

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

# Responding to Social Justice & Critical Race Theory

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## INTRODUCTION

The current climate of American culture is one of great social angst and unrest. Racial tensions between large segments of the black and white communities are extremely high, amplified by current social justice ideologies. These tensions are also apparent in Christian congregations. Such turmoil is nothing new in the history of humankind. What is more, the Holy Christian Church usually finds herself in the position to be a guiding light during such distress.

Even so, our nation has just come off a tumultuous political election season, full of sharp divisions and rancorous animosity toward candidates, political parties, and even Christian groups. There were relentless accusations that the incumbent candidate was racist and xenophobic, which he categorically denied. Promises were made by the other the candidate and now President, Joe Biden—to bring unity and harmony. (Early indications are those promises were more rhetorical than authentic).

The election results revealed a deeply divided country and were contested vehemently, climaxing in a mob protest at our nation's capitol, a subsequent riot and breaking into the capitol building, and a second failed impeachment attempt of the now former U.S. president, Donald Trump. All this amid a continuing pandemic, which has ultimately all been overlaid by extreme racial tensions among the black and white communities of the country that resulted from numerous occurrences of police brutality and injustice against blacks, the most notable “trigger” event being the death of George Floyd while under arrest by Minneapolis police.

As a result, the movements for social and racial justice and the underlying ideologies shaping various segments of that movement are now at the doorstep of every American

household, and consequently at the doorstep of our congregations. The Holy Christian Church must be ready to address these realities. People are hurting. They need hope. Injustice must be addressed. Racism must be stopped. The care of our neighbor must be enacted, even as we love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, and mind. Yet, lies and ideologies must be called out for what they are. Social movements toward genuine change must be distinguished from mere jockeying for political power. The movement to demonstrate that all black lives matter is not the same as the organization that claims only certain Black Lives Matter.<sup>1</sup>

As is often the case amid great social unrest, there are myriad and complex layers that need to be sorted out along the way. There is confusion and disagreement about how the social justice movement is to be understood or embraced, particularly among Christians. To be sure, the Holy Christian Church in America must be ready to combat the sin of racism and injustice. Yet, it must also guard against the dangerous ideologies that would displace or even replace the love and light of Christ and his eternal word of truth as the means for our life together. This two-part monograph seeks to tackle that challenge.

### *Persona Non Grata—A Disclaimer*

To start, I readily admit I write from the perspective of a persona non grata. I write as a white, heterosexual male. According to current cultural identity politics of the day, I am a scapegoat for all cultural maladies. As a result, there are those who hold that I should

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<sup>1</sup> The obvious disparity in the Black Lives Matter organization is the lack of care for the unborn in the black community. Despite the black community making up just 12% of the U.S. population, black women have 38% of all abortions. Carole Novielli, “TRAGIC: Black Women Abort at Almost Four Times the Rate of White Women” *Live Action*. (February 16, 2020) <https://www.liveaction.org/news/black-babies-aborted-new-york-city-born/>

not be given a voice, especially when it comes to offering commentary or analysis on the plight of the black community, particularly if I dare contradict any prevailing ideological narrative.

Without question, I have not suffered prejudice, racism, or discrimination like those in the black community. I cannot and will not claim to know the unbearable heartache and suffering that the evil of slavery, Jim Crow laws, redlining, brutality, segregation, and discrimination has brought upon the black community. Many black brothers and sisters have more adequately written from firsthand experience on that suffering.

However, the Lord Jesus Christ invites us to bear one another's burdens and enter into the suffering of one another. It's true that I as a white man could never adequately understand the utter horror and injustice blacks have so long endured. Yet it's incumbent on us all to come alongside the humanity of one another as fellow beloved creatures of God, and stand upon truth as we together sort out the best way forward during these divisive days.

### ***The Church is From All Nations***

Standing together recognizes that the Lord's Church is made up of people from every "nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9). In other words, the church is made up of the entire human race. Sadly, the racist identities that haunt humanity are the product of fallen humankind. But in the Holy Christian Church all are given a voice. In fact, one day we will stand before the Lord in eternity and together speak with one voice, able to do so through our Lord Jesus Christ who shed his blood for one and all, once and for all. Therefore, in our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) church body that is 95% white Anglo Saxon, reasonable and loving voices must brave cultural criticism in order to affirm the word of the Lord and

lovingly outline how we can together navigate these troubling times to jointly move forward in faith.

I say this even as the broader secular culture holds that the white, heterosexual male is the fundamental problem of society and should not be permitted to speak. Rather he is simply to comply with the dictates of white guilt and offer penance for his offence. As Joshua Mitchell notes, "if cathartic rage is to pass over the white, heterosexual man, he must celebrate the identity politics version of that liturgy daily, by displaying signs of innocence on his front door—or more likely, his office door—for all to see."<sup>2</sup> This would mean embracing the ideology of virtue signaling and retribution, which, from the Christian perspective, does not offer grace, mercy, or forgiveness, but demand perpetual reckoning for all past offenses and make one guilty by association, or in this case, the color of one's skin. (Which is, ironically, the very definition of racial prejudice). It's an ideology not based on the objective truth of God's Word, but upon prevailing cultural thought of the day.

### ***The Way Forward***

Such virtue signaling will not have a positive lasting impact on the present racial injustices, nor will it validate the great suffering of the black community. It will simply attempt to leverage the powers that be as a punitive effort against a current people group for the sins of the past and present, be they real or perceived. Rather, the way forward is with Christ at the center. This means the forgiveness of sins he

THE WAY FORWARD IS WITH  
CHRIST AT THE CENTER

<sup>2</sup> Joshua Mitchell, *American Awakening: Identity Politics and Other Afflictions of our Time*. (Encounter Books: New York, 2020), xxiv–xxv.

won upon the cross, along with the whole truth of God's Word, including the love for our neighbor and the defense of our neighbor, must lead us forward. To that end, I intend to address these bitter realities and ideological challenges from a distinctly confessional Lutheran perspective.

This two-part monograph addresses the issues of racism and prejudice, as well as assertions about white privilege, institutional racism, and pervasive systemic racism in the broader American culture and the institutions within it, (including the church). More specifically, this work seeks to address the evils of racism and those affected by the sin of racism in any given form, as well as providing guidance for the pastoral care of souls, along with an honest assessment about the erroneous generalizations about American institutions, the church, and the white community in general.

This first part of the study ventures a technical, somewhat academic analysis regarding the ideology behind some segments of the social justice movement. Critical Race Theory is an academic and philosophical discipline. The hard work of sorting out a theory requires slogging through its origins and its subsequent manifestations. This is not meant to look past the sin of racism or the affliction of the black community, but rather simply to guard against the erroneous overcorrection presently foisted upon society by the critical social justice movement. Likewise, an examination of the corresponding claims of inherent systemic racism present within the fabric and systems of America society will be considered in light of our confessional Lutheran theology. This includes exploration of the particular terminology used in the critical social justice narrative as well as a study of the development of Critical Race Theory (and Critical Theory) that undergirds the "critical" social justice movement.

Part One provides a specific analysis of ideological calls to stem racial injustices by becoming "antiracist." This is a specific concept set forth by adherents to Critical Race Theory, which is now becoming mainstreamed in multiple segments of American culture, particularly public schools and higher education, as well as the broader marketplace and progressive politics. This ideology will be shown to be activist in nature, which brings inherent dangers and extremism demonstrably distinct from those who promote justice from a biblical perspective. Evaluations of Critical Race Theory ideology will also be made in light of clear biblical theology. Finally, a clear alternative and ethic of care rooted in the Lutheran Two Kingdoms biblical theology and doctrine of vocation will be presented.

Part Two offers a guide for pastoral care during a social justice age. It will examine how to give soul care to both victims and perpetrators of racism, even as it explores the plight and challenges in the black community due to racism and discrimination. I will review and recognize those same frustrations and challenges within our own church body. Finally, I deal with the balancing act Lutheran churches and pastors have historically wrestled with regarding their role in social activism and the care of souls.

Some may find that section deficient in terms of preferred solutions to the social maladies. However, the point will be that Christ must lie at the center of any solution whatever action the church decides to take. If that's not the goal, all remedies are reduced to one's preferred sociology or political ideology, which are inadequate as foundations for unity of mind and action within congregations of the Holy Christian Church.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Slavery, Racism and the Church: The Development of “Black Theology”

Sadly, the Christian church must acknowledge it has made tangible contributions to racism in America. When the colony first established by the Mayflower settlers started expanding (in the early 1600s), and the southern colonies became more agrarian, landowners saw the need for a continuous labor source. African slaves became the ideal choice to ensure generations of forced servitude.<sup>3</sup>

Because the need for labor was tied to building a nation the colonists considered to be a mission from God, it sadly resulted in the belief that using slaves was “patriotic even godly.” For example, “George Whitefield [1714–1770], the initiator of the Great Awakening, believed that ‘the colonies could not succeed without unpaid slave labor and he could not alter that reality.’”<sup>4</sup> In fact, “Whitefield himself purchased a plantation in South Carolina and owned seventy-five slaves.”<sup>5</sup> Even more damningly, Rev. W. M. Rogers asserted, “When a slave asks me to stand between him and his master, what does he ask? He asks me to murder a nation’s life; and I will not do it, because I have a conscience, because there is a God.”<sup>6</sup>

As a result, southern American Christianity bears a large part of the burden for precipitating the systemic introduction of racism in America. Harriet Beecher Stowe brought this to the nation’s conscience in her 1850 classic, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, even while her clergy brothers,

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<sup>3</sup> Mark DeyMaz and Onela Fennell Okuwobi, *Multicultural Conversations: An Eight-Week Journey Toward Unity in Your Church*. (Indiana: Wesleyan Publishing, 2016), 93.

<sup>4</sup> DeyMaz and Okuwobi, 94.

<sup>5</sup> Dwight N. Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 32.

<sup>6</sup> Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over*, 33.

Henry Ward Beecher and Edward Beecher, helped lead the abolitionist movement against slavery.

It must be noted that while Scripture mentions slavery in both the Old and New testaments, such slavery was not inherently based upon racism. It was more often rooted in economics and crossed races and nationalities. Biblical references are usually more descriptive about slavery than prescriptively affirming it.

Yet today’s cultural activists stalwartly insist that America remains systemically racist from its inception and therefore needs a new definition of racism to deal with this reality.<sup>7</sup> The following chapters explore this reality. We start with a brief examination of the history and global reality of slavery to gain an adequate context for the developments that follow.

### *Global Slavery and Its Effects*

The evils of slavery were not unique to the United States. History shows that slavery was perpetrated upon vast numbers of Africans by many other countries, and in much higher numbers. For example, the Arab world enslaved countless Africans for hundreds of years long before slaves were ever brought to North America. Estimates note that the Arab countries of Mesopotamia (Western Asia) brought seventeen million slaves to their lands; other examples show that Brazil had five million African slaves, the Caribbean islands had 3.5

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<sup>7</sup> The New York Times’ *1619 Project* set out to demonstrate the historical reality of this claim. Namely, that since before its inception, America was founded upon slavery and racism as a guiding principle. They have created a grade school curriculum that schools are now embracing and using for their student. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>.

However, a group of black historians and scholars have set out to dispute these claims, pointing out the historical inaccuracy of many of the 1619 Project’s claims through their own project titled, *1776 Unites*: <https://1776unites.com>.

million, France took 1.2 million; Spanish North America had one million, and British North America, which became the United States, brought 400,000 African slaves to its shores.<sup>8</sup>

The vastness of this evil and wicked trade permeated the globe for centuries. Calls for reparations for these past atrocities by the United States are increasing. Yet holding one country alone responsible would seem short sighted. Nonetheless within the social justice movement there is significant pressure to consider compensatory payments. In fact, the current Biden administration supports studying the possibility of paying such reparations.<sup>9</sup> But will there be a balanced approach to such a study and corresponding proposed action? Will it consider the historical vastness of this evil, making all participants equally liable? Most notably, will it also hold accountable the estimated 7–12% of all free black Americans who themselves also owned slaves in the years leading up to the Civil War (1820–1860)?<sup>10</sup> Suffice it to say this is a complicated and ugly matter.

The evil of slavery finally came to a head on American soil through a bloody civil war which ultimately ended slavery in the U.S. However, it was soon replaced with Jim Crow laws

that promulgated racism and discrimination. Segregation was then also implemented to keep black communities down, and ultimately lead to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, that still did not end racism and discrimination. Redlining and discriminatory practices disadvantaged the black community in the 1970s and 1980s, while racial profiling in high crime areas continued in the 1990s. All of this disaffected black people, especially poor black communities, cumulatively placing an oppressive yoke upon the majority of black people in America. Black intellectual Cornel West describes it this way:

[It is] the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others.<sup>11</sup>

From 2016–2020, this threefold oppressive force was amplified by multiple police shootings and cases of police brutality against black people. Regardless of the facts surrounding each incident, the optics of each were such that the black community felt the injustice of all the previous years of oppression coming down on them all the more. Ultimately it drove large segments of the black community around the country to renewed activism and protest, some forming an official activist group called Black Lives Matter. The final straw came after the death of George Floyd and sparked a summer of violent and destructive protests across the nation, so pervasive in nature that they are

<sup>8</sup> For more research and history on these statistics on slavery see Beauregard, Parker, “Do Blacks Owe Other Blacks Reparations?” (February 24, 2021) *The Blue State Conservative*. R.V. Young “Owning Slavery: A Christian Response to ‘The Case for Reparations’”. *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*. March/April, 2021. *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Captivating Guide to the Transatlantic Slave trade and stories of the slaves that were brought to the Americas*. By Captivating History, (Monee, IL, 2021); *The East African Slave Trade: The History and Legacy of the Arab Slave Trade and Indian Ocean Slave Trade*. By Charles River Editors. Monee, IL, 2021; And *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440–1870*. By Hugh Thomas. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Freking, “Biden backs studying reparations as Congress considers bill” *APNews*. February 17, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> “Do Blacks Owe Other Blacks Reparations?” (February 24, 2021) *The Blue State Conservative*.

