the endowments are set up to develop the economic strength of the Black community, hopefully they will become forms of development investments, higher education and business ownership.

Not only did slavery destroy Black people economically, it also pushed them to the bottom of the educational well. Being that education has been the only way for many Black people to amass wealth in the United States, I believe that the amount of money paid back to descendants of slavery should also make up for the years of educational currency that could

have used to improve Black people's economic condition. Economics and education are both critical parts of the Black reparations conversation. Here we must listen intently and listen again to the words of Fredrick Douglass and Minister Malcolm X. While they come from different perspectives and implore different methodologies in different eras of time, Douglass and X knew the proverbial way forward as they have helped to keep alive the ethical conversation of Black reparations to the families and descendants of the slave trade. ■

Rev. Dr. Darvin A. Adams earned his PhD in Theology and Ethics, is a CME church pastor, and an elected city councilman in Hookinsville, Kentucky.

Footnotes can be found by using the Search tool at www.christianethicstoday.com

What If The World Was A Family

*When the cupboard's store is not enough
to fully feed mother, father, and children,
real parents make the very tough
choice to ration the food in the bin,
seeing that no one is left short of
essentials until the cupboard is full again.*

*I sit here fully gluttoned by my last meal,
already planning the next, while elsewhere
in this world, hundreds . . . thousands feel
true hunger, hopelessly watching their dear
ones go hungry as disease and death steal
light from their eyes and the end draws near.*

*What if this world functioned as a family;
where those holding power and resources
rationed goods wisely and equitably,
drawing from nature's ample sources,
seeing that essentials are shared fairly,
and the weak are saved from malign forces?*

Would that please you, Father of us all?

—By Jim Rapp

<https://mycottageonthemoor.home.blog/>

The Future is Not Inevitable, but the Way Forward Is Familiar

By Carol Harston

From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century calls us to consider the American trajectory: Has it always been inevitable that we are locked into evolving systems of white supremacy and racial oppression? William A. Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen answer, “No.” All along the way, the American system *could have chosen* to walk a different path. Opportunities have presented themselves to address the economic disparities and constant attacks on black well-being. There could have been repentance, reconciliation and reparations. And yet, America has never been courageous enough to pivot, shift and live into another way of being. Can we afford to be stuck in these patterns of systemic sins forever? If we buy this lie of complacent “inevitability,” we are giving up on hope for a better nation. Systemic apathy is just as dangerous as systemic oppression. One cannot exist without the other. When we believe the lie that white people cannot change, we are accepting ignorance, complacency and a future condemned to violence and hatred. The American Story is not over.

From Here to Equality tells us this good news: There has always been a way forward. Our past denial of reparations has deepened and complicated racial disparities, but it has not erased the path towards redemption. There is a way out. Our country does not have to remain trapped within this vicious cycle forever. Mullens and Darity show us a possible way forward by acknowledging, redressing and seeking closure.

The question before us: what will it take for America to commit to learning our real history in its totality? How can we respond creatively with faith in the country’s abundant resources and compassion for slavery’s resilient descendants? Our country needs sustainable sources of curiosity, creativity and courage. As a Christian clergy, I know that Christianity’s complicity and perpetuation of slavery, oppression and violence throw into question whether there is anything left for Christianity to offer our country. We cannot understate the trauma inflicted upon our nation by white Christian churches and clergy. It will take us centuries to discern, repent and heal from the horror unleashed upon God’s people by the perpetrators of traumatizing theology at the hands of white Christians.

Even so, I offer five Christian truths that can help orient churches to our country’s work of acknowledgment, redress and closure. I offer these boldly because I am convinced that one of white supremacy’s most dangerous weapons is the dominating and domesticating of Christian religion. The more Christians are silent in their biblical interpretation and gospel witness, the greater the hold white supremacy has upon Christianity’s greatest strength and salvation: our dark-skinned Savior, killed by the authorities and raised from the dead to inaugurate a new way of being in the world.

I am convinced that one of white supremacy’s most dangerous weapons is the dominating and domesticating of Christian religion.

These five Christian truths are postures and practices that can help us orient ourselves towards the work of reparations so that we can find familiarity in territory that American society portrays as foreign land. May these five Christian truths connect the dots for us in ways that help us listen to the familiar Spirit leading us into the Greater Story which we have been living all these days, but now with greater clarity and urgency.

- *God’s people discern their identity by identifying with people from the past.* We are accustomed to connecting with stories of people from faraway lands and distant people groups. Every year, we gather to tell the story of what happened in Bethlehem in the fields over two thousand years ago. Each Lent and Easter, we tell the story of Calvary’s hill. God’s presence in their lives teaches us about God’s presence in our lives. There is no length of time between slavery and the present that makes it irrelevant to us. We see the connection between the past and the present – whether that is millennia or hundreds of years.

- *God’s stories always involve flawed and failing*

persons. Let us remember that we regularly identify with disciples who misunderstand, disappoint, or even oppress. Their stories of wrong-doing and repentance are the bedrock of our faith. We know that looking back at our white ancestors and examining our white institutions will lead us to see our participation in and perpetuation of oppression. If we are humble enough to identify with Peter denying Christ, then let us learn how to be humble in our pursuit of reparations. We do not need to be heroes in our defining stories as people of faith. We need only to follow a Savior who regularly saves us and sends us home to tell others about our transformation.

- *God moves through mangled miracles.* Jesus' ministry culminates with mob violence, state execution, and a Savior covered in wounds. Easter morning is a celebratory day that acknowledges and transforms what happened on Friday. The brutality, despair, abandonment, betrayal and denial are retold every year so that we can better understand our sin and God's love. Our Savior's glory is a *gory* glory. Skipping, minimizing, scorning, denying or fearing the cross keeps us in a Good Friday world when God wants us to dance in the Easter parade – wounds and all.

- *God's action in the world continues without end.* Our scriptures may be bound in one book, but nowhere does it say the story ends with the final page. Jesus' story is not over. Reading the Great Commission as if Jesus is speaking to us leaves no room for complacency and apathy within God's people. We live God's open-ended story. Accepting yesterday's evils as tomorrow's reality denies God the possibility and power to transform our world.

- *God's ways are innovative and unpredictable.* If we need curiosity, creativity and courage, we must look no further than our God, who is always leading us where we could not go on our own. With our feet in the Red Sea and the Israelites on our heels, we've got to look to the God who parts the waters. Right in the thick of political division and authoritarian leaders,

the risen crucified Christ shows another way. We need to confess our paralysis and lack of creativity so that we can be open to Easter morning experiences where we discover that God is nothing but innovative and persistent

White churches: Let us rise up. Let us confess that we are people in desperate need of a Savior, only now to discover that we furloughed him a long time ago when we thought we could manage on our own. We created ourselves in Christ's position of power, but not in His image.

Fear not! Christ was born into a religious context where the trajectory felt inevitable and the future seemed like a closed book. Our Savior can once again lead us forward to find our souls cleansed, our pulpits redeemed, and our people commissioned into the ministry of reconciliation. Let us shout, "Glory!" and get to work forming committees, wading into tough conversations in love, and praying fervently for the stubborn steadfast persistence to see this work through

Our Savior can once again lead us forward to find our souls cleansed, our pulpits redeemed, and our people commissioned into the ministry of reconciliation.

to the end – whether it is in our lifetime or that of our grandchildren. Could it be that the white mainline Christian church's resurrection is yoked with the resurrection of Black dignity, power, and safety? What a beautiful, unexpected, open-ended world God is creating among us. ■

Rev. Dr. Carol Harston is as Associate Pastor for Faith Formation and Congregational Engagement at Highland Baptist Church in Louisville Kentucky.

A Sermon on Temptation and Group Evil

By Lewis Brogdon

*Matthew 6:9-15 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.**” For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

Like Jesus did in verses 5-7, we need to challenge ineffective practices of prayer. In that spirit, I ask the following questions. What is the point of prayer and why should we pray in the first place? Is prayer merely space for us to vent and lament what troubles us or to get our personal sin slates clean? Is prayer a form of magic where we say the right words to get the right results? Does prayer encourage passivity as we give our troubles to God and do nothing until God answers or moves in our lives? These are all common beliefs about prayer taught in churches that sustained forms of spirituality that have proven to be shallow and bankrupt. Why do I say this? Think about it. Genocide, slavery, Jim Crow segregation, redlining, mass incarceration, rampant poverty, wars, and gross economic disparities have been practiced for 400 years in this country with the sanction and silence of churches. How can we say that we understand prayer?