<sup>11</sup> Cornel West, *Race Matters*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 14.



estimated to cost taxpayers billions of dollars.<sup>12</sup>

How has the church responded to all of this? Even more, how can the church offer an ethic of love and care, defending our neighbor, while also guarding against the extremism and emotional hijacking that can come in the face of injustice? How do we keep Christ at the center? The pages that follow attempt to answer all of these questions.

To start, we begin with a brief assessment of how the emergence of “black theology” as a result of black oppression has impacted the church, the social justice and antiracist movement, as well as Critical Race Theory adherents.

### ***Black Theology—Roots of Antiracist Ideology***

Lutherans have long understood the marks of the Holy Christian Church to be the pure teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments (Augsburg Confession, Article VII). For some in the church, the current social justice debate shows how defining the mission of the Holy Christian Church in these terms appears shortsighted. They assert that such a mission is devoid of the church’s true purpose among society today.

So called “black theology” makes such a claim. According to this theology, a summary of the mission of the Holy Christian Church defined primarily in terms of the means of grace is actually a racist view of theology. The assertion is that this view of the church and her theology was actually created by white people who held to a white supremacist ideology and is therefore tainted by white racist thinking.

Sadly, even after the Civil Rights Act was

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<sup>12</sup> Brad Polumbo, “George Floyd Riots Caused Record-Setting \$2 Billion in Damage, New Report Says. Here’s Why the True Cost Is Even Higher.” *Foundation for Economic Education*. Sept. 16, 2020.

passed, black oppression continued. This was amplified by the uneven history of the American church defending blacks. As a result of these bitter circumstances, black theologian and pastor James Cone began seeing theology and the life of the church in a different light. In the 1970s he began to posit certain differences between what he called white theology and black theology:

It is of course possible to assume that black religion and white religion are essentially the same, since white people introduced “Christianity” to black people. However, that assumption will deprive the theologian of vital insights into black religious thought forms, because it fails to recognize the significant connection between thought and social existence...What is the connection between life and theology? The answer cannot be the same for blacks and whites, because blacks and whites do not share the same life. The lives of a black slave and white slaveholder were radically different.<sup>13</sup>

In short, Cone began developing a black theology that has at its core the liberation of an oppressed people. He summarizes that theology below:

Black liberation theology was created by black theologians and preachers who rejected this white teaching about the meek, longsuffering Jesus. We called it hypocritical and racist. Our Christology focused on the revolutionary Black Christ who “preached good news to the poor,” “proclaimed release to the captive,” and “let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18f). Since whites have been

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<sup>13</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, (New York: Orbis books, 1975, 1997, 2018), 9.

the most violent race on the planet, their theologians and preachers are not in a position to tell black people, or any other people for that matter, what they must do to be like Jesus. This is black common sense theology, which is deeply embedded in the radical side of black religious history and the source out of which black liberation theology emerged.<sup>14</sup>

From a Lutheran perspective, this theology ultimately lands upon the law rather than the Gospel. In Cone's words, "There can be no reconciliation with God unless the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, and justice is given to the poor. The justified person is at once the sanctified person, one who knows that his or her freedom is inseparable from the liberation of the weak and the helpless."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the chief message is not upon Christ the crucified and his shed blood, but upon achieving liberation for the racially enslaved.

Nonetheless, Cone's thinking was a ray of inspiration for the heirs of the Civil Rights movement. It also remains the backdrop for some contemporary social justice and "antiracist" thinkers of today. Most notable among those thinkers is the young black professor and activist Ibram Kendi. His recent works *Stamped from the Beginning* and *How to be an Antiracist* have catapulted him to the forefront of the new social justice thinking.

Kendi sees in Cone's theology the impetus to better understand the oppression of blacks by white people, and to gain a contemporary foothold toward formulating an antiracist

society. Later chapters will explore what it means to be an antiracist. But first, we explore the intersection of black theology and contemporary social justice to better evaluate the movement from a Christian perspective.

According to Kendi, Cone defined a Christian as "one who is striving for liberation." This put religion in a new light, one in terms of "a Christianity of the enslaved, not the Christianity of the slaveholders" and therefore better expressed the plight of the black man.<sup>16</sup> Cone and others like him serve as an inspiration for Kendi and the overall fight for racial equality. However, the Christ of this theology appears to have little expressed personal or salvific meaning. Instead, it lends itself to Kendi's near impossible antiracist ethic (as will be explored in later chapters). From an orthodox Christian perspective, this becomes extremely problematic. Consequently, Cone's theology requires further examination.

### *Moving Beyond Scripture*

In short, Cone's theology is based not on an oppression of sin, death, and the devil, but oppression at the hands of white racist and repressive people. Cone sees Christ as a black man coming to deliver freedom against oppressive forces, and therefore reads all of Scripture through the oppression of white supremacy. And though Scripture is important to him, he does not limit his theological thought to Scripture alone:

I still regard the Bible as an important source of my theological reflections, but not my starting point. The black experience and the Bible together in dialectical tension serve as my point of departure today and yesterday. The order is significant. I am black first—

<sup>14</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Preface to the 1997 edition, xvi.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in a May 2, 2018 post for the *Christian Century* by Elizabeth Palmer entitled, "James Cone's theology is easy to like and hard to live," <https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/cover-cover/james-cones-theology-easy-and-hard-live>.

<sup>16</sup> Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, (New York: One World, 2019), 17.

everything else comes after that. This means that I read the Bible through the lens of a black tradition of struggle and not as the objective Word of God. The Bible therefore is one witness to God's empowering presence in human affairs, along with other important testimonies. The other testimonies include sacred documents of the African-American experience—such as the speeches of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., the writings of Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison, the music of the blues, jazz, and rap.<sup>17</sup>

Should any white theologian object to such a hermeneutic, upholding instead a theology of justification by grace through faith in the shed blood of Christ, they are automatically disadvantaged. To decry Cone's contextual understanding of the Scriptures is to be disingenuous. He contends that any white man claiming objectivity of doctrine, while at the same time saying his (Cone's) hermeneutic is subjective, only proves his racist disposition.

Objectively, however, the broader history of the Holy Christian Church testifies differently. Cone's theology is simply incompatible with orthodox biblical theology, and certainly not with any tradition coming out of the Reformation tradition. Yet, that does not reduce the need for our awareness of it.

Cone essentially admits this heterodoxy himself.<sup>18</sup> "I respect what happened at Nicea and Chalcedon and the theological input of the Church Fathers on Christology; but that source alone is inadequate for finding out meaning of

black folk's Jesus."<sup>19</sup> In short, he appears to create a very limited theology that collectivizes black people from all of history and from every nation, forcing them into one category. They must all see theology from the point of view of black people under American slavery, Jim Crow, discrimination, and prejudicial bigotry. It should be noted that the first three conditions are neither legal nor explicitly prevalent in the contemporary experience of black Americans today.

This perspective is neither faithful to the history of the Holy Christian Church nor compatible with traditional biblical orthodox Christianity. However, such collectivist ideology and the corresponding established identity become central to viewing populations of humanity for iterations of "black theology." As we will see, this is a central tenet for Critical Race Theory, just as Critical Theory is for ungirding the current sexual and moral revolution of the LGBTQ movement. In short, such "race" theology makes Christ only a means, where being black becomes primary. It reduces theology to be about subjective human perspectives rather than the objective truth of Jesus Christ crucified for the sins of the world (John 3:16).

Basing theology on skin color remains foreign to the heritage of Christianity. Though white people have misused and abused Scripture, twisting theology toward their racist and fallen heart, this does not negate the truth of orthodox Christian theology confessed in accordance with the Word of God. In the end, Cone's theology not only leads toward heterodoxy, but ultimately to heresy. Even so, it prepared the way for the dogmatic overcorrections now being pressed upon American culture through the social justice movement and the ideology of Critical Race Theory, which comes complete with its own terms and definitions to shape

<sup>17</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, xi.

<sup>18</sup> "The Jesus of whom I speak, however, is not primarily the one of Nicea and Chalcedon, nor of Luther, Calvin, and Barth. . . . For Christological reflections, I turn to the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul and of the Spirituals and Gospel Music, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Martin Luther King Jr." Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 13.

contemporary vocabulary and behavior.

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## CHAPTER 2

### Definitions: Understanding the Dogma and Language of Social Justice

Just as the tenets of theology need to be explored and defined, any pervasive theory of culture requires similar treatment. This chapter delves into the new terms and definitions of the social justice movement in order to see how best to let the truth and light of Christ shine upon a misguided movement and offer a better alternative.

#### *The Dogma of an Ideology*

Historic biblical Christianity does not create theology and ethics based on the racial, ethnic, national, or pigmented identity of human beings. As Paul says, our identity is in Christ. “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20), and “in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26–28). In other words, Christians do not speak of fellow human beings based on their specific cultural, racial, sexual, or national identity, but upon their redeemed identity in Christ as a precious and beloved child of God—one who has been justified and sanctified by the shed blood of Christ and His Holy Spirit.

Nonetheless, taking Cone’s lead of moving beyond Scripture, and progressing to a collectivist ideology in order to implement reform, preeminent social justice thinkers like Ibram Kendi, Ta-Nahesi Coates, and Robin DiAngelo combine the framework of Marxian thinking and postmodern deconstruction

philosophy, permeated with Freudian psychoanalysis, to create various polemics and dictates of how to remake culture into a so-called “antiracist” society. We will explore the deeper philosophical and technical foundations of the movement in the next chapter. But first we need to grasp the common vernacular of the resulting social justice movement to better understand how this theory gained credence in American society.

#### *Must be Antiracist*

Kendi’s antiracist terminology will be our starting point. For him an antiracist is different than being “not racist.” One can never be neutral. In other words, it is illegitimate to claim you are “not racist.” One is either a racist or actively working against racism. This assertion reveals his broadened definition of racism—namely, it is “a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, the definition of an antiracist is one “who is expressing the idea that racial groups are equals and none needs developing, and is supporting policy that reduces inequality.”<sup>21</sup> This academic definition creates a framework to construct the social justice movement and its corresponding dogma. And though the technical language of a theory and its practice can seem arduous to understand, its complexity is no excuse for Christians to ignore it or refuse to do the hard work of distinguishing between the pursuit of biblical justice and critical social justice.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, 18

<sup>21</sup> Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, 24

<sup>22</sup> Kevin DeYong offers a simple and helpful definition of biblical justice: “So for simplicity’s sake, let’s take biblical ‘social justice’ to mean something like ‘treating people equitably, working for systems and structures that are fair, and looking out for the weak and the vulnerable.’” Found on his *The Gospel Coalition* blog, “Is Social Justice a Gospel Issue?” September 11, 2018. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/social-justice-gospel-is-sue/>.

It's important to note that social justice thinkers like Kendi decidedly push socialistic or totalitarian tendencies in order to introduce public policies that better bend American culture to conform to their ideological (or dogmatic) point of view. Note that this revolutionary endeavor certainly has the intent of making over the church. The goal is to purge America of all her alleged "inherent" white supremacist origins and dismantle all systemic racism within every American institution.

### ***Fighting Discrimination with Discrimination?***

Ironically, to do this, the movement is actually perpetrating racist discrimination in the name of equality. The Wall Street Journal provides just one example of this increasing trend among public schools across the nation:

EVANSTON, Ill.—This summer, school superintendent Devon Horton told the residents of this city north of Chicago that for "oppressed minorities," the coronavirus was only the latest chapter in their long history of persecution—the pandemic of "inequity and racism and classism" had been holding them down for a lot longer.

In recognition of the impact of racism, Dr. Horton said, Evanston schools would give students from marginalized groups first priority for seats for in-person learning and all other students would be taught remotely. This is "about equity for Black and brown students, for special education students, for our LGBTQ students," he said during a public meeting, held via Zoom.

After the slew of angry letters aimed at Dr. Horton, the school board responded with an open letter to the community.

"When you challenge policies and protocols established to ensure an equitable experience for Black and brown students," the board said in its letter, "you are part of a continuum of resistance to equity and desire to maintain white supremacy."<sup>23</sup>

The school board letter collectivizes all detractors of its policy. The blatant accusatory nature of the school board's letter demonstrates the utter danger of this ideology. People are forced into an either/or category. If you oppose this radical racist ideology and speak out about it, you are labeled a white supremacist.

There is simply no reasonableness to this dogma. Sadly, this type of thinking and behavior fits in with what it means to be an antiracist. In fact, as Kendi clearly defines it, such discrimination is actually appropriate if equality is being achieved. "If discrimination is creating equality, then it is antiracist. If discrimination is creating inequality, then it is racist." In other words, he ironically advocates for discrimination as a step toward equality.

### ***Equity and Equality***

Here, the unrealistic goal of equality of outcome—over against equality of opportunity—is revealed as the ever-guiding light for this ideology. Equality of opportunity is the notion that all are provided an equal opportunity to achieve success, but that success is dependent on individual effort within that opportunity. Equality of outcome, however, is the demand that regardless of individual effort the outcome must be the same for all. Therefore, equality of opportunity is considered undesirable

<sup>23</sup> Douglas Belkin and Lee Hawkins, "Can School be 'Antiracist'? A New Superintendent in Evanston, Ill., Has a Plan," *The Wall Street Journal*. 10-6-20, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/can-school-be-antiracist-a-new-superintendent-in-evanston-ill-has-a-plan-11601982001?mod=d-jem10point>.

because it accommodates meritocracy and is seen as prohibitive and antithetical to equity. Equal opportunity, in this view, usually favors those who have an inherent social advantage.