This is surprising considering the model prayer is so popular. Christian bookstores and online distributors offer an array of bookmarks, framed pictures, and postcards with the words of this prayer. I can recall my days in high school. Our football and basketball

team knelt before each game to recite these words. This prayer is popular, but I am not certain that most Christians in America understand it because things we call normal do not reflect the vision of God’s kingdom that lies at the heart of this prayer. With all that is happening in our world, we need the words of the model prayer to ground our spirituality, theology, advocacy, and policy work. In the words that follow, I will provide a new way to engage and apply this text.

We Need a Different Encounter with this Text

What do I mean by a different encounter? As an African American biblical scholar, I am accustomed

With all that is happening in our world, we need the words of the model prayer to ground our spirituality, theology, advocacy, and policy work.

to engaging in counter-interpretation of Scripture. Some texts in the Bible have a problematic history for African Americans and so, black interpreters aid the community in understanding a different import or meaning of a text. A different encounter is reading and application of the model prayer, that unlearns the ways the model prayer functioned in the form of Christian religion that accepted racial hate, violence, and structural injustice. After unlearning these things, we can see the meaning of this text in a new way.

There are two interpretative errors we need to correct. First, we have the wrong theological foundation. Look at the opening words of the prayer: “our Father who is in heaven.” The prayer does not say your father but our father. Let me give you an example. White churches have turned this phrase into “my white American Father who is in heaven.” They project whiteness and American nationality onto God and identify God as one like them, what the Bible calls idolatry. Most do not even know they are doing this because it is a part of culture. They rarely, if ever, think of God as not like them, as more than them.

This is what I mean by a wrong theological foundation. Now others follow this same flawed and reductionistic way of thinking: projecting race, class, and other identity markers onto God. Second, we have to correct the individualistic focus we imposed on a prayer intended to be communal. The text does not say

We Need to Focus on a Particular Phrase in This Prayer

Verse 13 introduces us to the idea of temptation and deliverance from evil as group or communal issues. The text says, “and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” This suggests the need to expand

The text says...	The text is changed to say...
Give us today our daily bread	Give me today my daily bread
Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors	Forgive me of my debts as I forgive my debtors
Lead us not into temptation	Lead me not into temptation
Deliver us from evil	Deliver me from evil

me but us. Much of American evangelicalism thinks of spirituality as a “me” issue and so again projects false ideas onto the text.

When we distort the meaning and import of the text, the prayer loses its ability to nurture values and thoughts that resemble God’s vision for the world. The New Testament stresses the relationship between prayer and Christian practice. It shows that the purpose of prayer is to affect how you think, how you live, and how you respond to others. So, it is incredibly important to get the meaning right. Here is a little corrective, an interpretive tip that can recondition your mind to grasp the inclusive and expansive nature of the prayer. In places you see the word “our” and “us,” add this qualifying phrase - “all persons in all places – black, brown, and white.”

To the God of all persons (in all places) – black, brown, and white – who is heaven. Holy is your name. May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give all persons – black, brown, and white - daily bread. And forgive the sins of all your children – black, brown, and white – as we forgive all those who sin. And keep all your children - black, brown, and white – from temptation but deliver us from individual and communal (systemic) evils. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen (Author’s paraphrase/translation).

This simple phrase broadens the import of this prayer to include your neighbors and corrects any tendency to think of this pray in an individualistic manner.

our understanding to see temptation as a “group thing.” Otherwise, we will miss evils that God wants to deliver us from like racism and classism. I like to think of verse 13 as sober reminders about temptation and the pervasiveness of evil in groups.

This country is drowning in evil. American society is in a constant state of unrest, confusion, strife, and decline because we do not think of sin and evil as communal problems. This has to change. In the book “Moral Man Immoral Society,” Reinhold Niebuhr makes an argument about human behavior in groups that helps us to see the import of the group nature of temptation in verse 13.

Individuals may be moral in the sense that they are able to consider interests other than their own...and are capable of preferring the advantages of others to their own...But all these achievements are more difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and social groups. In every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships” (Reinhold Niebuhr, xxv)

There are three takeaways from this very important quote. First, this would suggest that we behave differently in groups than we do individually. Second, we need discernment, strength, courage, and radical honesty to resist what comes naturally to peers within our groups. Third, we also need to be aware of the different groups we are a part of - American citizens, members of a religion, denomination, congregation,

social class, family, ethnicity, race, gender, etc. Each group presents unique temptations that if unchecked unleashes evil on others in the world.

Think about this. I may not kill someone individually but, as an American, will go along with killing someone from another country if we declare “war” on them. I may provide shelter for my family, but, as a member of the upper or middle class, will allow millions of people to live outside and experience deprivation. People in groups write laws and policies that benefit them and harm others, and they will justify it, even if it means locking kids in cages and letting people die. When we give into group temptation, we do evil things. This is why verse 13 is so relevant for the

to the last book in Scripture, the book of Revelation. Listen to Jesus’ message to a group of Christians at Philadelphia “I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Revelation 3:10). The language of the hour of temptation sounds a lot like 2020 – a season of great testing of who we are and the ties that bind us together.

This graphic is helpful in seeing the component parts of major issues confronting us and causing such pain and loss. Events in 2020 have exposed painful things about American society and deep rifts, that if not addressed, threaten the future of this country

	An Era of Great Social Upheaval & Deep Social Rifts				
Global Pandemic “Covid-19”	Political system w/ dysfunction & gridlock	Entrenched Racism & Xenophobia	Weakening Infrastructure	Gross Economic Disparities & Mass Poverty	Collapse of Meaning & Declining Influence of Religion

church today. It invites us to think about all the temptations tied to how identity, loyalty, differentiation, entitlement, and action work, then allowing Scripture to correct and guide what we do in groups. When scriptures like 1 John 2 talk about the lust of eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride or life or Romans 12:2 that exhorts readers not to be conformed to pattern of the world, that is group language. Those verses are talking to us and about the systems we create and sustain.

We Need to Hear a Word of Warning about Temptation and Group Evil

Our fore parents missed the import of the model prayer. They prayed this while enslaving Africans or committing human atrocities against Native Americans. I do not want us to repeat their mistake. I want us to understand the model prayer, pray in this manner, and live according to its vision. I want this for an important reason. We are engulfed in a struggle for the soul of this nation. In a sense, the struggle is apocalyptic. In apocalyptic writings, there are often corrupt empires, material excess for the few, religion gets co-opted by socio-political power, and there is mass suffering, especially among poor and marginalized communities. These social conditions gave rise

as a thriving democracy. Please read the following articles to get a sense of the array of issues we are facing and the kind of temptations we face as a society: Joel Kotkin, “America’s Drift toward Feudalism,” Yoni Appelbaum, “How America Ends,” Jonathan Rauch, “Rethinking Polarization,” Wade Davis, “The Unraveling of America,” George Packer “We Live in a Failed State” and Jennifer Richeson, “The Mythology of Racial Progress.”

Amidst this struggle for our souls, we face two great temptations and evils I want to name. First, there is the temptation and attendant evils of justifying structural inequality and the neglect of our neighbors. This prayer reminds us that everyone should have daily bread, not just people in your groups. Second, there is the temptation and attendant evils of justifying hate toward those who are different from us and or those we differ with. This prayer challenges us to forgive and not succumb to temptations like hate, bitterness, resentment, and violence lest we become what we hate or become what we strive to fight against. I am not saying we should not resist injustice or stop protesting. Not at all. I am, however, challenging us to examine what is fueling and grounding our work.

This is why I keep reminding people of the teachings of Jesus and Dr. King’s writings. Both understood that

we are in this together, even the people we oppose, that we cannot fight injustice with bitterness and hate or any form of evil; and that it is easy to disguise and justify hate and violence (having a good reason to hate or react with violence does not make it right). Again, this is how group evil becomes so pervasive, which is why we must be vigilant and steadfast in prayer as we fight the good fight. May these words both challenge and guide us in the coming days as we confront

our own “hour of temptation” in the remaining days of 2020 and beyond. ■

Lewis Brogdon (Ph.D.) is the Research Professor of Preaching and Black Church Studies at the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky and chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Simmons College of Kentucky.

Emotional, Impromptu Words Spoken by Doc Rivers

Los Angeles Clippers coach Doc Rivers was asked about the the shooting of Jacob Blake, a Black man shot multiple times in the back by Kenosha, Wisconsin police. Rivers gave this tearful response.