What is more, equity is actually distinguished from equality. Equity ensures that everyone has what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives; everyone begins at the same starting place in life. Equality, however, means everyone receives the same things to enjoy full, healthy lives. Thus, one deals with the starting place while the other with what one receives along the way.

But we must ask, at what cost can this actually be achieved? In perhaps his most stunning statement, Kendi blatantly endorses discrimination as a fitting behavior: “The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.”<sup>24</sup> This is a curious, if not unsettling assertion. Given humankind’s fallen condition, advocating for such blatant discrimination is only bound to create further unrest. This perspective is nonetheless consistent with the expanded definitions and dogmatic ideology that critical social justice warriors are teaching.

### ***Woke—A Marxist Connection***

As cries for social justice against “systemic racism” and “white privilege” reach a fevered pitch, the church needs to be clear minded and culturally well informed. We must remain scripturally based and Christ centered, so as not to lose our bearings nor fail to speak a word of truth while acting with compassion in the face of calls for reform in society at large or in the church itself.

To say we live in complex times is a bit of an

understatement. However, that complexity is reflected in the various approaches to the issue of systemic injustice and racism. Definitions are critical. New terms are often added to cultural vocabulary to indicate trends and to identify and label those who are culturally aware. One of the latest in social justice vocabulary is the slang term “woke.”

The simple definition of the word comes from the verb “to wake,” as in to wake up from sleep. However, “woke” has been adapted in our American setting as a cultural and political description referring to a perceived awareness of issues concerning social justice and racial justice. To be “woke” is to awaken from the sleep of ignorance or from outdated beliefs into the enlightenment of new cultural awareness about social and racial justice. It means one has been “awakened” to a particular type of critical consciousness. In particular it embraces the worldview of critical social justice that sees the world only in terms of unjust power dynamics and the need to dismantle problematic systems. The modifier “critical” is often used here because the movement is derived from Critical Race Theory, more specifically from Critical Theory, which will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

Although the term “woke” is new to our setting, the concept should be familiar. When Karl Marx claimed “Religion is the opium of the masses,” he was essentially talking about the need to be woke. He considered religion a tool of oppression because it kept people asleep. Like opium, he contended it deadens pain and clouds the truth. Religion, he claimed, soothes suffering and gives false hope. The Marxist revolution needed images of Christ to be removed, speech codes enforced against pastors, and icons of biblical truth destroyed in order to clear the path toward communism.

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<sup>24</sup> Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, 19.

The critical social justice movement carries similar Marxian themes as it seeks to remake the whole of culture rather than just the social classes that Marx set out to destroy. To do this, not only are new words added to our vocabulary, but definitions of words are often expanded, altered, or completely reinvented, and then repeatedly mainstreamed into social consciousness to modify thought and behavior.

## *Justice*

Consider the concept of justice, for example. Classically understood, justice is defined as a virtue. In fact, justice is one of the four cardinal virtues. It was viewed as the moderation between selfishness and selflessness—between having more and having less than one’s fair share. In Christian moral theology, justice is a quality or habit which perfects the will and inclines it to render to each and to all what belongs to them. The object of the virtue of justice is the other person’s rights, whether natural or bestowed by church or state. Thus, an injustice occurs when something that is due a person, like freedom or personal agency, is withheld.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, biblical justice has a long-understood meaning which stems from the identity and being of God himself. It carries dual meaning and purpose as it relates to both our relationship to God and others (called communitive justice) and to the particular role of authorities and God himself rendering just judgment in the various stations of life (called distributive justice).<sup>26</sup>

In the bible the Hebrew words *tsedek* and *mishpat* can be translated as either “righteousness” or “justice” depending on the context. The Bible has more than thirty examples of these words being used interchangeably.<sup>27</sup> In fact, God

himself is both righteous and just. They go together; he cannot be one without being the other.

Micah 6:8 offers an imperative of how we ought to treat others in terms of behavior that is both good and right, but also just: “He has told you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (ESV). In practical terms then, “Doing justice means following the rule of law, showing impartiality, paying what you promised, not stealing, not swindling, not taking bribes, and not taking advantage of the weak because they are too uninformed or unconnected to stop you.”<sup>28</sup> For Lutherans, it might simply be summarized as keeping the second table of the law and loving your neighbor as yourself, doing the works God has prepared for you to do (see Eph 2:10). Yet, biblical justice also means more than conforming to God’s moral standard as we relate to others. It also refers to “impartially rendering judgement, righting wrongs, and meting our punishment for lawbreaking.”<sup>29</sup> Both of these understandings of justice are part of God’s guiding light that help the Holy Christian Church act confidently in the face of social injustices. They are what we understand as biblical justice, which is very different from the social justice movement of today.

BIBLICAL JUSTICE...IS VERY  
DIFFERENT FROM THE  
SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2014), 44

<sup>26</sup> Scott Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Credo House Publishers, 2020), 24.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see Proverbs 8:20, Psalm 103:6. In par-

titular, see also Psalm 97:1–2 for how righteousness and justice are foundational to the character of God himself.

<sup>28</sup> Kevin DeYoung, “Is Social Justice a Gospel Issue?” *The Gospel Coalition*. September 11, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/social-justice-gospel-issue/>.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice*, 24.

## ***“Social Justice”***

Critical social justice warriors (often referred to as SJWs) push justice to mean more than what is due an individual based upon natural or divine rights. To them justice must force equality of outcome (rather than only equality of opportunity) upon all society. Therefore, it is deemed “social justice.” In particular, this definition of social justice carries the beliefs that are based upon the values and morals of social progressivism, cultural inclusivity (LGBTQ movements), civil rights, transgenderism, feminism, and multiculturalism rather than the morals of traditional virtues or biblical truths.

For example, although through all of time “marriage” referred to the union of one-man and one-woman, recent Critical Theory and social justice thinking infiltrated the minds of the American populace and legal fields to change the definition of marriage. The critical social justice movement pressed for “equality” of same sex couples so that they might be able to become “married” legally. As a result, in 2015 a 5–4 Supreme Court ruling read a right into the constitution and “equality” is now legally forced upon the American people.<sup>30</sup> Then, in the summer of 2020 the next advancement of critical social justice equality came in another 5–4 supreme court ruling that legally redefined the meaning of biological sex for transgender individuals.<sup>31</sup> Once again, a new “equality”

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<sup>30</sup> *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015), is considered a landmark civil rights case in which the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by both the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The 5–4 ruling requires all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the Insular Areas to perform and recognize the marriages of same-sex couples on the same terms and conditions as the marriages of opposite-sex couples, with all the accompanying rights and responsibilities.

<sup>31</sup> *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 590 U.S. (2020), is considered a landmark United States Supreme Court civil rights case in which the Court held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees against discrimina-

tion because they are gay or transgender.

was read into an existing law and equality of outcome is now being forced upon the American people. The growing trend to consider terms and definitions in such a plastic manner and thus change culture by legal fiat is alarming.

## ***(Systemic) Racism***

The definition of racism is very important to understand in this context. Racism is the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioral traits corresponding to physical appearance and should be distinguished based on the alleged superiority of one race over another. However, the prevailing cry of the social justice movement has included the accusation of “systemic” racism. That is something different than racism. Systemic racism believes social structures have assumptions that systemically oppress minorities. However, social justice warriors and Critical Race theorists are now merging the two definitions to make them one and the same. It’s important, therefore, for Christians to have a basic knowledge of terms as we engage in the care of one another and understand the changing cultural landscape.

To that end, we must adamantly assert that racism is utterly abhorrent and evil. It must be labeled sin and treated as the sin that it is. This is part of the Christian life. Those who have committed racist acts or carry a racially prejudiced mindset need to repent. Upon repentance, believers rest in the full forgiveness and cleansing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who leads them forward with a transformed heart and mind that loves and serves others in the name of Christ.

Likewise, those who have been the victims of hatred and racist acts need the salving balm of Christ’s healing blood that also brings to them restoration and cleansing for all unrighteousness they have endured (1 John 1:7). See Part Two

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tion because they are gay or transgender.



of this study for the specific pastoral care that enacts this divine healing and care.

Nonetheless, we live at a time when the definition of racism is under scrutiny and the definition of justice is being altered. Our own LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations study of racism previously noted the following definition:

Racism has been defined as ‘the theory or idea that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and certain traits of personality, intellect, or culture and, combined with it, the notion that some races are inherently superior to others.’ According to this definition, racism refers to the belief that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups are associated with the presence or absence of certain socially relevant qualities or abilities that are determinative of people’s social worth and their value as human beings.<sup>32</sup>

This definition is dated and no longer the accepted universal understanding for racism. That’s true both in the secular culture as well as in the church. As noted, many are now defining the term racism as directly linked to whole systems and policies present within our culture and country. This includes the assertion that the founding principles of America are inherently and structurally racist and have been so from the very beginning.

Understanding the above terms and how they are employed is vital to successfully navigating our cultural chaos. They are predicated on the

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<sup>32</sup> *Racism and the Church: Overcoming Idolatry*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. (St. Louis, 1994), 10.

claim that racism permeates every system of this country. As a result, being a “white” person is considered problematic in itself. In this view being white comes with inherent privileges which stem from a racist system of government. Social justice, then, means that white people need to self-identify as racist, check their privilege, and stand aside for people of color in order for equality to take place.<sup>33</sup> The assertion is that if white people would better understand their implicit bias, a more racially just society would result. New terms have subsequently emerged to help further these assertions. They are white privilege, white guilt, and white fragility. Each is a phrase meant to describe various conditions and emotions of white people as a result of the movement.

### ***White Privilege***

First is the phrase white privilege. It is that white people are born with an unearned advantage based upon their color of skin (their whiteness) which can be observed both systemically and individually. This alleged advantage, coupled with Kendi’s assertion that discrimination in the name of equality is acceptable, compels many employers and universities to intentionally discriminate against their white employees by requiring diversity and sensitivity training regarding their whiteness. The goal is to change the inherent racist bias and behavior that woke employers claim is present in all white people.

Recent examples, however, demonstrate that even life-long liberals who have otherwise

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<sup>33</sup> Consider on July 15, 2020 The National Museum of African American History & Culture put out the chart below about the cultural assumptions of whiteness. After numerous complaints it was eventually revised and then removed. Valerie Richardson, “Smithsonian African American museum removes ‘whiteness’ chart slammed as racist”, *The Washington Times*, (Friday, July 17, 2020). <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/jul/17/smithsonian-african-american-museum-remove-whiteness/>.

embraced the social justice movement are acknowledging this is going too far. The trend is generating and fueling a racially hostile working environment, especially on college campuses. Smith College, a prestigious all-women's school in Massachusetts, is one recent example. The working environment had become so hostile for one white woman that she finally resigned. She noted that relentless diversity training reduces people's personhood to a racial category and makes continued employment for white employees contingent on their willingness to work on their alleged implicit bias.<sup>34</sup>

In the business world, Coca-Cola hired a diversity consultant (Robin DiAngelo) to lead their diversity training, which required white employees to learn how to be less white. "To be less white is: to be less oppressive, to be less arrogant, to be less trusting, to be less defensive, to be less ignorant, to be more humble, to listen, to believe, break with apathy and break with white solidarity."<sup>35</sup> However, this particular instance has garnered significant attention and caused the platform hosting the diversity training class (LinkedIn) to remove it from their site.

In public schools around the country whole curriculums are being developed in retaliation to the white bias allegedly woven into the teaching of school subjects, even mathematics. In fact, the California Standards for the Teaching Profession created a mathematics curriculum titled, A Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction: Dismantling Racism in Mathematics Instruction.<sup>36</sup> They charge that a

"white supremacy culture in the mathematics classroom can show up when:

- The focus is on getting the "right" answer.
- Teachers enculturated in the USA teach mathematics the way they learned it.
- Expectations are not met.
- Addressing mistakes.
- Teachers are teachers and students are learners.
- Math is taught in a linear fashion and skills are taught sequentially, without consideration of prerequisite knowledge.
- Students are required to "show their work."
- Grading practices are focused on lack of knowledge.
- Language acquisition is equated with mathematical proficiency."<sup>37</sup>

White people who object to this type of indoctrination, diversity training, or bias training fall into another newly coined category that collectively constitute what is called "white fragility."

### ***White Fragility***

White fragility is a phrase coined by Robin DiAngelo in her book by the same name, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. This pejorative term refers to a state among white people in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes

<sup>34</sup> Dave Urbanski. "'Lifelong liberal' resigns from woke women's college for its 'racially hostile environment' where whites allegedly are attacked" *Blaze Media* February 26, 2021. <https://www.theblaze.com/news/liberal-resigns-woke-college-racially-hostile-environment>.

<sup>35</sup> Del Río, Mairem. "Coca-Cola Asks Its Workers to Be 'Less White' to Fight Racism." *Entrepreneur*. Feb. 25, 2021. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/366132>.

<sup>36</sup> see also, Rick Moran, "The Woke Attack on Mathe-

tics Has Created 'White Math'." *PJ Media* (March 2, 2021). <https://pjmedia.com/news-and-politics/rick-moran/2021/03/02/the-woke-attack-on-mathematics-has-created-white-math-n1429474>.

<sup>37</sup> The recommended curriculum is summarized in this document: "Dismantling Racism in Mathematics Instruction," 7. [https://equitablemath.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/1\\_STRIDE1.pdf](https://equitablemath.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/1_STRIDE1.pdf).

intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include outward displays of emotion such as fear, guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation.