“It’s just so sad. What stands out to me is just watching the Republican convention, viewing this fear. All you hear is Donald Trump and all of them talking about fear. We’re the ones getting killed. We’re the ones getting shot. We’re the ones that we’re denied to live in certain communities. We’ve been hung. We’ve been shot. All you do is keep hearing about fear. It’s amazing why we keep loving this country, and this country does not love us back. It’s really so sad. Like, I should just be a coach. I’m so often reminded of my color. It’s just really sad. We got to do better. But we got to demand better.

“It’s funny, we protest. They send riot guards. They send people in riot outfits. [White supremacists] go up to Michigan with guns. They’re spitting on cops. Nothing happens. The training has to change in the police force. The unions have to be taken down in the police force. My dad was a cop. I believe in good cops. We’re not trying to defund the police and take all their money away. We’re trying to get them to protect us, just like they protect everybody else. I didn’t want to talk about it before the game because it’s so hard, like, to just keep watching it.

“That video, if you watch that video, you don’t need to be Black to be outraged. You need to be American and outraged. How dare the Republicans talk about fear. We’re the ones that need to be scared. We’re the ones having to talk to every black child. What white father has to give his son a talk about being careful if you get pulled over? It’s just ridiculous. It just keeps going. There’s no charges. Breonna Taylor, no charges, nothing. All we’re asking is you live up to the Constitution. That’s all we’re asking for everybody, for everyone. Thank you.”

The Pivot in Preaching: Moving from Text to Life, The Saga of Life and The Preaching Event... Writings of John Claypool

By Walter B. Shurden

John Claypool, *Stages: The Art of Living the Expected* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1977, 90pp.)

John R. Claypool, *The Saga of Life* (New Orleans, LA: Insight Press, Inc., 2003, 95pp.)

John R. Claypool, *The Preaching Event* (Waco, TX: Word Incorporated, 1980, 139pp.)

One of the best white Baptist preachers and teachers of preachers in the South of our generation is Clyde E. Fant. In 1969 with weak knees I followed him as pastor at the First Baptist Church in Ruston, LA. I was 29-years-old and scared to death of the job. But I was maybe more intimidated by following Dr. Fant who had left Ruston to TEACH preaching at a Baptist seminary!

One Sunday night during worship (we still had worship back then on Sunday evenings), almost three whole years after I had been pastor, I called on good ole' Fred Leachman to lead us in prayer. (Back then, we still called on people in the congregation to pray without warning.) "Dear Lord," Fred intoned, "We thank you that we are free to worship here tonight. And we ask you to bless Dr. Fant as he preaches to us." After that, I have no idea what else Fred might have asked of the Almighty!

Fant's preaching was unforgettable and I know why. Years after I left Ruston, he visited us in our home in Louisville, KY. Sitting in the den after lunch, I asked him to tell me in a sentence the secret of good preaching. "Go for the text," he said, "then go for the life."

He rattled it off so quickly that I assumed he had been asked that question a 100 times. He had it down pat. His counsel for good preaching begged brevity: "Go for the text. Go for the life."

John Claypool did that. He went for the biblical text, always with remarkable, amazing insight into its life. And he did it beautifully, Sunday after Sunday. In his second book, *Stages*, later retitled *The Saga of Life*, he went for the text of King David's life. He then demonstrated how David's life related to four developmental stages of our lives. In his third book, *The Preaching Event*, Claypool unpacked his theology and the prac-

tice of moving from text to life in the pulpit.

Stages/The Saga of Life is a book of four sermons Claypool preached in the mid 1970s at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX. The book had three lives. Word Books first published it in hardback in 1977 as *Stages* with the subtitle of *The Art of Living the Expected*. In 1980, Word reissued it as "A Key-Word Book" in paperback. Finally, Insight Press published it in 2003 under the title of *The Saga of Life: Living Gracefully Through all of the Stages*. Because

John Claypool did that. He went for the biblical text, always with remarkable, amazing insight into its life. And he did it beautifully, Sunday after Sunday.

it is more readily available today, the Insight publication of 2003 is the edition I cite here.

In their printed form, the four sermons of *Stages/The Saga of Life* read more like essays than sermons. One suspects Claypool elaborated in the print edition. He addressed four developmental stages of life: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and senior adulthood.

Utilizing the life of King David as his biblical background, Claypool's aim was "to blend the light of biblical wisdom with the best from the behavioral sciences" (20). And for what purposes? He wanted to help individuals understand the distinct challenges of each of the four stages of life.

This particular book mirrors John Claypool's awareness of and interaction with his contemporary culture. He used Paul Tillich's correlation method. Culture defined the issues and revelation provided the answers. Gail Sheehy, a journalist of the culture, published her blockbuster book, *Passages*, in 1976; it stayed on the New York Times Best Seller list for three years. Claypool published his sermons the next year. Eric Erickson, the great developmental psychologist, pre-

ceded Sheehy and developed eight stages of human development. Claypool cites him in the book. While Claypool preached from the Bible, he did so in the full light of prevailing culture. Themes of his book even foreshadow James Fowler's much more expansive and comprehensive 1981 Stages of Faith.

Claypool claimed modest hopes for the book: "First, to provide an individual with perspective on his or her own past, insight into his or her own present, and preparation for his or her own future; and second, to provide individuals some 'handles of understanding' in what is going on in the lives of family and friends who are at these various stages along life's way" (22).

Regarding the stage of childhood, Claypool identified two needs: affirmation and expectation. The child needs to be affirmed and made to feel worthy. As one reads Claypool's complete oeuvre, one becomes aware of how surprisingly personal this specific need was for him. He spoke often of feeling unworthy. Those of us who knew John Claypool ask in mystification, "How could John Claypool have ever doubted his self-worth?" But that he did reminds the rest of us of how universal is the need for self-affirmation.

But as the child needed to be affirmed, she also needed to be reminded of the accountability of her life. Being has an ethic to it. "No matter how secure a child may feel in the delight of his or her family, no matter how much self-worth may have been internalized, if he or she has not also developed a sense of responsibility to take what has been given and pass it on to others, then it is not likely that God's dream for that child can ever come true" (37).

Adolescence, the second stage, said Claypool, finds one in "the valley of transition." The young person moves from dependence to interdependence, learning that independence is a myth. During a child's adolescence, the parent must step back without stepping out on the relationship, while the young person must walk forward without walking away from one's sources.

Adulthood, Claypool's third stage, is not a time of "arrival" when all things are settled. Rather it is a time of continuing areas of growth. He identifies three: vocation or generativity, intimacy or relationship with others, and inward growth or self-fulfillment. Claypool hammers away at one of the Achilles heels of many adult males, especially ministers: the need for balance between these areas. And one recalls Claypool's own confession in another place that he was better at work than he was at home.

While Claypool excels at relating each of the stages of life to the life of David, he may be at his best when he writes of "senior adulthood." Returning to one of the major themes of his preaching, that of self-worth,

Claypool identifies the major shift in the senior years from doing and having to being.

Reading these four sermons reminds us that Claypool was a pastor, not simply a preacher. His sermons, though almost always universally applicable, were rooted in the needs of local congregations. He was more than preacher; he was church visionary, church theologian and church educator. His sermons were designed to help the real people who sat before him each Sunday to make it through another week.

John A. Broadus, Edward McNeill Poteat and John R. Claypool are the only three Southern Baptist ministers to give the celebrated Lyman Beecher lectures on preaching at Yale University. Though invited, Carlyle Marney died before he could deliver his lectures in 1980.

Claypool contended that when preaching is done "authentically, something of enormous significance takes place. An event occurs, where power of the deepest sort moves out of one human being to affect other human beings" (31). Therefore, he called his four

Claypool contended that when preaching is done "authentically, something of enormous significance takes place. An event occurs, where power of the deepest sort moves out of one human being to affect other human beings."

Beecher Lectures The Preaching Event in which he sought to answer the what, the why, the how, and the when of the preaching event.

What is it that the preacher does when standing to preach? What is the objective? It is "to establish a relation of trust between the human creature and the ultimate Creator. Reconciliation of the profoundest sort is the true business of the preacher . . ." (36). A relationship has been broken! We are not simply frail and flawed creatures. We are insurgents, rebels! The preacher's role, says Claypool, is that of reconciler.

Why does the preacher do what she does? What is the motivation? "Am I trying to get something from the audience for myself, or am I intent on giving something of myself to the audience" (57)? Drawing on C. S. Lewis, as he often did, Claypool contrasts "need-love" with "gift-love." He said out loud what every preacher knows deep in her bones. There is a "high" to

preaching. One becomes easily addicted to the plaudits. What the preacher needs often trumps what the preacher gives. Claypool understood the preacher as a gift-giver.