DiAngelo is a white female social justice warrior, who, like Kendi, also champions a particularly broadened definition of racism. She quotes professor J. Kehaulani Kauanui, who simply states, “Racism is a structure, not an event.”<sup>38</sup> She then extensively elaborates on this with accounts of those she identifies as ignorant white racists exhibiting their systems of privilege. But as she does, DiAngelo has a specific audience in mind:

This book is intended for us, white progressives who so often—despite our conscious intentions—make life so difficult for people of color. I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color. I define a white progressive as any white person who thinks he or she is not racist, or is less racist, or in the “choir,” or already “gets it.” White progressives can be the most difficult for people of color because, to the degree that we think we have arrived, we will put our energy into making sure that others see us having arrived.<sup>39</sup>

Her approach is curious as she openly acknowledges that “this book does not attempt to provide the solution to racism. Nor does it attempt to prove that racism exists; I start from the premise. My goal is to make visible how one aspect of white sensibility continues to hold racism in place: white fragility.”<sup>40</sup> Oddly, she seems to be embracing the broadened definition

of racism and all of the heightened awareness and wokeness that goes with it in an effort to demonstrate that she has “arrived.”

Nonetheless, enforcement of this new definition is not being limited to select elite quarters of society. Facebook and social media are littered with demands for and examples of the new social ethic for confessing one’s white privilege and even arranging community “kneel downs” as a show of guilt and penance for white privilege.<sup>41</sup>

In her corporate consulting service that offers racial sensitivity training, DiAngelo teaches white people how to intentionally “interrupt” the inherent racism present in every white male and female American. In so doing she likewise coaches black people how to see that racism—even if they as black people claim it’s not there—and help facilitate the needed interruption within the white person’s inherent and avoidably racist disposition. This interruption, DiAngelo says, is necessary because of the social caste system white people have been born into and participate in wittingly or unwittingly. In short, it is a system that automatically prejudices white people toward black people simply as a part of who they are. In her words:

I came to see that the way we are taught to define racism makes it virtually impossible for white people to understand it. Given our racial insulation, coupled with misinformation, any suggestion that we are complicit in racism is a kind of unwelcome and insulting shock to the system. If, however, I understand racism as a system into which I was socialized, I can receive feedback on

<sup>38</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*. (Boston, Beacon Press, 2018), 20.

<sup>39</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> I observed the wife of a LCMS pastor organize one such community event through social media, continuing to chastise those who refused to confess their white privilege and show solidarity with penance for the guilt of their whiteness.

my problematic behavior and racial patterns as a helpful way to support my learning and growth.<sup>42</sup>

In the end, she essentially asserts a non-falsifiable hypothesis. The way you can know you are racist is if you are white, and if you are white you must know that you are a racist who is part of a system that perpetuates racism. In her words, “The default of the current system is the reproduction of racial inequality; our institutions were designed to reproduce racial inequality and they do so with efficiency.”<sup>43</sup> To deny this demonstrates your fragility and why you need her expensive services to interrupt your racism and bring you to wokeness, which usually includes some form of corresponding penance. The irony of it all, of course, is that she herself is white. Nonetheless, the fear of being called racist and “cancelled” is palpable among many. Countless examples demonstrate how many people are driven underground to express their frustration with the unyielding and unreasonable dogmatic push of this movement.<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, DiAngelo’s book is dangerously cultish. Her credibility lacks consistency since she strips black people of agency by ironically noting that it is only white people who will be able to deliver them from the oppression of white people: “When I say that only whites

can be racist, I mean that in the United States, only whites have the collective social and institutional power and privilege over people of color. People of color do not have this power and privilege over white people.”<sup>45</sup> Together with Kendi’s books, this exemplifies the unsettling extremes pressed into the hearts and minds of people in contemporary America. However, the reason these books are being received so readily is because of the condition described by final term in this chapter—white guilt.

### ***White Guilt***

White guilt is the individual or collective guilt felt by white people for harm resulting from racist treatment of ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans or indigenous peoples, by other white people. This is most specifically created in the context of the Atlantic slave trade, European colonialism and the legacy of these eras. The social justice movement plays upon this guilt by highlighting and amplifying it in order to upend perceived power structure inequalities.

Black journalist and author Shelby Steele counters the idea of white fragility as something that emanates from the reality of what he began calling “white guilt” even before it was a popular term. He says that when “America acknowledged its racism [by passing the Civil Rights bill and the Johnson administration’s oversight], it effectively made blacks into the nation’s official, and, seemingly, permanent victims—citizen victims—as it were, for whom demands of responsibility are verboten lest the larger nation seem to be oppressing them all over again.”<sup>46</sup>

Candace Owens, a young conservative black

<sup>42</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 153.

<sup>44</sup> “Bari Weiss has written an outstanding piece for City Journal about the ways in which wokeness has moved from universities to some of the country’s most exclusive prep schools. After speaking with parents and teachers at schools on both the east and west coast, Weiss concludes the woke revolution is already over. In fact, parents at these schools, aware their kids could be kicked out for any reason, are afraid to be identified as skeptics of critical race theory. This fear of being accused (or worse having your children blacklisted) is already so great that not a single person Weiss spoke to was willing to have their name appear in print.” John Sexton, “How Wokeness is taking over American Prep Schools” (March 9, 2021) *Hot Air*: <https://hotair.com/archives/john-s-2/2021/03/09/wokeness-taking-americas-prep-schools/>.

<sup>45</sup> DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> Shelby Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil rights Era*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 55-56.

female political commentator, echoes this view and even testified to congress about the victimhood blacks are pushed into: “To be black in America means to have your life narrative predetermined: a routine of failure followed by alleged blamelessness due to perceived impotence. It means constant subjection to the bigotry of lowered expectations, a culture of pacifying our shortcomings through predisposition.”<sup>47</sup>

They both observe how this has created a victimization identity among blacks, which then brought forth a “militance towards whites” and “became a litmus test of ‘blackness’.” Consequently, “when victimization is identity, then the victim’s passionate anger can be called out even when there is no victimization. In other words, the victims’ anger can be relied on as a political force.”<sup>48</sup> This, says Steele, has given “blacks a political identity with no real purpose beyond the manipulation of white guilt.” Though written in 2007 regarding how this was manifested among the black power movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Steele’s critique echoes the current reality of American culture today.

Most notable is his observation that the black power movement of previous decades “quickly became the most totalitarian and repressive identity that black America has ever known,” where all “dissent became heresy, punishable by excommunication, because anything less than uniform militancy weakened the group’s effectiveness with white guilt.”<sup>49</sup> Enter the present-day Black Lives Matter organization that seems to have surpassed this militancy. (Here I again distinguish between the black lives matter movement to reasonably address racial injustice and the ideology of the militant organization of

Black Lives Matter). Again, Candace Owens notes how this extreme militancy is being played out on social media, particularly after the death of George Floyd: “Any individual who did not post a tribute to George Floyd and Black Lives Matter was immediately branded a racist. Culture had dictated that this was the corrective course of action, and any person who refused the mandate was publicly lambasted.”<sup>50</sup>

In short, both Owens and Steele help us see the pervasive attitude of indignation and moral certitude that a social justice movement shaped by Critical Race Theory has fomented in our larger culture. As will be demonstrated, objectivity and reasonableness are not the goal of the theory, unless it is to objectify every dissenter from it as racist, reprehensible, and needing to be “cancelled.”

Consequently, we need to examine Critical Race Theory and the philosophy that paved the way for it. Knowing the above terms and definitions allows us to dive deeper into the theory and better understand how it gave rise to the ideology of the current social justice movement.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory

The varying and expanding definitions of racism and antiracism are simply the outworking of the underlying ideology of Critical Race Theory and undergirding the social justice movement. Critical Race Theory is an American activist phenomenon that formally took shape in the academic and legal world beginning in the 1970s, not long after the passage of the Civil Rights Act. It’s an area of study that utilized the tenets of postmodern philosophy to construct a

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<sup>47</sup> Candace Owens, *Blackout: How Black America Can Make Its Second Escape From the Democrat Plantation*. (New York: Threshold Editions, 2020), 2.

<sup>48</sup> Steele, *White Guilt*, 72.

<sup>49</sup> Steele, *White Guilt*, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Owens, *Blackout*, 232.

theory which “holds that race is a social construct that was created to maintain white privilege and white supremacy.”<sup>51</sup> However, we must note that this idea was first introduced before any postmodern thought came on the scene. At the turn of the twentieth century, black intellectual W.E.B. DuBois argued that the idea of race was being used to assert biological explanations of differences that are social and cultural, in order to perpetuate the unjust treatment of racial minorities. His 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is considered a landmark in the literature of black protest and pressed this accusation forward in rhetorically artful ways.<sup>52</sup>

However, it was the later linguistic and intellectual tenets of postmodernism that created the Critical Theory that today dominates the cultural landscape of America. Postmodern precepts include the following: “the core postmodern idea that knowledge is a construct of power, that the categories into which we organize people and phenomena were falsely contrived in the service of that power, that language is inherently dangerous and unreliable, that knowledge claims and values of all cultures are equally valid and intelligible only on their own terms, and that collective experience trumps individuality and universality.”<sup>53</sup> The point of each tenet is that it contains an activist element that seeks to reorient and remake society, coercively if necessary, according to the moral vision expressed within the theory.

But to understand how Critical Race Theory developed into what it is today, and why it demands what it does, we need to grasp in at least a rudimentary way the ideology and

philosophy of the Critical Theory that underlies it. A brief assessment follows.

### ***Critical Theory: Neo-Marxism***

Critical Theory itself is its own school of thought that began developing in the early 1920s at the University of Frankfurt, Germany. The Frankfurt School contained within it a group of scholars at the Institute for Social Research who developed what they called critical theory and popularized the dialectical method of learning by interrogating society’s contradictions.<sup>54</sup> They began with the inquiry of why Marxism had failed in the west, questioning what it was about capitalism that prevailed in the face of Marxist economic theory.

To review, Marxism is a social, political, and economic theory originated by German philosopher Karl Marx. It was first formally presented in 1848 in the pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*. Marxism examines the effect of capitalism on labor, productivity, and economic development and argues for a worker revolution to overturn capitalism in favor of communism. Marxism posits that the struggle between social classes—specifically between the bourgeoisie (well to do capitalists) and the proletariat (poor workers)—defines economic relations in a capitalist economy. The inequality of these relationships, it was thought, would therefore inevitably lead to revolutionary communism.

The Frankfurt School scholars used Marxism as an initial framework of investigation, but then augmented and updated it to their socio-historical period, creating a Neo-Marxist theory. They gave particular attention to the problem of “rule through ideology, or rule carried out

<sup>51</sup> Helen Pluckrose & James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything About Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody*, (North Carolina, Pitchstone Publishing, 2020), 111.

<sup>52</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> Pluckrose & Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 111.

<sup>54</sup> Nicki Lisa Cole, “The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory: An overview of people and theory” *ThoughtCo*. (October 15, 2019). <https://www.thoughtco.com/frankfurt-school-3026079>.

in the realm of culture.”<sup>55</sup> They believed that technological advancements in communications and the reproduction of ideas enabled this form of rule. Their brand of Neo-Marxism overlapped with Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony. Together it constituted a study of the rise of mass culture through technological developments.

According to Lisa Cole, these scholars examined how technology led to a sameness in production and cultural experience. In short, “technology allowed the public to sit passively before cultural content rather than actively engage with one another for entertainment, as they had in the past. The scholars theorized that this experience made people intellectually inactive and politically passive, as they allowed mass-produced ideologies and values to wash over them and infiltrate their consciousness.”<sup>56</sup> In their minds, this was why capitalism was able to succeed, because consumerism functions in much the same way. “It maintains itself through a creation of false needs that only the products of capitalism can satisfy.”<sup>57</sup> In an effort to examine the societal implications of what this meant for Marxian economics and the triumph of capitalism in Germany, Freudian psychoanalytic theory was utilized by critical theorists as a tool for cultural examination and thus created a new form of thinking about traditional forms of theoretical inquiry.

### ***Traditional Theory vs Critical Theory***

The above philosophical examination was predicated upon the difference between traditional theory and what came to be known as critical theory. Critical theory drew its name

from Marx’s original demand that everything must be “ruthlessly” criticized, which is something much different than traditional “critical thinking.”

Traditional theory was descriptive of a phenomenon and had the aim of discovering how something works and why it works that way. Critical theory proceeds from a prescriptive normative moral vision for society, ruthlessly describes how the item being critiqued fails that vision (usually systemically), and then prescribes activism to remake it into the prescribed vision. In short, critical theory examines systems of power (e.g., how a working class is oppressed). It seeks human emancipation from the forces of domination and offers the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry necessary to decrease domination and increase freedom in all forms. Ultimately, critical theory wants a cultural “awakening” to dismantle the ideology of capitalism because of the inequality that capitalism breeds.

This critical theory then became the backdrop for legal scholars and philosophers of the 1970s to examine the inequalities of U.S. law in terms of race, gender, and sexuality and how they believed those inequalities might be addressed more adequately.

### ***Adding Postmodern Philosophy***

Helping to advance this examination was the emergence of postmodern philosophy. It gave critical theorists an additional new lens to diagnose the perceived malady of society. One overly simplified summary of postmodernism and its preeminent thinkers demonstrates why it was so attractive to Critical Theory and subsequently for Critical Race theorists: “Postmodernism has become a Lyotardian metanarrative, a Foucauldian system of discursive power, and a Derridean oppressive

<sup>55</sup> Nicki Lisa Cole, “The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory.”

<sup>56</sup> Nicki Lisa Cole, “The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory.”

<sup>57</sup> Nicki Lisa Cole, “The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory.”

hierarchy.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, postmodernism allows for the preeminence of story over objective truth, it reduces humanity to the will to power, and ruthlessly criticizes the inequality of power and the resulting oppression within its hierarchical structures, all while elevating feelings and pleasure over duty and responsibility.

Put it all together and it collectively becomes an eccentric sandwich of thinking—Marxian economic theory, Postmodern theory, and Freudian psychoanalytic theory, all sandwiched between buns of critical theory. It creates an odd and acquired taste for the uninitiated. Perhaps a bit like the eccentric but currently best-selling McDonald’s sandwich in China—the spam burger.<sup>59</sup> It is a curious and unexpected food creation combing mayonnaise, crumbled Oreo cookies, and spam that is claimed to be surprisingly satisfying to the consumer. It’s a fitting metaphor for understanding how people are devouring Critical Race Theory in our time.

The sandwich has two normal buns to give it shape and structure. These represent Critical Theory. They are then coated with the comforting texture and tang of thick mayonnaise. This stands for Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Crumbled Oreo cookie is then piled on—because why should chocolate chip cookies have the corner on the market? This represents Marxian economic theory. Finally, two slices of deconstructed meat in the form of spam are added. This aptly stands for postmodern theory.

<sup>58</sup> Helen Pluckrose, “How French “Intellectuals” Ruined the West: Postmodernism & Its Impact.” *New Discourses: Pursuing the light of objective truth in subjective darkness*. (April 6, 2020).

<https://newdiscourses.com/2020/04/french-intellectuals-ruined-west-postmodernism-impact/>.

<sup>59</sup> Maggie Hiufu Wong, “An acquired taste? McDonald’s China offers burger featuring Spam and crushed Oreos” *CNN Travel*. December 22, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/mcdonalds-china-oreo-spam-burger-intl-hnk/index.html>.

This concoction is all devoured one strangely delicious bite after another.

This is how Critical Theory is being fed to Americans to shape our thought about race, gender and sexuality and likewise how Critical Race Theory is being garnished for our American palette.

### ***Critical Race Theory: The Fight for Power***

Now to assess Critical Race Theory itself. One of the premier texts of Critical Race Theory explains the theory this way: “The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power.”<sup>60</sup> It expresses the desire to fundamentally alter the control of power in favor of the morals they assert as essential. To do so, they admittedly go beyond the reasonable steps taken in the civil rights era which stressed incrementalism and step by step process. Instead, “critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.”<sup>61</sup> The goal is to deconstruct and upend power structures in favor of the oppressed. For those familiar to the movement

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FAVOR OF THE OPPRESSED

and its history, the list of thinkers who have influenced it are startling and confusing:

<sup>60</sup> Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>61</sup> Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 3.



As the reader will see, critical race theory builds upon the insights of two previous movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism, to both of which it owes a large debt. It also draws from certain European philosophers and theorists, such as Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, as well as from the American radical tradition exemplified by such figures as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Power and Chicano Movements of the early sixties and seventies.<sup>62</sup>

Although some were previously referenced above, each of these cited thinkers would be worth studying on their own. Those of significant concern are Gramsci (the Italian Marxist philosopher who advocated the eradication of what he considered the oppressive “hegemony” of western culture), and the postmodern philosophers who questioned objective truth in favor of self-indulgent expression and the will to power—Foucault and Derrida. Their assaults on God’s created order, as well as on objective truth, language, and sexual decency serve as the dangerous foil for Critical Race Theory advocates.

Correspondingly, Critical Race Theory has been further advanced by the use of “intersectionality,” by which it seeks to deconstruct the inequality facing the people of the world. Its goal is to parse and identify the multiple various intersections of the noted oppression being experienced by people in our culture. The premier text for this movement states:

When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and organization of power in a given society are better

understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, intersectionality asserts that it’s possible to uniquely discriminate against someone who falls within an intersection of multiple oppressed identities—like one who is black and female and homosexual. The aim was to demonstrate that the current discrimination law is “insufficiently sensitive to address this.”<sup>64</sup> But whatever legal insights are gained, it has served to further deconstruct reality and to expand those identified as victims of American systemic oppression. What is more, it has provided rationale to protest this oppression and work towards dismantling the current system of law and order that serves to promote said oppression.

In the end, the theory aims to completely remake culture and public policy on the premise of what is deemed morally acceptable according to the tenets of this eclectic mash of theories. As noted above, its roots are in Marxism, but it is technically not Marxist. Rather, it is “Marxian” in nature. That is, with some postmodern thinking the Marxist goal of remaking the social class system is gutted and traded out for remaking culture as a whole by using psychoanalytic emotional appeals to equality not only of race, but also of sexual preference, gender, and any minority status. Again, true Marxism was an economic theory that had the intent of rejecting capitalism in an effort to address the social class inequality with

<sup>62</sup> Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016), 2

<sup>64</sup> Pluckrose & Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, p.56–57

a revolution of the proletariat (“Workers of the world unite!”).

In contrast, Critical Race Theory, informed by the tenets of Postmodern thinking and Freudian psychoanalysis, uses a quasi-shell of Marxism in an effort not only to remake the social class system, but to completely remake all of culture. The means to enact this is being mitigated through the present cultural identity politics (people groups’ collectivized identity) and current corresponding calls for equality, along with the new morals of affirming and endorsing this antiracist ideology. What is deemed acceptable to this ideology is nothing short of dismantling every system, structure, or policy that is allegedly racist. This includes the entire American experiment, specifically the capitalistic market, as well as the judicial and political systems. Likewise, any church that reflects anything similar to the morals or values of the identified racist system is also subject to discrediting and dismantling.

### ***Results of Critical Race Theory and the Emergence of Black Lives Matter***

The results of this theory in contemporary culture are becoming more and more obvious. Consider black journalist Te Nehesi Coats, who took up the mantle of W.E.B. Du Bois’s narrative protest and wrote an award winning national best seller in 2015, *Between the World and Me*. In it he recounts his racially injustice-filled and traumatized life from the 1990s to the present in the form of a letter to his son. He includes bitter accounts of growing police brutality, and his overall disdain for America and her racist past and present.

His follow up best seller, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*, is a composition of selected essays that focus on the eight years of the Obama presidency, followed by what he considers a vicious backlash or “whitelash”

with the election of Donald Trump. One essay in particular, “The Case for Reparations” lays out his rationale for why America through her government should give serious attention to paying reparations to black people with ancestors who were slaves.<sup>65</sup>

As already noted, President Biden supports the creation of a committee to study this possibility. However, this proposal was also taken to another level when Duke University economist and professor William Darity Jr. and his wife, the writer A. Kirsten Mullen, co-authored a report making the case for systemic reparations to erase the existing black-white wealth gap—a common disparity noted by social justice advocates. “The authors calculated about \$800,000 for each eligible household, using the average wealth disparity between black and white households, rather than the median figures. The average white household net worth is \$929,800, while average black household net worth is \$138,000.”<sup>66</sup> They estimated this would require an allocation between \$10 and \$12 trillion by the U. S. government to eligible black Americans, suggesting that such an allocation should serve as the baseline for black reparations in the twenty-first century.

Yet, counter arguments see this as short sighted and an insufficient solution that would not ultimately cure the larger malady among poor black communities. Black economist Thomas Sowell noted this already in 1999.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *We Were Eight Years in Power*, “The Case for Reparations.” (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 163–208.

<sup>66</sup> “Economist lays out case for reparations that would cost US gov’t \$12T” *New York Post*, August 13, 2020. <https://nypost.com/2020/08/13/economist-lays-out-reparations-plan-that-would-cost-gov-12-trillion/>

<sup>67</sup> “The catastrophic decline of the black nuclear family began, like so many other social catastrophes in the United States, during the decade of the 1960s. Prior to the 1960s, the difference in marriage rates between black and white makes was never as great as 5 percentage points. Yet, today, that difference is greater than 20 percentage points—

Others continue tracking this with him today. They specifically note that, “what the sexual revolution made morally acceptable, the welfare programs of the Great Society made financially possible by subsidizing sex without consequences, procreation without marriage, and homes without fathers. The results of which are the fatherless homes and out-of-wedlock births (conditions strongly correlated to poverty, crime, and other negative outcomes) that have become the norms in the black community.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, there is not universal agreement on the oppression being espoused, nor on the political remedies being championed in the name of equality.

This tension becomes all the more important to understand when one considers the emergence of the organization called Black Lives Matter. It is a direct descendent and outworking of Critical Race theorists. Their original official platform specifically aimed to “dismantle” and undermine the nuclear family and traditional biblical family values. It has since been revised after public scrutiny.<sup>69</sup> The group does not purport to uphold biblical justice, nor even the ideal that every black life matters. Rather they are selective and specific about which black lives matter and how their group can help gain political power to ensure public policy reflects those specific values.

Even more troubling from a Christian perspective is that Black Lives Matter is openly

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and widening, even though the nuclear family is also beginning to decline among white Americans. Whatever the explanation for these changes, it lies much closer to today than to the era of slavery, however disappointing that may be to those who prefer to see social issues as moral melodramas.” Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 16–17.

<sup>68</sup> Regis Nicoll, “Reparations: The Wrong Solution to the Wrong Problem” *Crisis Magazine*, Sept. 7, 2020. [https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/reparations-the-wrong-solution-to-the-wrong-problem?mc\\_cid=a9974dd-a09&mc\\_cid=5936825dc7](https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/reparations-the-wrong-solution-to-the-wrong-problem?mc_cid=a9974dd-a09&mc_cid=5936825dc7).

<sup>69</sup> <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>.

pagan and is essentially animist in the spirituality associated with the movement. On June 13, 2020, Melina Abdullah (the co-founder of BLM Los Angeles), and Patrisse Cullors, discuss the role that spirituality and prayer has played in the Black Lives Matter movement, during a program by the Fowler Museum at UCLA. Note the rituals, practices, and beliefs associated with their organization and movement:

Patrisse Cullors says, “In my tradition you offer things that your loved ones who have passed away would want. Whether it’s like honey or tobacco... things like that... It is important that we be in direct relationship with the dead.” She continues: “Hashtags for us are way more than a hashtag. It is literally almost resurrecting spirits that are going to work through us to get the work done.”

Melina Abdullah, concurs. “What’s happened as we invoke these names is the invocation of their names that goes beyond remembering them,” she explains. “We call out our ancestors, we call them out for specific purposes.”

“The first thing that we do when we hear of a murder is we come out, we pray, we pour a libation we built with the community... This movement is much more than a racial and social justice movement. At its core it’s a spiritual movement.”

“I know you always had this spiritual practice,” she goes on to say. “We were going to the ocean and doing these rituals and really feeding our spirits.”

Patrisse Cullors, likewise, says: “Our spirituality is at the center of Black Lives Matter and that is not just for us. I feel like so many leaders and so

many organizers are deeply engaged in a pretty important spiritual practice. I don't think I could do this work without that."<sup>70</sup>

The results and manifestations of Critical Race Theory are decidedly concerning. Not the least of which are the antibiblical and antichristian postures that it takes. Consequently, a biblical evaluation of the overall social justice movement will be helpful.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Biblical Evaluation

Christian columnist and author Rod Dreher has pointed out: "Social justice warriors are known for the spiteful disdain they hold for classically liberal values like free speech, freedom of association, and religious liberty."<sup>71</sup> Ironically, the words of Civil Rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. become startlingly out of place in this ideology. In one of his most famous speeches, King memorably advocated for classic liberty and true democracy: "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."<sup>72</sup> In other words, evaluations and judgments of people based on personal responsibility, virtue, and character defined King's dream.

Contemporary critical social justice warriors despise judgements based on character and behavior. Rather they seek acceptance and

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<sup>70</sup> Dan Burke, "The Occult Spirituality of Black Lives Matter", *Crisis Magazine*. [https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/the-occult-spirituality-of-black-lives-matter?mc\\_cid=8b7e6b9b67&mc\\_eid=5936825dc7](https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/the-occult-spirituality-of-black-lives-matter?mc_cid=8b7e6b9b67&mc_eid=5936825dc7) ; Alejandra Molina, "Black Lives Matter is 'a spiritual movement,' says co-founder Patrisse Cullors", *Religion News Service*; YouTube video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1836&v=8NHQ3uyIngM&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1836&v=8NHQ3uyIngM&feature=emb_logo)

<sup>71</sup> Rod Dreher, *Live Not By Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*. (New York: Sentinel, 2020), 81.

<sup>72</sup> August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "I have a dream" speech.

approval rooted in identity politics and pledges to collectivist identity that demand we reject human freedoms for the greater good of their preferred definition of "equality." This thinking demands that everyone toe the line and follow the vision and rules of social justice, rather than the content of their character or their own best judgment or even the contents of their personal consciences. Dreher notes:

In radicalizing the broader class of elites, social justice warriors (SJW) are playing a similar historic role to the Bolsheviks in prerevolutionary Russia. SJW ranks are full of middle-class, secular, educated young people wracked by guilt and anxiety over their own privilege, alienated from their own traditions, and desperate to identify with something, or someone, to give them a sense of wholeness and purpose. For them, the ideology of social justice—as defined not by church teaching but by critical theorists in the academy—function as pseudo religion. Far from being confined to campuses and dry intellectual journals, SJW ideals are transforming elite institutions and networks of power and influence.<sup>73</sup>

At a minimum, this ideology smacks up against biblical teaching, if not also against the tenets of classic liberal democracy. Biblically orthodox Christians are right to shudder at the utter disavowal of objective truth and the cosmically created order, as well as the sleight of hand language games played in this form of thinking. Whenever power becomes the desired outcome, there is only the possibility of a perpetual power struggle that is going to play out. And the only way to get power is to wrest it away, at times by any means necessary, from someone else. It will inevitably and ultimately violate the first

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<sup>73</sup> Dreher, *Live Not By Lies*, 42.

commandment as the self inexorably becomes one's god.

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### **Objections**

Thus, there is much to object to about the tenets and outcomes of Critical Race Theory. To start, perhaps a practical example can help set the framework for these objections.

During a week in September 2019 news cycles ran continuous stories of a terrible racist incident. A twelve-year-old girl at a Christian School in Washington DC was violently mocked and abused by three of her classmates. Amari Allen, who is black, said that for weeks she had been bullied by the boys, who are white. The culminating act of bullying, according to the tearful testimony of Amari, was when the boys pinned her arms behind her back, covered her mouth, and used scissors to cut her dreadlocks. As Tom Ascol of Founder Ministries described it: "The scene she described was horrific. Anyone who would treat a fellow image-bearer of God—much less one who is a mere twelve-year-old—should be punished with severe consequences."<sup>74</sup> The only problem is it did not happen. She made it up.