How does the preacher do what he does? What methodology did Claypool recommend? “We will make our greatest impact in preaching when we dare to make available to the woundedness of others what we have learned through an honest grappling with our own woundedness” (86-87). Here Claypool called for what he is best known: confessional preaching. Truth, he insisted, has the best chance of happening through us if we admit how it happened to us. So how does a preacher preach? As a witness!

In the final chapter, Claypool addressed the timeliness or the when of preaching. “There are teachable moments and appropriate occasions when things are possible that could never have been before and never could be again” (115). Here the preacher is nurturer, one who “who works with growing things” and understands timing, what to do when.

Mary Oliver believed poetry was life-transforming. She said, “For poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as

Truth, he insisted, has the best chance of happening through us if we admit how it happened to us. So how does a preacher preach? As a witness!

necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry.” John R. Claypool believed exactly that about The Preaching Event.

While I cannot vouch for it nor do I know if it is simply a common practice at the Beecher Lectures, I heard that when John Claypool finished his lectures at Yale the audience stood immediately with a boisterous ovation. I would have stood with them, quickly, gladly, had I been there. ■

Walter Shurden is a Baptist scholar, preacher, writer, and mentor to many. He is an emeritus professor at Mercer University and lives in Macon, GA with his wife, Kay. This essay is the second in a 6-part series which he has written for Christian Ethics Today.

Matching Gift Opportunity

Readers of *Christian Ethics Today* have been blessed by generous contributions from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation. Many of our readers knew Eula Mae and John Baugh and/or their daughter, Babs, who served God in many ways including as a member of the Board of Directors of CET.

The Baugh Foundation gifts to the CET journal are offered as “matching gifts” which enhances the gifts of each of us who also support the journal.

If you are able, please consider a special end-of-year gift to support the journal as an offering in memory of these wonderful people, and in support of the on-going work carried on by the Baugh family.

THANK YOU FOR READING, SHARING, AND SUPPORTING
CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

Churches and Unions Together for the Common Good

By Tony Campolo

Whenever there are proposals for social change by progressives, whether they be for a plan to save the environment, calls for a just tax code; raising the minimum wage to 15 dollars an hour, establishing universal health care, or a creating a just distribution of wealth, there is likely to be strong resistance from those corporate leaders whose vested interest is to maintain the status quo.

There is little doubt that the power and wealth of the captains of business and industry are far too great in today's society. The incomes of top corporate executives have reached obscene levels, especially when compared to the incomes of most other Americans. In 1945, according to one estimate, there was a 35 to one dollar ratio when the incomes of executives of major corporations were compared with the average incomes of the workers in their companies. Today, that ratio is 350 to one. Of great importance is that in many, if not in most cases, the major part of what these executives get paid is not in cash, but rather in shares of stock in their respective companies. They usually have a vested interest, therefore, in maximizing the profits of those companies by paying their workers as little as possible. This is one reason the distribution of wealth in America has become so extremely unbalanced with 22 percent of the nation's wealth being concentrated in one percent of the population. It takes no genius to recognize that such concentrations of wealth translates into a concentration of power, nor why those who so greatly benefit from the present system have good reason to oppose its being changed.

Once there were positive checks on corporate power. More than 60 years ago, Kenneth Galbraith, the almost legendary economist from Harvard University, referred to these checks as "countervailing powers." They were the powers of government and labor unions. According to Galbraith, whenever corporate power became too great, the allied powers of government and labor unions were able to curtail corporate power. However, this effective balance of countervailing powers which existed for several decades, has, unfortunately, been negated over the past 20 years.

First, the power of labor unions has been significantly reduced because union membership has dra-

matically decreased. Labor unions primarily have been made up of industrial workers, and American industrial production has undergone a precipitous decline. A significant amount of industrial production has been gradually shifted to Asian and Latin American countries where U.S. companies could secure cheaper labor. Also, automation has displaced the jobs of many U.S. workers. An often-overlooked cause of declining union membership has been that corporate management often employed propaganda techniques that effectively have made unionizing undesirable to many workers.

Government, the other possible countervailing

Once there were positive checks on corporate power. More than 60 years ago, Kenneth Galbraith, the almost legendary economist from Harvard University, referred to these checks as "countervailing powers." They were the powers of government and labor unions.

power, according to Galbraith, that might have served as a check on the growing control that the corporate sector exercises on society, has been significantly diminished because of changes in the financing of political campaigns. The U.S. Supreme Court's ruling, Citizens United, has made it possible for corporations to highly influence, if not control, what government can do to limit corporate power. That ruling removed most of the limits on the financial contributions that corporations can make to the campaigns of candidates running for office. Corporate contributions to election campaigns now overwhelm what unions and all other donors together can contribute. Will Rogers, the humorist of a century ago, once said, "Nobody should complain about the U.S. Congress. It's the best Congress that money can buy!" If that was true back in

his day, it is even more so today.

Surveys taken by political scientists reveal that corporate leaders generally do not use their unchecked power for the common good. They are more likely to be governed by the self-serving principles of Ayn Rand and the doctrines of social Darwinism. Their unbridled capitalism has led, among other social problems, to the degradation of the environment along with the denigration and exploitation of working people both in America and in Third World countries.

This situation, however, is not hopeless. Something can be done to check the growing dominating role of corporate power. Unions could be revitalized! The power of organized labor could be increased if there were a major new effort for recruiting into its membership those hundreds of thousands of American workers who are underpaid and have few benefits such as health care and paternity leave. Consider the 350,000 underpaid workers in the fast food industry, and that even larger group of workers who are in the service sector of the economy. This latter group includes hotel maids, janitors, cleaning personnel, household servants and security guards. The unionization of these often-neglected workers would increase the power of unions significantly. But unionizing such workers may be more difficult than it at first seems because there are laws about unionizing that would have to be changed for this to happen.

There are religious leaders and their followers who have convictions that require a deep commitment to the poor and oppressed, and would likely work for such changes including unionization if they believed that such efforts could make life better for exploited people. Getting religious leaders involved in strengthening unions may not be as unlikely as it at first seems. There is a historical example of this in the late 19th century and early 20th century when church leaders in New York and Chicago lent significant help and legitimation to the labor movement. Biblically-based incentives for social justice motivated many social gospel leaders, such as Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, to give support to, and even work to help the labor movement. Together, with labor leaders, they worked to end child labor and to promote such social benefits as the eight-hour workday and the five-day work week. Liberal socially conscious church leaders mobilized support for union initiatives to advance women's suffrage and the passing of the Social Security Act. As recently as the middle years of the 20th century, church leaders could be found marching arm-in-arm with Martin Luther King to support a union strike for garbage collectors in Memphis, Tennessee.

To once again gain that kind of support from church leaders, as well as from the leaders of other religious groups, unions would have to change their image. Justified or not, a survey of public opinion likely would show that unions are viewed both in negative ways and as being irrelevant as a force for the common good. To many in the religious community, they seem to be interested only in higher wages and better benefits for their members. Furthermore, to a large extent in the public's mind, there have been too many links between unions and organized crime, as well as evidence of internal corruption. Also, in the early 20th century, union strikes sometimes were marked by violence as well as being infused with Marxist ideologies. For many religious leaders, unions would have to "clean up their act" and portray a more positive image before they would be willing to lend their support.

What would go a long way towards changing their image and gaining the support of religious leaders would be for unions to adopt an overtly socially

For many religious leaders, unions would have to "clean up their act" and portray a more positive image before they would be willing to lend their support.

progressive agenda. Such an agenda would have to show commitments to end racism and sexism, not only in the workplace and in union practices, but in society in general. Also, religious leaders would like to see unions adopt a "green agenda" that promotes environmental responsibility in America's industries, as well as a commitment to end the exploitation of "sweatshop" workers both in the United States and in developing countries. This latter commitment should be easy for unions to embrace because it has been the exploitation of workers, both at home and abroad, that has taken so many legitimate jobs away from union workers.