But before this was revealed, the case was played out on social media, which as one can imagine called for severe and drastic action against the alleged bullies, who were simply one more instance of the utter white supremacy

faced by black children and adults. However, after taking due time, the police conducted a thorough investigation, wherein the child finally confessed her wrong. Likewise, her grandparents issued a full-throated apology, and the school never gave in to demands for reparative social justice before due process and true justice could take its course.

Ascol offers some insightful lessons learned from this unfortunate situation that directly pertain to how Christians should see Critical Race Theory:

We live in a hyper-racialized culture that undermines real racial harmony. Those who insist that every offense or slight that takes place as well as every inequity that exists between racially diverse people is necessarily due to racial injustice contribute to this combustible situation. All injustice is due to sin but not all injustice is due to sinful partiality. But when racism is redefined in terms of post-modern power structure formulas (as ideologies like Critical Race Theory do), then every failure of those impugned with "whiteness" is attributed to racial injustice.<sup>75</sup>

In short, Christians do well to assess how much they either wittingly or unwittingly subscribe to an ill formed, illogical, and unbiblical approach to racism that attempts to explain this grievous malady and provide a corresponding plan of redemption for it. As noted in chapter two, the quest to solve racial injustice is frequently far different than striving for biblical justice.

The so-called morality of Critical Race Theory has at its core a dogma, essentially a faith, that does not interpret the world in terms of spiritual

<sup>74</sup> Tom Ascol, "The Cautionary Tale of Amri Allen," <https://founders.org/2019/10/03/the-cautionary-tale-of-amari-allen/>.

<sup>75</sup> Tom Ascol, "The Cautionary Tale of Amri Allen."

forces of sin and grace, but in terms of subtle material forces, such as systemic bigotry and diffuse omnipresent systems of power and privilege.<sup>76</sup> The manner in which this theory most often plays out in broader culture is when the oppressed or their representative convey an emotional narrative of their oppression, so as to let the emotion of the story rather than its facts speak to powers that be, calling for justice and corresponding changes in policy.

This approach follows the postmodern turn that does not uphold overarching metanarratives of objective truth but prioritizes personal narratives and the subjective truth ascribed to those stories. This is part of the reason why Critical Race theorists have such a hard time standing up to economists who bring objective facts to the table (especially the likes of black intellectuals like Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams, as we will see in the next chapter). Such facts do not affirm the feelings of the narrative.

Nonetheless, key to this theory is the belief that emotion is truth, irrespective of any facts that may disprove the justification for that emotion.

KEY TO THIS THEORY  
IS THE BELIEF THAT  
EMOTION IS TRUTH

Logic and facts play no inherent formal role and are useful only if they can support and intensify the emotion being expressed, as well as make the case for obtaining power to subvert all oppressive forces.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Pluckrose & Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 18.

<sup>77</sup> Consider the example of an obese black women speaking on Opera's network talk show blatantly claiming that the racist society in which black women live, particularly the Trump era, is the reason for causing their obesity. She considers it illegitimate to hold obese black women accountable in any way for their obesity, especially when

## *A New Religion*

Essentially, this theory has bred a new religion. In his article "Antiracism, Our Flawed New Religion" black journalist, John McWhorter, explored this reality already in 2017 in evaluating the aforementioned Ta Nahehi Coates's best-selling works, *Between the World and Me* and *We Were Eight Years in Power*. McWhorter notes:

The Antiracism religion, then, has clergy, creed, and also even a conception of Original Sin. Note the current idea that the enlightened white person is to, I assume regularly (ritually?), "acknowledge" that they possess White Privilege. Classes, seminars, teach-ins are devoted to making whites understand the need for this. Nominally, this acknowledgment of White Privilege is couched as a prelude to activism, but in practice, the acknowledgment itself is treated as the main meal...

The call for people to soberly "acknowledge" their White Privilege as a self-standing, totemic act is based on the same justification as acknowledging one's fundamental sinfulness is as a Christian. One is born marked by original sin; to be white is to be born with the stain of unearned privilege...

The proper response to original sin is to embrace the teachings of Jesus, although one will remain always a sinner nevertheless. The proper response to White Privilege is to embrace the

she claims that researchers show black women do not lose the same amount of weight using the same diet as a white woman, which she again says is evidence that even our diets are racist. In response, black conservative comedians, the Hodge Twins, take her to task for the utter illogic of these claims. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE9BqgztnHs>.

teachings of—well, you can fill in the name or substitute others—with the understanding that you will always harbor the Privilege nevertheless.

Coates is telling these people that they are sinners, in a sense, and they are eagerly drinking in the charge, “revering” him for it. This, ladies and gentlemen, is worship, pure and simple.<sup>78</sup>

This is an example of the idolatry resulting from a flawed ideology. At its core, Christians who embrace this manner of thinking must consider whether they have traded in the absolute truth of Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life altering realities that come from a repentant life in Christ, for the secular creed of emotionalism and perceived social justice.

Critical social justice fails to see that injustice is due to sin and that not all sin is due to sinful partiality. The primary concern of critical social justice is systemic power in society. It’s the sole lens through which adherents view society and material reality. Consequently the theory lacks any understanding regarding the depravity of all humankind, choosing to believe instead that power can be successfully pried away from power structures and properly wielded by new power structures, oppressively so, as the means to correct oppressive and unjust power.

The fundamental theological tenets displaced by the dogma of Critical Race Theory include, but are not limited to: creation, original sin and actual sin understood according to the 10 commandments, objective truth, redemption and salvation through Christ alone, personal accountability and responsibility, vocation and love for our neighbor, the role of repentance,

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<sup>78</sup> John McWhorter, “Antiracism, Our Flawed New Religion” *The Daily Beast*, Apr. 14, 2017. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/antiracism-our-flawed-new-religion>.

not to mention the new life that comes from living with faith, hope and love.

The personal piety of this new religion requires adherents to engage in active self-scrutiny. Then they must strategically act from that awareness and challenge social injustice perpetrated against any minority group. This ideology requires a commitment to an ongoing and lifelong process of rigorous self-examination and repentance of failure to obey the dictates of antiracism and equality.

In this view, life is not care or love for the neighbor regardless of need, but only care for particular people groups, especially the oppressed—including those engaged in lifestyles that Holy Scripture would call sinful. Individuals or groups that do not fall into predetermined accepted categories are seen as the enemy. At this point confirmation bias is often valorized, even though the goal of social justice claims to rid white people of inherent biases. As such, this ends up only fostering anger and rage rather than compassion or forgiveness. Identity politics and virtue signaling create labels of either “innocent” or “guilty,” leading to reparative demands for justice, often enacted as retribution in the form of cancel culture. Concisely but ironically this becomes a religion of disorder, chaos, and suppression, supposedly created to upend disorder, chaos, and suppression.

### ***Misbeliefs***

In the end, Critical Race Theory leads to critical social justice which sees society as stratified (divided and unequal) by race. Rather than looking at others as precious and beloved creatures of God regardless of skin color, people groups are segregated and labeled according to preconceived categories that purportedly exemplify inequality. True, the goal of the movement is justice and equality, but it is not biblical justice nor biblical equality.

Rather, because inequality of being, position, and possessions are seen as deeply embedded in the fabric of society, inherently structural in nature, adherents of critical social justice actively seek to change this defined inequity by force if necessary. Remember, Kendi said discrimination for the sake of equality is actually a tenet of this dogma.

In contrast, biblical Christianity sees all discrimination and racism against black or white, Hmong or Indian, as evil and wicked. Increasingly, the extremism of the social justice movement is being recognized and critical reactions against it occur within both black and white communities.

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## CHAPTER 5

### Critical Reactions to Critical Race Theory

After five decades of these Critical Theories filling university courses, coupled with the advent of digital advancements in social media and cellphone cameras that capture incidents of “police brutality,” our American society now finds itself in the midst of massive cultural upheaval. In fact, as was pointed out in chapter three, the use of technology to shape thinking is part and parcel of Critical Theory. Without question, technology has contributed to the relatively rapid escalation of the critical social justice movement.

Recognizing this, in September of 2020 the Trump administration made a major announcement that “the White House Office of Management and Budget would move to identify and eliminate any trace of ‘critical race theory’ in the federal government.”<sup>79</sup> By then there had

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<sup>79</sup> “Party’s Over: Trump Orders Purge of ‘Critical Race Theory’ from Federal Agencies,” Briart News. <https://www.briart.com/tech/2020/09/04/partys-over-trump-orders-purge-of-critical-race-theory-from-federal->

already been 90 days of rioting and destruction of property across the country. Evidence was mounting that instigators and agitators of the rioting were adherents to Critical Race Theory ideology, in which extensive looting was even embraced as a political tool and weapon.<sup>80</sup> As a result, the Trump administration deemed the above actions necessary, though the policy was reversed in President Biden’s executive order on January 20, 2021, the day of his inauguration. His order was ostensibly designed to “advance racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government.”<sup>81</sup>

A GROWING NUMBER  
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CRITICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

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[agencies/](#). See also “Trump Bans Federal Money From Funding Far-Left Anti-American ‘Critical Race Theory’”, *The Daily Wire*, [https://www.dailywire.com/news/breaking-trump-bans-federal-money-from-funding-far-left-anti-american-critical-race-theory?itm\\_source=parse-ly-api?utm\\_source=cnemail&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=090620-news&utm\\_campaign=position3](https://www.dailywire.com/news/breaking-trump-bans-federal-money-from-funding-far-left-anti-american-critical-race-theory?itm_source=parse-ly-api?utm_source=cnemail&utm_medium=email&utm_content=090620-news&utm_campaign=position3) ; see also “Trump Administration Bans Critical Race Theory Trainings At Federal Agencies”, *The Federalist*. <https://thefederalist.com/2020/09/05/trump-administration-bans-critical-race-theory-trainings-at-federal-agencies/>.

<sup>80</sup> “Vicky Osterweil’s new book, ‘In Defense of Looting,’ “makes the case that looting isn’t a betrayal of protests for Black lives, but a vital aspect of the movement...” Joy Pullman, “Amid Riots Ripping The Country, NPR Promotes Book ‘In Defense Of Looting’” *The Federalist*, Aug. 31, 2020. <https://thefederalist.com/2020/08/31/amid-riots-ripping-the-country-npr-promotes-book-in-defense-of-looting/>.

<sup>81</sup> The Executive Order asserts: “...a historic movement for justice has highlighted the unbearable human costs of systemic racism.” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>.



Yet a growing number of black American intellectuals and influencers have been regularly disputing the claims at the core of critical social justice. In fact, since the social upheaval and riots of 1968, the black community has been fragmenting and distinctly moving away from being the monolith of thought and action that some attempt to portray.<sup>82</sup>

In his 2010 book, *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*, longtime Washington Post journalist Eugene Robinson (a black man) pointed out that “Black America” is not unified in interests or need.<sup>83</sup> In other words, the effort to remake the whole system of American society based on this new ideology in the name of a unified collectivist voice of black Americans is utterly disingenuous, if not completely dangerous.<sup>84</sup> Still, shouts of “No justice, no peace” continue to fill the air with this ideology.

### ***Cosmic Justice***

To these shrill accusations, renowned economist Thomas Sowell (a black man) has long offered a calming counter voice, deftly noting the inconsistencies of the social justice movement. In his book *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* he lays out the long-held definition for traditional justice (the virtue) and contrasts it

with “cosmic justice”, a term he uses instead of “social” justice because, as he rightly points out, all justice must occur socially. He notes the dubious claims of lumping current conditions of humanity into one basket as the result of a past evil:

One of the many contrasts between traditional justice and cosmic justice is that traditional justice involves the rules under which flesh-and-blood human beings interact, while cosmic justice encompasses not only contemporary individuals and groups, but also abstractions extending over generations, or even centuries.<sup>85</sup>

Sowell skillfully makes the point that a great historic evil does not automatically explain all other subsequent evils. Just as cancer can indeed be fatal, it does not explain all fatalities, or even most fatalities. His point is “how easy it is to go wrong, by huge margins, when presuming to take into account complex historical influences.”<sup>86</sup> As mentioned in chapter 3, he likewise notes that social justice and traditional justice are fundamentally different concepts. For him, the former deals with results and prospects while the latter is about impartial processes.<sup>87</sup>

Sowell warns against the dangers of assuming such cosmic justice is achievable. Unlike God at the dawn of creation, we cannot simply say, “let there be equality” or let there be “justice.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, attempting to provide equality of opportunity may have a place in pursuing a just society, but asserting equality of outcome as an essential moral principle of social justice fails to count the cost of enacting such social justice in a fallen world.

<sup>82</sup> During the early 2020 presidential campaign trail, then former Vice-President and democratic presidential nominee, Joe Biden told black DJ and Breakfast Club cohort, Charlamagne *tha* God, “If you have trouble figuring out to vote for me or Trump, then you ain’t black.”

<sup>83</sup> Eugene Robinson, *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 65. Robinson notes there are four distinct groups: A mainstream middle class majority with a solid stake in society; a large abandoned minority with less hope than ever of escaping poverty; a small transcendent elite, full of wealth and power; and newly emergent groups of mixed race and recent black immigrants who question what “black” even means.

<sup>84</sup> This fragmenting became even more prevalent in 2020 with a growing number of black conservative voices and figures publicly pushing back against the narrative that all blacks are liberal or a monolith of democrat voters.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 31.

<sup>86</sup> Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 9.