There is a good possibility that such a progressive social agenda could gain support for unions among many religious communities. The leaders of those mainline denominations allied with the National Council of Churches, along with most Roman Catholic bishops, as well as many progressive Jewish leaders, likely would consider partnering with unions to further such causes. African-American

and Hispanic church leaders, who often opt for social policies that help the poor, would likely join such a coalition of religious leaders. Joining this possible assembly of Christians and Jews would be those Evangelicals who belong to such socially progressive groups as the Red Letter Christian led by activist Shane Claiborne and the Sojourners community, led by best-selling author, Jim Wallis; joining them would also be those who identify with the Poor People's March, led by Rev. William Barber. While there is some truth to the sarcastic claim that Evangelicals are the Republican Party at prayer, there are a host of Evangelical leaders who march to the beat of a different drummer and many of them could be won over to supporting labor unions should unions embrace a commitment to a social justice agenda.

To grow and once again become the kind of countervailing force that could check the ever-growing power of corporations, the labor movement would benefit greatly if it had a few charismatic leaders such as it had decades ago in Clara Lemlich and, more recently, in Cesar Chavez. In a media-oriented society there is a need for voices to articulate the vision of justice that the union movement at its best is all about. Doing much to help the labor movement's image would be for it to be seen as having the support and moral legitimation of religious leaders, such as that which Martin Luther King provided for the Civil Rights movement. When the struggles for economic justice for exploited workers become difficult, there will be a need for voices to declare: "With God all things are possible." With that kind of leadership, it is even possible to envision inspired justice-oriented young people calling on people to support the movement and conducting membership drives for unions. This could happen if idealistic young men and women could believe that unions were standing up for downtrodden workers who have had no voice.

Too much time and effort has been spent on describing the existential situation when the real challenge is how to change it. Could a pragmatic response be a revitalized social justice-oriented labor movement, undergirded by religious leaders working together for society's common good? Could such a coalition seeking, not only benefits for union members, but also to serve those whom Jesus called, "the least of these" be the grounds for a new labor movement? Could such a movement become once again, in Kenneth Galbraith's words, a countervailing force that could check the ever-expanding power of the corporate sector of society?

I can almost hear the question asked centuries ago by the prophet Isaiah: "Who will go for us, and whom shall we send?" I would that a new generation of faith-based activists might answer, "Here we are! Send us!" ■

Tony Campolo is one of the most influential Christian leader in the world. Along with Shane Claiborne, Tony created the Red Letter Christian

There are a host of Evangelical leaders who march to the beat of a different drummer and many of them could be won over to supporting labor unions should unions embrace a commitment to a social justice agenda.

network (www.redletterchristians.org). He is a scholar, author, speaker, and represents the best of the teachings of Jesus. He is a member of the board of directors of Christian Ethics Today.

The Power Of Love To Find ‘Hope In Troubling Times’

Bishop Michael Curry

Bishop Michael Curry gave a sermon at the 2018 royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, at St. George’s Chapel, in Windsor, England. The head of the Episcopal Church preached love. . . . “When love is the way, we actually treat each other, well, like we are actually family,” he said at the time. In his new book, titled *Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times*, he offers a road map on how to love one another.

Curry, a descendant of enslaved people, is the first Black man to lead his church and is a strong advocate of same-sex marriage. But he didn’t always know he wanted to be a religious leader — he just knew he wanted to “serve.” His father was a minister, but he says his dad didn’t care if he was “ordained or a lawyer” — as long as Curry understood that he was “put on this Earth to do some good.”

“I remember, at one point, he and I had a conversation about something — I think I got on his nerves — and he said, you know something? The Lord didn’t put you here just to consume the oxygen.”

His father was also involved in the civil rights movement, and when Curry went to college, he started reading Dr. Martin Luther King’s writings and realized, “Maybe this is a way that Michael Curry can make a difference.”

Curry spoke with NPR’s Weekend Edition Sunday about his views on love in a divided time, his relationship with the church and his new book on September 20. Some of the highlights of that conversation include:

On reconciling the different wings of the church

LGBTQ folk have been put down by the church for so long, and so their struggle and pain — it’s real. It’s deep. I’ve not experienced that, so I can’t speak from that place. But I can say that I know what it is to be put down. What applied for us, I came to realize, must apply to others — that if we’re equal in the eyes of God, we should be equal in the eyes of the law. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all people are — all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. Those words were true. They were right. What the founders didn’t realize was they didn’t just apply to them. They applied to the Indigenous people. They applied to the Africans enslaved. They applied to their wives and daughters —

that they apply to us all.

On how to talk to someone with differing beliefs

Nobody does anything for no reason. There’s always a story. And sometimes, if you can get behind the presenting question, whatever that happens to be, the relationship will have the — sometimes can have the capacity to help you navigate the difference. I mean, in the book, I said, I was learning to stand and kneel at the same time — to kneel in the sense of acknowledging that I’m not God, and you have as much right to your perspective as I do to mine. But I’ve also got to stand — to stand for what I believe and humbly trust is the right thing. And it doesn’t change everybody’s minds, but it does create a different atmosphere, and atmosphere does make a difference, especially over the long haul.

All men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. Those words were true. They were right. What the founders didn’t realize was they didn’t just apply to them. They applied to the Indigenous people. They applied to the Africans enslaved. They applied to their wives and daughters — that they apply to us all.

On the fight for racial justice

It’s a painful moment, but there’s hope in it. You know, George Floyd — for one human being to have their knee on the neck of another human being and to snuff out the breath of life that God gave in them — we saw that. And to hear that man cry for his mother — thank God for that 17-year-old girl who had her iPhone or her smartphone and filmed it. I think many of us saw that and said, that’s not who we want to be. That is not the America we want to have. ■

NPR’s Ian Stewart and Hadeel Al-Shalchi produced and edited this interview for broadcast.

Has America Lost Its Ability to Laugh?

By Lavonn Brown

In 2006, Trump bought 1400 acres in northeastern Scotland. He envisioned a world-class golf resort lined with luxury homes. About the same time, a wind farm was being considered. It would be built in view of Trump's golf course. Trump tried to block it, saying it would damage Scottish tourism. In a hearing on the issue in 2012, a member of the Scottish parliament asked for Trump's evidence that tourism would be damaged. Trump responded, "Well, first of all, I am the evidence. I am more of an expert than the people you'd like me to hire. . . I am considered a world-class expert in tourism." The room broke out in laughter and parliament members rolled their eyes. They built the wind farm. (See article, "In The Rough," by Ross Choma in *Mother Jones*, Sept/Oct, 2020.)

When did America lose its ability to laugh at Trump's brand of flimflam? After all, we have been hearing it for years. After describing an America in shambles, he said, "I alone can fix it" (Republican Convention, July, 2016). Where is the laughter?

In an interview, he said, "I'm speaking with myself, number one, because I have a great brain . . . my primary consultant is myself" (Mar. 16, 2016). Again, where is the laughter?

In yet another interview, he said, "I'm like a very smart person" (July 11, 2015). On another occasion, he said, "I'm a stable genius." Where is the laughter?

Referring to people whom he called the elite, he said, "I have a much better apartment; I am richer than they are; I am smarter than they are; I became president and they didn't."

Where is the laughter?

As Americans, we have watched Trump's steady march toward authoritarianism. He insists that if you are president, you have absolute authority to do what you wish. He ignores scientific and military advisors, intelligence agencies, and law and order forces. Instead, he relies on gut level experience. And nobody laughs.

He denies the seriousness of the virus epidemic, saying it will go away like a miracle. He fails to develop

a national strategy for dealing with it. He continues to come up with fake remedies. He listens to anyone but his medical advisers. And nobody laughs.

He courts hostile powers to assist him in elections. "Russia, are you listening . . . ?" Yes, Russia is listening. What is behind his regular calls to Putin? Could it be that he is asking Putin for advice on how he can do for America what he has done for Russia, how he can become its Supreme Leader. And nobody laughs.

Some of us are crying a lot. Why? Because our democracy is at stake.

Now he is attempting to dismantle the U. S. Postal Service so mail-in ballots will not be counted. A few weeks before election, the American people find themselves defending the Postal Service against presidential

In a hearing on the issue in 2012, a member of the Scottish parliament asked for Trump's evidence that tourism would be damaged. Trump responded, "Well, first of all, I am the evidence. I am more of an expert than the people you'd like me to hire. . . I am considered a world-class expert in tourism." The room broke out in laughter.

attack. Trump admits that his motive is that he fears mail-in ballots would make his election less likely. And the entire world laughs.

America, are you laughing? Perhaps November 3rd will be the ideal time to begin laughing again. ■

Lavonn Brown is a retired minister living in Norman, OK with his wife, Norma. He said that writing this made him feel much better.

White Too Long by Robert P. Jones

Reviewed by Myles Werntz

It is no secret (and impossible, frankly, to say otherwise) that American Christianity has broadly taken the shape that it has because of race. This is not a monocausal argument for American church history which would undermine other factors such as common sense realism, pragmatism, endless frontiers, separatist impulses among Protestants, or the complex relationship between civic republican and Christian virtue.

But at every turn, race has haunted what American Christianity has become, both with respect to where it has flourished and where it has declined. It was race which materially propelled new denominations into being through the division of Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist denominations. It was race which gave shape to what theological education institutions exist today; for it was the denial of education to former slaves that occasioned the rise of institutions such as Shaw Divinity School. It was race which led Black Baptists to promote missions to Africa long before their white counterparts; race which led to historical divisions among American Christians. Whatever else we can say about American Christianity's history, it has unquestionably existed under the sign of race.

It is not as if any of this is now a surprise. There have been no shortage of books detailing this history, or prophets singing out jeremiads about American Christianity's racial problem. For before there was an America, there have been voices making their signs against Christianity's seemingly insoluble problem of race. From the days of Bartolome de las Casas through Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Dubois and James Cone and Jemar Tisby, the history has been amply documented. What more can there be to say?

Enter *White Too Long* by Robert P. Jones. Jones, CEO and founder of the Public Religion and Research Institute. Jones approaches the question of American Christianity's relationship to racism partly through historical reconstruction, but partly through sociological surveys, offering not just a theological or historical account, but one rooted in the attestations of self-identified white Christians. He begins the book with a broad narrative account of the co-existence and co-optation of white supremacy by Christians from America's founding to the present, offering detailed accounts of how this relationship unfolded through

the Southern Baptist Convention (the denomination of Jones' youth), in the construction of Lost Cause mythology in the South, and in Charleston and Richmond.

Jones describes the ways in which white supremacist ideology was propagated through an amalgam of Christian virtue and a belief in the divinely ordered subjugation of black people, and the ways in which it supported this ideology through church practices, church architecture, and sponsoring of Confederate monuments. At this point in the book, Jones' story is relatively familiar. White, Southern evangelicals have been blind to the sins of racism which continues to cast

But this is where Jones' story gets not just interesting, but damning: What was most explicitly seen in slave owners who founded the largest seminary in the Southern Baptist Convention (a story which Jones tells over the course of two chapters) is actually the ubiquitous story of all white American Christianity, without remainder.

a shadow over the movement today.

But this is where Jones' story gets not just interesting, but damning: What was most explicitly seen in slave owners who founded the largest seminary in the Southern Baptist Convention (a story which Jones tells over the course of two chapters) is actually the ubiquitous story of all white American Christianity, without remainder.

At this point, traditionally more progressive white denominations distance themselves from evangelicalism, pointing toward their efforts in racial justice or their public social stands. But Jones' case, built on sociological surveys of self-identified white Christians across demographic, educational and geographical differences, is that there is almost no statistical dif-

ference between the racial attitudes of evangelicals, mainline denominations or Catholics on this count. The diversity of self-identification of denominations is not accounted for here. But this is beside the point. If the racist attitudes are as prevalent as Jones' work shows, the racial diversity within a congregation is due to agreement on theological principles, not racial acceptance by white Christians.

In a shocking twist to the normal plot, where more of these forms of Christianity are prevalent, the index of racist attitudes increases, making the South's Christian racism stronger among evangelicals, but New England's Christian racism strongest among Catholics. Geography continues to shape racist attitudes, as Jones shows how the number of slaves historically in an area indexes to the prevalence of white racist attitudes; but the damage is universal across traditions, regardless of geographical relationships to slavery.

Nearly 20 years ago, in their landmark book *Divided by Faith*, Christian Smith and Michael O. Emerson made the case that evangelical theology, with its attention to the individual and salvation as an effacing of personal guilt, was particularly unable to see racism or grasp how a person could be culpable for historical harms. Such a study set off a wave of works which allowed for evangelicals, then, to be the poster children for racism; but Jones' work shows this to be a distraction.

The upshot of his argument is nothing short of devastating: Not only are non-evangelicals empirically only slightly less racist than other white Christians, but self-identified racist attitudes of Christians of all varieties are significantly higher than in non-religious persons. In one of the most damning findings, racial attitudes among black Christians are far closer to non-religious persons than they are white Christians, regardless of denomination.

It is the ubiquity of his findings that is most stunning. The ways in which evangelical theology as individually calibrated contribute to this are well-known. But what Jones wants us to come to terms with is that white Christian formation—and indeed, preservation—of racism takes many forms. The histories of Black Catholics and of alt-right movements within Catholicism, of Presbyterian support of segregation, and of the A.M.E. churches are not only historical markers, but invitations to consider the ways in which these theologies too have sustained racism in their own unique ways.

Jones' previous book, *The End of White Christian America*, offered a precursor to his newest book, detailing the ways in which the consensus of American Christian political power was coming to end. The title

of his book was meant to be purely descriptive; as a matter of demographics and sociological data, Jones plainly demonstrated in 2016 that by 2028—at the latest—white Christians would no longer comprise a majority of the voting bloc. What was ventured in that volume—a sociologist's argument about voting patterns and political engagement—was a simple thesis: White Christian voting power has been in decline for nearly 30 years, and the tipping point is coming soon.

With the election of Donald J. Trump, Jones' thesis seemed to be in jeopardy. Perhaps he had underestimated the prowess of one sector of American Christianity—evangelicals, who had been backed into a corner and reluctantly voted defensively for Trump. Jones, in the epilogue to *White Christian America*, stood by his thesis, that Trump's election was the last gasp of a demographic decline, and not a reversal of it. With this new book, however, a more horrifying possibility emerges: Jones was still right about the decline about Christian participation; the reason that Trump succeeded was not because Christians ignored the

The upshot of his argument is nothing short of devastating: Not only are non-evangelicals empirically only slightly less racist than other white Christians, but self-identified racist attitudes of Christians of all varieties are significantly higher than in non-religious persons.

racist rhetoric, but because the more pagan advocates of Trumpist racism cohered with Christian formation across the board.

Jones' singular focus on the ways in which attitudes of racial superiority are not only preserved but upheld, intertwined with how American Christian churches tell their own history, leading him to overstatements at times. At times he reads, for example, the uplifting of antebellum values as the preservation of white supremacy, not as an incidental value. And at times, in the desire to surface racism within denominational histories, Jones' story veers toward the monocausal. But his work neither rises nor falls on the history so much as it does the sociological surveys. And the surveys, the self-attestations, tell a less avoidable story.

The last five months of pandemic and isolation have yielded two crises for Christians: an increased demand

for racial justice, and a relative absence from the church. At just the time when Christians are in need of time, space and presence to process monumental changes, we are unable to do so. It is with some eeriness, then, that Jones' conclusion—that white churches across theological divides tend to sustain racist attitudes—comes during this time when churches are largely not meeting. For if Jones' survey evidence is correct, white churches meeting in a time of racial protests may have in fact muted the effects of the protests. But in the absence of church gatherings—if in fact church gathering has contributed to and not mitigated racist attitudes—Christians have an unintended opportunity to hear the voice of racial protest anew.

This absence of church gathering which will, according to Jones' work, empirically decrease the deformation which occurs on issues of race. But simply removing Christians from the site of deformation on race does not itself solve the problem. The argument which I and others have made is that in the absence of church formation, some other voice of moral formation will fill that need, whether social media, popular culture or individual intuition. And so, we are left with this in the wake of Jones' work: White Christians will be formed badly according to race; but apparently going or not going to church makes no difference on that score. So, what is there to do?

Let us begin with what will *not* help. First, I will assume, for the sake of argument, that Jones' statistical work is largely correct, given that the data is self-supported and vetted by other sociologists. One need only turn to the New Testament to see the prevalence of in-group thinking with respect to cultural bias, and the ways in which Paul's churches struggled with perpetuating bias, not merely in the form of ideas, but in structural inequities. And so, it will do no good to simply ignore Jones' data. It does no good to point anecdotally to this church or that church, or to this congregation as a counter-example; for Jones is interested in vast trends, not inspiring outliers.

Secondly, it may do limited good to offer an account of multi-cultural churches on the whole as a plausible solution. While multi-ethnic churches now account for 19% of all churches, leadership of those churches, according to work by Michael Emerson, is still over 70% white. Korie Edwards, in her 2008 work, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*, concluded similarly that attitudes on race among multi-ethnic churches did not materially differ among white congregants of those churches.