<sup>88</sup> Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 8

A great example Sowell provides is that of a sinking ship with 300 people on board but only 200 life-preservers. If equality of outcome is the defining moral principle of social justice, then the only “just” outcome is that everyone should drown. However, “most of us would probably prefer the unjust solution, that 200 lives be saved, even if they are no more deserving than those who perish.”<sup>89</sup>

### ***Objections by the Black Community***

Numerous other black Americans, many who are Christians, find numerous inconsistencies in the claims of systemic racism in the United States. They are pushing back against the claimed moral authority of the critical social justice movement. Some key voices include Larry Elder,<sup>90</sup> Candace Owens,<sup>91</sup> economists Walter Williams<sup>92</sup> and the above-mentioned Thomas Sowell,<sup>93</sup> former congressman and

retired Army Colonel Allen West,<sup>94</sup> journalist Shelby Steele,<sup>95</sup> and Professor Carol Swain,<sup>96</sup> to name just a few. Each have provocative and insightful perspectives worth exploring.

The development of these parallel thought processes coming from various segments within the black American community is interesting, particularly since they developed from one era to the next. In fact, these diverging lines of thought help trace the nature and content of the fracturing contemporary black community.

Starting prior to the civil war, Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington are considered inspirations for many black Americans, including those listed above. Both were slaves whose respective stories demonstrate virtuous characteristics of sheer determination and perseverance that strove toward achievement and accomplishment despite the horrendous injustices they endured and fought against.

Douglass escaped from a brutal life of slavery in his early twenties and then began writing and speaking against it as an abolitionist. He wrote an autobiographical account of his life up to that point in time in 1845 portraying his brutal treatment, as well as an account of his escape

of the world but sometimes even attempt to apologize for the latter.” 135.

<sup>94</sup> See West’s book *We Can Overcome: An American Black Conservative Manifesto*. (New York: Brown Books, 2020). “The values reflected in the history of the black community are faith, family, individual responsibility, excellence through quality education, and service to the nation. It does not take any highly intellectual analysis—especially for someone like me, the third of four generations of combat veterans in the family—to see that somewhere along the way, we stopped teaching the history that did not accommodate a certain narrative.” 54.

<sup>95</sup> See Steele’s books: *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (Harper: 2006), and *Shame: How America’s Past Sins Have polarized our Country*, (Basic Books: 2015).

<sup>96</sup> See Swain’s book, *Be the People: A Call to Reclaim America’s Faith and Promise*. (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2011). See also *The 1776 Report*, (January 21, 2021) for which she served as the vice chair of the President’s Advisory 1776 Commission.

<sup>89</sup> Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 29.

<sup>90</sup> See Elder’s 2019 documentary *Uncle Tom: An Oral History of the American Black Conservative*.

<sup>91</sup> See Owen’s book, *Blackout: How Black America Can Make Its Second Escape from the Democrat Plantation*. (New York; Threshold, 2020).

<sup>92</sup> See Williams’ book, *Race and Economics: How Much can be Blamed on discrimination?* (Hoover Institution Press: California, 2011). While exploring the use and misuse of language in issues of racism he notes the vast inconsistency of its employment within society as it relates to the actual statistics of behaviors by race. One issue in particular is the claim of “racial profiling” by the police. He quotes positively Charleston, South Carolina, Chief of Police Rueben Greenberg who argued that the problem facing black America is not racial profiling but, “the greatest problem in black community is the tolerance for high levels of criminality,” 121. Ultimately, he concludes, “The law abiding black citizen who is passed by a taxi, refused pizza delivery, or stopped by the police can rightfully feel a sense of injustice and resentment. But the bulk of those feelings should be directed at those who have made race synonymous with higher rates of criminal activity rather than the taxi driver or pizza deliverer who is trying to earn a living and avoid being a victim of crime.” 122.

<sup>93</sup> Of Sowell’s numerous works, in addition to *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, see *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*. (New York: Encounter Books, 2005): “Many who are selectively indignant about the immorality of slavery in American society or in western civilization do not merely pass over in silence the larger-scale slavery in other parts

which was intentionally vague—to protect those who were escaping by the same manner. Later on, he offered a fuller account of his life in 1881. He was a prolific and inspiring writer who helped shape the American abolitionist movement. Yet he also encouraged accountability and resolve for the black community even as he called the United States to task for the atrocity of slavery.<sup>97</sup>

Likewise, Booker T. Washington is a key figure of American post-Civil War history. Thought to be born in 1856, he was a slave until about nine-years-old when the Civil War ended his forced servitude. The autobiographical account of his life and his awe-inspiring creation of the Tuskegee Institute is captured in his 1901 book, *Up from Slavery*.

While Frederick Douglass was a leading voice for blacks from the time of his first autobiography until his death in 1885, Washington was the dominant leader in the African American community between 1890–1915. However, Washington was criticized by some in the black community, most notably by intellectual elite W.E.B. Du Bois, for being what Du Bois considered a sellout.

During the period of reconstruction, Washington fought to give blacks, especially southern blacks, the education and skills to

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<sup>97</sup> Douglass gave a powerful speech titled, “What the Black Man Wants” at a Boston meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in April 1865. In it he said the following: “Everybody has asked the question, and they learned to ask it early of the abolitionists, ‘What shall we do with the Negro?’ I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, if they are worm-eaten at the core, if they are early ripe and disposed to fall, let them fall! I am not for tying or fastening them on the tree in any way, except by nature’s plan, and if they will not stay there, let them fall. And if the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs!” Quoted in Walter E. Williams, *Race and Economics: How Much Can be Blamed on Discrimination?* (Hoover Institution Press: California, 2011), 3–4.

make a living, contribute to society, and carve out a place for themselves in the changing post-Civil War American world. Yet, Du Bois, of mixed race and a northerner who had never been a slave, chided Washington particularly for his 1895 speech at the Atlanta Exposition, because he failed to condemn segregation and racial injustice in unequivocal and harsh terms. Du Bois begrudged what he considered Washington’s failure to properly fight for the black community’s inherent rights as human beings, but instead seemed to give tacit permission for the continued mistreatment of blacks. This even as Washington tirelessly fought for their betterment and the advancement of the Tuskegee Institute.

Du Bois was regarded as one of the founders of the NAACP (1909). He is considered the more premier and notable post-Civil War black man of achievement by the social justice advocates of today. He had a long and productive if not controversial life (1868–1963). He believed that capitalism was a primary cause of racism, was generally sympathetic to socialist causes throughout his life—joining the Socialist Party of America in 1911—and died a year before the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. His chief complaint with Washington was that he passively submitted to the segregation and discrimination of the south in what he called the “Atlanta Compromise”.

It is difficult to fault Washington or Du Bois for their positions. Washington chose the route of realistic pragmatism in dealing with a rebuilding South. He promoted personal accountability, hard work, discipline, and good order. Du Bois, indignant from the terrible treatment of blacks, chose in contrast a strident defiance that focused on protesting against the white man’s oppression. Even so, as a result of Du Bois’s critique, the inspiration and accomplishment of Washington’s Tuskegee Institute was minimized

by the more defiant and strident voices for social justice and continues to be so today.

In fact, Du Bois remains the more esteemed voice because his defiance and indignation better fits with the narrative of the current social justice movement. The apparent course of action for critical social justice is to continue demanding that America pay for her sins, expanding on the definitions and protests first expressed by Du Bois. However, Christians need to consider whether strident and defiant dispositions serve best to enact justice or if our biblical faith provides a better and more robust alternative to do so. The final chapter in Part One of our study offers a biblical alternative to the strident ideology of critical social justice.

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## CHAPTER 6

### Biblical Social Justice and Our Lutheran Ethos

To this point, we've dug deeply into the theory and dogma of the critical social justice movement. We have also critically evaluated its presence in our culture. What remains is to offer a clear alternative that prizes biblical justice and provides a clear ethic of faith and life. That's the goal of this chapter.

Lutherans resolutely affirm the importance of biblical justice and have a rich history of teaching about care for others in both word and deed. However, there is admittedly a perennial tendency to reduce the robust Lutheran confession of faith solidified in the Reformation to mere personal matters of internal faith. The result of this misbelief is that faith in Christ has no impact on day to day living, particularly upon the life of the local church, and hence in larger society.

From time to time, the push to "withdraw" from political matters and societal issues has been

present in various Lutheran minority voices.<sup>98</sup> But this view misrepresents the full-bodied ethic flowing from Lutheran theology, rooted in the doctrine of vocation which frees the Christian to act with deliberate care for the neighbor. Martin Luther himself offers a vigorous summary of this understanding:

"We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor."<sup>99</sup>

In other words, the Christian lives life at the intersection of two kingdoms: the spiritual kingdom and the temporal kingdom, where the object of faith is always Christ and the indirect object of faith (in action) is always the neighbor. The doctrine of vocation coupled with the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms offers a vibrant and practical alternative to the ideology of Critical Race Theory.

### *Two Kingdoms*

Luther had much to say about both the doctrine of vocation and life in two kingdoms. In his 1523 work, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, he began developing this two-kingdoms thought that has come to help Christians think through how we are to live life in relation to others as both a citizen of heaven and citizen of temporal government.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> "The Gospel has nothing to do with outward existence but only with eternal life...It is not the vocation of Jesus Christ or of the Gospel to change the orders of secular life and establish them new...Christianity wants to change man's heart, not his external situation" Christian Luthardt Karl H. Hertz (ed.), *The Two Kingdoms and One World: A Sourcebook in Christian Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 87.

<sup>99</sup> Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*, AE 31: 371.

<sup>100</sup> Luther, *Temporal Authority*. "For this reason [human

He emphasizes the importance of privately enduring evil, while also standing up for our neighbor in the face of injustice:

In this way the two propositions are brought into harmony with one another: at one and the same time you satisfy God's kingdom inwardly and the kingdom of the world outwardly. You suffer evil and injustice, and yet at the same time you punish evil and injustice; you do not resist evil, and yet at the same time, you do resist it. In the one case, you consider yourself and what is yours; in the other, you consider your neighbor and what is his. In what concerns you and yours, you govern yourself by the gospel and suffer injustice toward yourself as a true Christian; in what concerns the person or property of others, you govern yourself according to love and tolerate no injustice toward your neighbor. The gospel does not forbid this; in fact, in other places it actually commands it.<sup>101</sup>

Scholar Gustaf Wingren unequivocally notes how the neighbor stands at the center of Luther's ethic: "Love born of faith and the Spirit effects a complete breakthrough of the boundary between the two kingdoms, the wall of partition between heaven and earth, as did God's incarnation in Christ."<sup>102</sup> Thus wherever there might be social injustice and oppression, Lutherans certainly have an ethic to act upon in the face of it. This

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depravity] God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that—no thanks to them—they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace. Thus does St. Paul interpret the temporal sword in Romans 13 [:3], when he says it is not a terror to good conduct but to bad. And Peter says it is for the punishment of the wicked [1 Pet. 2:14]." AE 45:91.

<sup>101</sup> Luther, *Temporal Authority*, AE 45:96.

<sup>102</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999), 46.

mobilizes us to care for our neighbors whenever they are subject to sinful social injustice or oppression.

Yet, there are those today who consider promoting mere individual responsibility as inadequate to fight against such social injustice. In this view the church as the people of God is called to rise up and collectively speak against such oppression and injustice. Like Isaiah speaking to the whole people of Israel on behalf of the Lord, so voices today press those same words into the ears of the Holy Christian Church in our local congregations: "learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Isa 1:17).

Such voices hold that the church as an institution must engage against injustice through her public speaking and acting. Not only should pulpits and official public statements bring condemnation of such injustice, but the actions of the church as a whole should strive for changes in public policy, provide tangible services to the oppressed, and even organize massive civil protest against any such injustice. Like the abolitionists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the contemporary prolife movement, present day biblical social justice advocates contend that the church as a whole should press for public and private reforms in the face of racial inequality and social injustice.

This potentially complicates our understanding of the Holy Christian Church, introducing various opinions about the church's role in the face of injustice. Here, too, Luther is helpful. In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, he expresses the balancing act the Christian makes in suffering all things in himself, while also defending against injustice and evil on behalf of others. This includes making proper

*THE CHURCH HAS A ROLE  
IN APPEALING TO THE  
GOVERNMENT ON BEHALF  
OF THE OPPRESSED*

use of government oversight and care of people, which would imply the church has a role in appealing to the government on behalf of the oppressed:

Certainly we are not compelled or obliged to let every insolent person run rampant all over the place and to take it silently without doing anything about it—not if we can follow orderly procedure in defending ourselves. Otherwise, however, all we can do is to suffer if someone treats us unjustly and violently. We must not sanction a wrong, but we must testify to the truth. In opposition to violence and malice, we certainly may appeal to the law. Thus, before the high priest Annas, Christ Himself appealed to the law and asked for justice (John 18:23); nevertheless He let himself be struck, offering not merely His other cheek but his whole body.<sup>103</sup>

A Christian has to be ready to endure whatever you and everyone else may do to him, but he is not obliged to let your whims run riot all over him if he can prevent it by appealing to the law and by seeking the help of the government. Although the government may refuse to protect him or may itself becomes guilty of violence, he is not obliged to keep quiet on that account as though he had to sanction such procedure.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Luther, *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, AE 21:112.

<sup>104</sup> Luther, *Sermon on the Mount*, AE:116.

In sum, there is certainly an ethic that the church and her individual members are to undertake in the care and love of the neighbor, particularly in the face of social injustices and oppression. This two-kingdom ethic of love is subsequently employed in the daily vocations of every Christian. Those daily stations of life begin in one's family and extend to their station as worker, community member, church member, and citizen. The doctrine of Two Kingdoms and the doctrine of vocation are ultimately fortified by the truth of Christ's summary of the law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37–39).

Here is the individual mandate for Christians to care for their neighbor, especially when they are in need. Yet what does this care look like in the face of social injustice? Even more, what should the local congregation and national church bodies be doing to address injustice and racism, both in society at large as in their own church bodies? These questions will be addressed in more specific detail in Part 2. However, a general theological framework for love and action is outlined below, even as we first review the mission of the Holy Christian Church from a Lutheran perspective to see how it all fits together.