Third, it will do some limited good to be introspective with respect to a denomination's theology. In the wake of the Civil War, what Jones finds is that racist

ideology was not attached to one singular element of Southern evangelicals; it simply found a different home. Prior to the Civil War, a post-millennial eschatology was prominent, emphasizing the progressive nature of the Kingdom of God. Such an eschatology exalted the South as God's Kingdom coming to the world. But in the wake of the South's defeat, a pre-millennial eschatology, emphasizing the continued decline of the world toward the Second Coming became more prominent. And so, racism became entrenched in a different way, attached to segregation as the best possible solution to stave off the continued decline of society.

Here it is helpful, however, to bring in one of the maligned aspects of Jones' story for a rehabilitation: the altering power of friendship. In Smith and Emerson's book, one of the elements they discuss with respect to the difficulty of overcoming racial formations is that friendships require not only affinity, but proximity; to enter into a different way of seeing race, white Christians must not only see black Christians as their own flesh and blood, but be in spaces which are

Accordingly, white Christians cannot overcome Jones' conclusions by simply repenting and resolving to do differently; we must literally undergo a metanoia which alters the spaces and social formations we are in.

not predominantly white.

Accordingly, white Christians cannot overcome Jones' conclusions by simply repenting and resolving to do differently; we must literally undergo a metanoia which alters the spaces and social formations we are in. For the white church to no longer be the site of racial deformation, in some cases, it would involve intentionally becoming less demographically white. This may take the form of replanting churches, of shared racial leadership in churches, of white Christians joining congregations where they are not the majority race, listening, participating, and waiting to be included.

Jones' argument about the prevalence of racism rests on the power of social formation: White Christians, regardless of denomination, are more likely to be racist than other Americans in no small part because of the frequency of white Christians being around predominantly other white Christians. This "reckoning," as

Jones puts it, cannot be a matter of knowledge, whether in recounting of histories or in the accumulation of data surrounding racism's present legacies.

In one respect, in the translation of anecdotal evidence into sociological statistics, Jones' work is no different. But where Jones' approach is intimately sobering is in the totalizing grasp of the problem: No iteration of white Christianity escapes the problem, and not just at a historical level. The only questions to be asked now are, "In what ways does our tradition reproduce the problem?" and "Where can I be saved from this sin which so easily entangles?" If Jones' assessment holds up, the salvation of white churches will lie only in new spaces of friendship—spaces which will entail the dismantling of the present ones.

What seems to be the logical conclusion of Jones' findings is more structurally plausible in places like Abilene, where I live, where whites are approximately 70% of the population, such that white Christians disaggregating would be possible. But what of places where the white population is nearly homogenous? It is here that Jones' argument is less clear, but ultimately concludes that what is needed—as indicated by the role of friendship—is a return to church not purely as a site of doctrinal instruction, but of virtue formation married to structural changes. In other words, it would not be enough for white Christians to move to another church if this move were not accompanied by the deeper change—virtue which comes only through friendship, and friendship through the willingness to let another's presence change us.

For all white Christians, the way out is not through mere doctrinal alterations, if for no other reason than

the fact that alteration of doctrine only means racism will cohere in a different form. Nor is the way out pure structural change, although structural change offers a new material reality into which we offer our confessions and prayers. The way forward is the slow and intentional work of friendship, attending to who is not in the building, and what their absence is reinforcing in white Christian churches.

For true friendship, rooted in a common pursuit of the good, means that my good and yours are interlocked, such that whatever racism I harbor will come to the surface when my social and political good and the good of black Christians diverge. In that moment, I will either pursue the good with them, or I will turn away and prove my friendship to have been one of convenience and not true virtue. The truth of friendships cannot be known in advance, but is proved over time, so that the legacy Jones points out might be unlearned, un-supported and unmade. ■

This essay first appeared on *Mere Orthodoxy: A Christian Review of Ideas* (www.mereorthodoxy.com) on September, 10, 2020 and is republished here with permission.

Myles Werntz is director of Baptist Studies and associate professor of theology at Abilene Christian University, where he directs the Baptist Studies Center in the Graduate School of Theology. He is the author and editor of five books in theology and ethics, and writes broadly on Christian ethics of war and peace, immigration, ecclesiology and discipleship.

**Thank You for *Reading,*
Sharing and Supporting
*Christian Ethics Today***

Excising the Pain of My Family's Racism

By Kerry Smith

The magic number is now 28. Not days or anniversaries or any streak to champion. Instead, it is the number of surgeries and procedures that now have befallen me, the roots of which are found in a painful past.

The day was bright and sunny. The wind blew softly, and the sunlight shown through the leaves of a tall oak tree, causing the light to dance and move with each breeze. My grandfather had his feet propped up on that tree while sitting in one of those old aluminum folding lawn chairs as I played with his and my grandmother's little cockapoo puppy. In his lap was a nickel-plated Colt 38 pistol with ivory handles. My grandmother's beautiful orange day lilies danced from the warm summer breeze and the ground was filled with Camel cigarette butts, strewn all around from the smoking habit that had stained my grandfather's fingers yellow. It was such a beautiful day that I remember it even though it has been 56 years ago when I was only three-years-old.

Out of that occasion, blue sky, leaves dancing on the ground, beautiful flowers and all, came the ring of my grandfather's voice as he yelled, "Get your goddamned black ass on the other side of the street or I will blow it off!"

I was jolted from my innocent play and looked up to see an African American man hurriedly walking across the street to the other side curb that lined the opposite lane, where he stepped up to the sidewalk and rushed along to the little grocery store that was catty-corner to my grandparents' home. He knew that in my small town in those days that "Mr. Gus" (my grandfather's name) would do just exactly what he said he would do because of what he had already done in the name of hatred and racial cleansing.

Mr. Gus was as racist as anyone you could ever imagine. He was a third generation grand something or other in the Ku Klux Klan. My mom used to tell the story of his coming home from one of their rallies, wearing the white hood and garments associated with the Klan and how it had scared her to death. He would travel every weekend to somewhere in Georgia where he and others would conduct raids in order to beat and scare people of color and, in some instances, even conduct lynchings.

In later years, we would sometimes sit out in the

backyard of his home as he told stories of how the Klan had carried out some of the most heinous activities the mind could imagine. He would relish the details, as if he championed their success, almost like the retelling of a scoring drive in the final two minutes of a football game. He would be gleefully laughing at the success of his violence as though it were a trophy displayed on the shelves of some sports-loving child.

Those stories are still there in my soul. They are still there because I was supposed to participate in these events along with one after another of we southern sons. If we didn't, we were called "nigga lovas." We all were expected to join in these activities. Our entire family held on to racism in the same way that, at family meals, we would pass the chicken, the chitlins,

Our entire family held on to racism in the same way that, at family meals, we would pass the chicken, the chitlins, the butterbeans, and that pound cake.

the butterbeans, and that pound cake. "Excuse me, PawPaw, can you pass that bowl of racism so I could get me a big ole' spoonful!!!"

I attended Southern Seminary at a time when the mind, soul and heart were encouraged to meet in the middle for a healthy washing. One of the courses that had a profound impact on my life was a course in Black History and Christianity, taught by Dr. Immanuel McCall. I had left my home to follow the calling of God and, in doing so, I had lost my inheritance or what little there was left of it. First of all, you didn't leave "the family" without repercussions and, second of all, if you were at an institution where you examined yourself in the light of scripture and spirit and had changed, your values would change and so would your commitments.

It was in that particular light that I corrected my grandfather's son-in-law, my uncle, when within ear-shot of my children on one particular visit, he went on a tirade blaming the "niggahs" for everything wrong in our society. I could not sit by and allow this and I corrected him. And in one fell swoop, I lost any relation-

ship with him and any inheritance I might have had. I had, as my aunt would tell me later, disavowed my heritage because of what I was doing in helping my children to live a life without racism.

But a childhood and adolescence filled with racism, pain and injustice does not simply go away without its tentacles reaching to pull you back into all of it. I think it is right here, at the crossroads of influence and intimidation and emotional and physical pain, where all of it comes together in a force so strong that it can cause intense physical issues all the way up until death, simply as the result of a childhood influenced by such an adverse experience.

If you want to understand the impact of living a life of pain and injustice, look up the acronym “ACEs: Adverse Childhood Experiences.” The book associated with this is called *Childhood Disrupted: Adverse Childhood Experiences* and if you believe that the kind of childhood I experienced or what others experience does not have enormous lasting effects, this book is worth a view. If ever there was a call to a children’s ministry that offers love and hope, freedom and the love of God, and bowlfuls of helpings of grace—real grace, God’s grace—with hugs so tight that one may feel faint, then it is right at this important developmental stage of childhood where the foundation of living life gracefully is laid.

So, it is number 28 and it will be number 29 in the Fall. These numbers represent the surgeries and procedures I have had done on my spine and my neck, having my lumbar spine fused, my cervical spine fused, and my hands, my precious hands that do art

work and hold my children and wife. These are the hands that have helped me get beyond my very own ACEs through carving. They have been impacted by a dysfunctional past as well as having been operated on. If we want to work on ridding our nation of racism, I believe we should look at the way we do children’s ministry because, well, for some of us, the ACEs of racism have done awful damage to us at the age of our childhood. It does not however have to be the last word on our impact on our children. A word of grace should instead be the very first word, because some child somewhere has a grandfather who is spewing racism, and a little boy or girl is drinking it all in.

As I remember the pain of my childhood, I leave you with this passage found in Matthew 19:14 KJV: But **Jesus said**, “**Suffer little children**, and forbid them **not**, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” ■

Christian Ethics Today. He suffers from disabling physical pain which gives perspective to his understanding of other painful experiences.

A word of grace should instead be the very first word, because some child somewhere has a grandfather who is spewing racism, and a little boy or girl is drinking it all in.

CORRECTION

We regret making a typographical error in the Summer 2020 edition of Christian Ethics Today that resulted in the name of Swami Vivekananda being incorrectly stated as “Vivekanada.” CET acknowledges and values the contributions of this important Hindu Swami to the historical interfaith movement and regrets the mistake. Further, we regretfully repeated the misprint in both the title to the article by Robert Sellers and in the list of articles on the cover of the issue.

Rape Culture...In the Church

By Sammy Choi

Rape culture has deep roots around the world; and the Christian domain is not immune to it. From sexual abuses at the hands of Catholic priests, to hundreds of victims assaulted by leaders within the Southern Baptist denomination¹, and the countless number of incidents that have gone unreported for years and generations, it is disheartening to know that people who are to be Christlike and share the good news of Jesus Christ have perpetrated such atrocious harm. The Church, by being silently complicit to sexual assaults, has also been guilty of causing indirect harm by covering up these crimes and by victim-shaming those who have been assaulted. When reading and hearing about Christians and the Church engaging in these disgusting acts, one is led to wonder how a movement such as Christianity could be composed of active participants in the direct opposition of what Jesus Christ called Christians and the Church to do—to love God and to love others (Mark 12:30-31).

On a cursory level, the term “Christian ethics” would appear to be meaningless in light of these atrocities. It is imperative to examine within the biblical texts the prominence of rape culture and how it may prop up the church’s complicity of it today, while considering principles of Christian ethics principles in what the church’s response to it should be.

Rape culture is defined as “a society or environment whose prevailing social attitudes have the effect of normalizing or trivializing sexual assault and abuse.”² When looking at the biblical texts, one can find examples of this type of normalization of sexual assault. David and his many women, while small in sample size relative to the entirety of the bible, serve as an expansive look at how women were marginalized and viewed as possessions. In Wilda Gafney’s *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, she details the extent of his womanizing. From Abigail all the way to Abishag, there are 10 women who are named as either engaged or married to David.³ While the account of David and Bathsheba probably receives most attention in sermons and references of infidelity, it is rare to hear it referred to as rape as Gafney explains.⁴ David noticed her, lusted for her and, against her will (as if she had a choice against a king who desired her), he raped her. There is also the

story of David’s daughter, Tamar, and how she was raped by her own brother, Amnon. Here we find her pleading to her brother, “No, my brother, do not force me; do not do anything so vile!”⁵

I can’t speak for the experiences of others in the church in hearing these stories. (I never heard the story of Tamar when I was growing up.) But they were never portrayed as violent sexual assaults. Stories like that of David and Bathsheba seem to be romanticized at best. At worst, Bathsheba is described as a seductress who lured David to her. This in its very essence is rape culture. Simply being a woman was reason enough to normalize victim-blaming.

While the account of David and Bathsheba probably receives most attention in sermons and references of infidelity, it is rare to hear it referred to as rape as Gafney explains.

It is interpretations like this, or the glossing over of the power dynamics that rendered women like Bathsheba unable to deny the advances of King David, that can contribute to the normalization of treating women as objects for the satisfaction of men. There is no equal footing between the genders. This patriarchal structure and elevation of the male status continue to have a stronghold today. Rape culture, buttressed by modesty culture,⁶ especially within a complementarian view of gender roles, drives the marginalization of women, and places the responsibility of male lust and its subsequent actions, on women.

When understanding these stories through this framework, any well-meaning Christian must at the very least consider how Christian ethics calls for the Church to reckon with its complicity, and then to find a course towards justice. In *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*, Miguel De La Torre writes, “Ethics done on the margins is and must remain a contextual ethics that seeks to see the liberating work of God through the eyes of those made poor, those victimized,

and those made to suffer because they belong to the ‘wrong’ gender, race, orientation, or economic class.”⁷ In the context of rape culture, sexual assault victims must be at the center when seeking justice. However, often the claims of the victims are dismissed as attention-seeking or are silenced because of the damage that it will have on the perpetrator, thus putting the offender at the center and skewing the ethical lens towards them.

This is a failure of the Church, and is antithetical to the “mission of the church” that David Gushee and Glen Stassen speak of in *Kingdom Ethics*, where sharing the Gospel of Jesus to the whole world “requires the church to be a disciplined community, not just a collection of individuals who hear general moral principles and decide for themselves what they do (not) mean.”⁸

The leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention that dealt with the assault of over 700 people took it upon themselves to determine which moral principles they would adhere to, or bend to accommodate these crimes. This is an example of what can happen when there is no balance in one’s ethical framework. These individuals, whether consciously or subconsciously, informed their actions predominantly through the teleological mode of reasoning. They were looking out for their own interests and desires devoid of consideration of the impact that it would have on others.

There must also be a balance in determining what is right (deontological),⁹ and what aligns in the character/virtues expressed through the Sermon on the Mount (characterological)¹⁰ so that one’s moral compass isn’t bent solely for one’s own benefit. This was the case with David and Bathsheba, as it was with Amnon and Tamar. These men were fixated on what they wanted, and did whatever they could to obtain it, regardless of the harm it caused others. This is what happens in the absence of Christian ethics.

It is then only hopeful to look and see how Christian ethics can help drive the Church to act more justly, protecting the victimized and those on the margins. What is required is the recognition of one’s own wrong-doing, followed by the repentance of Christians and the Church of their complicity in the perpetuation of rape culture and victim-blaming.

In Phyllis Trible’s *Texts of Terror*, she recounts the story of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19, where the concubine is gang raped, and her body is subsequently dismembered. There she writes that misogyny belongs to every age, including our own. Violence and vengeance are not just characteristics of a distant, pre-Christian past, but infect the community of the elect to this day. Woman as object is still captured, betrayed, raped, tortured, murdered, dismembered and scattered. To take to heart this ancient story, then, is to confess its present reality. The story is alive, and all is not well. Beyond confession, we must take counsel to say, “Never again.” Yet this counsel itself is ineffectual unless we direct our hearts to that most uncompromising of all biblical commands, speaking the word not to others, but to ourselves: Repent. Repent.¹¹

This recognition and repentance bring about the shared virtue of mourning spoken of in the second beatitude. The mourning is for the victims who have had their humanity and dignity stripped away. It is for their grief and loss. However, mourning is also

These men were fixated on what they wanted, and did whatever they could to obtain it, regardless of the harm it caused others. This is what happens in the absence of Christian ethics.

for those who sin as a way of recognizing their own sin, and being convicted enough to change.¹² May Christians and the Church give the grace to victims that hasn’t been afforded them previously. And may Christians and the Church be bold enough to hold those who fuel rape culture accountable. ■

Footnotes can be found by using the Search tool at www.christianethicstoday.com

Samuel Choi is a student at Fuller Theological Seminary.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY FOUNDATION

Post Office Box 1238
Banner Elk, NC 28604

NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No 1478
DALLAS, TX

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS Fisher Humphreys Chair

- Patricia Ayres • Tony Campolo • Aubrey H. Ducker, Jr. • Wendell Griffen
- George Mason • Suzii Paynter • Kelly Reese • David Sapp

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 Cell (863) 207-2050
P.O. Box 1238 E-mail Drpatanderson@gmail.com
Banner Elk, NC 28604

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