### ***The Mission of the Holy Christian Church***

As we confront injustice and racism, or any social malady for that matter, we must keep the purpose of the Holy Christian Church in view. That prompts an important question. Exactly what constitutes the chief purpose of the Holy Christian Church? If we strive to uphold biblical justice, in fact if we are called to seek it out and enact it, should not action against contemporary

social injustice become the primary role of the Holy Christian Church? Some Christians believe so. In fact, as we saw in Chapter 1, some have even created an entire theology around that notion. But is this consistent with the mandates of Holy Scripture? Is that action and behavior the primary message that the Bible speaks, or might there be something even more significant to consider?

I realize even to suggest this in a “woke” culture will automatically draw the ire of social justice warriors, running the risk of being labeled a power hungry racist. Nonetheless, this question goes to the core of the issue before us. It testifies to the true malady lying behind all injustice and oppression and humanity’s ultimate need for a divine remedy, a remedy so powerful it brings an eternal cure for all injustice and oppression.

This truth comprises the biblical purpose and mission of the Holy Christian Church. It includes the belief that all injustice and oppression can be traced back to the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature—that all humankind is deprived as a result of the fall into sin.

This is a core tenet of Lutheran theology, as is its corollary about the restoration of humankind through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So to suggest that the primary purpose of the Holy Christian Church is to be an agent of social justice misses the larger malady involved. It attempts to merely treat the symptom while ignoring the cure. Therefore, even as we face racism and injustice, we need to let Scripture dictate the primary role for the Holy Christian Church in the world today. Doing so offers the assurance that no matter the culture, time, or country one lives in, and no matter one’s “race,” the mission of the Holy Christian Church has always remained the same, with one transcendent mission and purpose.

The words of the resurrected Jesus summarize

that mission and purpose: “that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47). Elsewhere he says it this way: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19–20). And again, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Accordingly, Lutherans have historically identified the Holy Christian Church by her marks: the clear preaching and teaching of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. In other words, although other actions may accompany the presence of the church, these are the chief markers that indicate the church is the Holy Christian Church.

### *Our Lutheran Ethos*

So where does this leave Lutherans in our age of social upheaval and the calls for social justice? What does that mean for pursuing biblical social justice and care of our neighbor? As Ecclesiastes reminds us, there is nothing new under the sun. The utter depravity of humankind (foundational in Lutheran theology), has been plaguing humankind ever since the fall.

This is the clear teaching of Holy Scripture: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps 51:5). “All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Rom 3:12). “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to

carry it out” (Rom 7:18). Likewise, Lutherans teach that after Eden sin is truly endemic and systemic in all humankind:

Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God’s eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.<sup>105</sup>

While this clear teaching of human depravity explains the continuing existence of racist oppression and injustice, it by no means excuses it. Rather, Christ has given his church the commission to proclaim both repentance and remission of sins in his name. By the clear proclamation of God’s judgement against sin wherever it occurs, our continual duty is to call each and every sinner to confess all sins of thought, word, and deed and find full and free remission in Jesus Christ for the sake of his bitter suffering, death, and glorious resurrection. Therein, the new life in Christ will also bring a change in behavior and care for our neighbor.

THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST  
WILL ALSO BRING A CHANGE  
IN BEHAVIOR AND CARE  
FOR OUR NEIGHBOR

<sup>105</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Augsburg Confession II, “Original Sin,” (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 36–38.

Our doctrine of the two kingdoms teaches that God is at work not only in his church to bring remission and healing for sins committed and sins received, but he is also working through society and civil government to preserve and protect the common good and public welfare. This is part of advocating for justice from a biblical perspective. As Christian citizens we have a duty to call upon those in authority to exercise their God-given office with utter fairness and integrity, to work to establish equality of opportunity, provide for public safety and private enterprise, and ensure domestic tranquility. In cases where the life and liberty of our neighbors and fellow citizens are threatened by oppressive or unjust laws and public policy, we will not shrink from speaking corporately as a church besides individually as private citizens to prophetically call for justice and equity before the laws of God and man.

We are called upon to use great wisdom and discernment when speaking in the public square. We want our neighbors and fellow citizens to clearly see we speak out of distinctly Christian love and compassion, not merely as yet another contentious political power group promoting its own peculiar point of view. Likewise, it’s especially important that our pastors and congregations be voices of calm reason and examples of compassionate Christian witness so that they reflect the light of Christ in our increasingly darkened world, that others may see our good works and glorify the Father in heaven (Matt 5:16).

The rage, hurt, and anger increasingly evident in the current social turmoil call above all for discerning pastoral care in the midst of our unrest and upheaval. Many souls are suffering irreparable damage from the sins they have committed, but especially because of sins others have committed against them. The discerning and skillful care of souls in Jesus’ name by the



called servants of Christ and the entire body of believers is a special calling in our day. This too will be specifically addressed in Part Two.

In the end, Lutherans have long confessed a clear ethic of care for neighbor in the face of oppression and injustice. Sinners that we are, we may have not always acted upon it as timely or robustly as we could have or should have here in America as we continue to deal with the tragic legacy of human slavery in our history and its ongoing racial consequences. For that we must repent.

Nonetheless this ethic of care in Jesus' name is inherent in our theology and very being. Yet, we must be careful lest this ethic be unequivocally or unthinkingly applied individually or corporately in ways unduly influenced or coerced by the politically correct or critical theory influenced pressures of our age. Particular examination of each specific instance or allegation of systemic injustice will need to be carefully, thoughtfully, and graciously considered.

Before we speak, we must accurately discern whether there is legitimate injustice and oppression as judged according to God's Word or if it is mere emotional manipulation or unfounded accusations. When it comes to matters of government policy, where God's Word is silent, we dare not say "Thus says the Lord." Yet this silence ought not keep us from acting in Christian compassion and care to prophetically speak up in defense of the oppressed in the face of clear brutality or cruel inequality.

In the current convulsive environment, our motivations may be misunderstood. Despite our best intentions, some may call us "bigots" and our most sanctified words and actions may indeed be labeled "racist." Yet this is a moment of confession to a watching, hurting, world.

We have a robust theology of faith and love—we live always and only by faith in Christ and

*THIS IS A MOMENT OF  
CONFESSION TO A WATCHING,  
HURTING, WORLD*

by love in the neighbor for his sake. Individually and corporately, we are called to the baptismal life—dying daily to sin and rising each day to newness of life in Jesus. As we confront genuine racism and actual social injustices with God's condemning law and reconciling grace we believe, teach, and confess a living Lord Jesus Christ who is the light of the world—the light no darkness can overcome.

## To Begin With

The care of souls in an age wrestling with social injustice is layered and complex. If pastors are to offer quality soul care, they need to be alert to normal spiritual maladies and simultaneously informed of the cultural conditions so they can provide specific care tailored to any presenting malady in a troubled soul. Like a doctor assessing symptoms of a disease pervasive in society—much like those of COVID-19—so a physician of souls needs to be mindful of the various societal maladies that impact and afflict the sheep in his flock and community.

Part one of this study provided a historical overview and ideological exploration of social justice and Critical Race Theory, contrasting it with biblical justice. It also outlined a clear Christian ethic for Christians to love and care for their neighbor in the face of injustice, balancing the truth of God’s Word with the pressures and misbeliefs of a critical social justice culture. Having previously examined our contemporary cultural landscape and the factors giving rise to our present social justice context, we turn now to the cure of souls.

In this part we move from theory to practice. Here pastors will discover specific tools to use as they care for souls in these troubled times. There is a clear need to address people hurt by the effects of racial injustice and racism—as well as those who may have either wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated such injustice.

That won’t be an easy task. Soul care never is, especially when there are any number of variables that can afflict someone all at the same time. On the whole, being a seelsorger—a curate of souls—in a social justice context is a multilayered, complicated and nuanced task in itself. And when combined with the proclivities of fallen humanity, plus countless other spiritual, physical, mental and emotional

ailments that afflict humankind, it’s enough to make a man run and hide. This is why the church father John Chrysostom says a shepherd needs “great wisdom and 1,000 eyes, so that he can examine a soul’s condition from every angle” in order to give proper care.<sup>106</sup> In other words, a pastor needs to be intentionally habituated to the disposition of humanity and the afflictions that confront us. While our societal unrest and demands for social justice may be complex, the core and content of soul care remain constant. Jesus Christ the crucified stands at the center of this care. His life-giving blood shed at the cross of Calvary is to be pastorally and skillfully applied upon the frail and fragile lives of sinners in spiritual distress through the careful enactment of word and sacrament.

You will need to develop a pastoral disposition sensitive to the complex layers of this emotionally charged environment, while also developing the pastoral skills to render a Christ centered curative treatment for wounded hearts and minds as well as those who have wounded others.

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## CHAPTER 7

### Jesus as Light and Life to Soul Care

It’s always helpful to begin with a remedy in view for any malady you’re treating. That remedy, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ. In him is life and light—a light to lead the way in the midst of any dark night of the soul. And with Christ as the light of the world, seasoned curates know the importance of applying his light to the many and varied ailments plaguing the souls of our time. Like light shone through a prism reveals its many and various colors, the one and same gospel light of Christ is

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<sup>106</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1964), 56.

applied by physicians of the soul to the various maladies appearing among people in our age of “social justice.” In other words, there will be various aspects of guilt, shame, heartache, and hurt from sins committed and sins endured, because of various racial injustices and forms of discrimination. They each need the same light of Christ as a remedy to be applied uniquely and specifically according to the prevailing malady of each soul and in accordance with its nuanced needs. Such soul care is done through the enactment of God’s Word by way of pastoral exhortation, admonishment, confession and absolution, consolation, prayer, ritual enactment and blessing, in accord with Christ’s command to his undershepherds to tend his precious sheep and lambs (John 21).

The focus of Part Two is thus on that complex task—the pastoral care of souls. It is undertaken amid our current cultural upheaval—full of rioting, unrest, divisions, and political turmoil—with the aim to render specific care in relation to those specific maladies that are peculiar to a specific individual. To do so successfully, pastors will need to be intentionally habituated to the care of souls in such a way that prepares them for ready engagement with the multiple symptoms and maladies that plague people, regardless of the social movement or unrest.

One pastor offering profound insight into soul care is seasoned curate Harold Senkbeil. His award winning and must-read book, *The Care of Souls*, calls this pastoral disposition a habitus.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>107</sup> “A pastor’s habituation, or character, is what counts most in ministry. This *habitus* can’t be instilled merely through pedagogy or acquisition of intellectual knowledge, though instruction and knowledge remain vital and indispensable components in pastoral education. The great nineteenth-century American Lutheran Theologian Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther put it this way in his *Pastorale*: ‘Pastoral theology is the God-given practical disposition of the soul, acquired by certain means, by which a servant of the church is equipped to perform all the tasks that come to him in that capacity.’ ...Habit is not something you were born with; it’s obtained over long experience.”

It’s a pastoral posture that engages individuals with attentive eyes and ears focused intently upon the presenting ailments of a soul that are seen through the lens of the unchanging word of God and coupled with contemporary diagnostic tools gleaned from modern psychology, employed through pastoral care as a first article gift of creation. (i.e., The First Article of the Apostles’ Creed). This disposition frames quality pastoral care and informs the second part of our study. With this habitus in place, one is all the more prepared to enact the grace of God—the forgiving and cleansing power of Christ.

### ***Forgiveness and Remission: The Double Cure***

The forgiveness of sins and the remission of sins (the putting away of sins) are two aspects of that same grace given through Jesus. Forgiveness speaks more about the removal of guilt, while remission includes the removal of shame. Experiencing racial prejudice and/or injustice results in aspects of both guilt and shame. Therefore, pastors need to be mindful of how forgiveness and remission are both essential to soul care, and how to intentionally enact each upon any troubled soul.

Both are applied through the shed blood of Christ, along with his identity bestowing grace. They stand at the core of all pastoral care and curative remedies. This is especially important in a culture bent on establishing “social justice.” In a time replete with demands for communal and governmental change regarding “systemic racial injustice,” a Christ centered curative remedy is the bold declaration that public policy and civil engagement—though important and helpful—are not what actually delivers the forgiveness of sins, the remission of sins, consolation, healing,

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Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastors Heart*. (Lexham Press, 2019), 18.

or the transformation of heart and mind. Rather, these flow from the gospel of the shed blood of Christ and his unconditional love. That is the remedy for hard hearts and hurting hearts alike. Christ is the remedy for both a bad conscience and a wounded soul. This chapter shows pastors how to offer care using these precious gifts and

*CHRIST IS THE REMEDY FOR  
BOTH A BAD CONSCIENCE  
AND A WOUNDED SOUL*

to enact care using these grace saturated gifts. This becomes especially important given the numerous questions that arise in our current context.

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## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Addressing Difficult Questions**

Our age of social justice brings with it a complexity of societal history and ideologies that pastors should understand, at least at a cursory level, in order to better engage in quality soul care. This means a pastor must be mindful of the various pressures pushing down on him as a member of society even as he himself has multiple vocations—husband, father, friend, citizen, etc. Important questions to address therefore include: How does a pastor balance the impulses of his personal political ideology with the convictions of his biblical theology in providing soul care for those in his flock? How does he allow his pastoral disposition to be shaped by scripture while remaining silent about any preferred political party or philosophy of government? Likewise, how will a pastor offer care to those who do not understand or are frightened by social movements seeking to halt systemic injustice, especially when some of those movements and counter movements are violent (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Antifa, white

supremacists, the Alt Right)? These are difficult but important questions that need to be tackled.

Additionally, pastors need to consider if caring for souls in an age of social justice includes marching in peaceful protests in solidarity with social reform movements. Likewise, does the care of souls include advocating for change in public policies related to racial injustice and/or spurring a congregation and community into overt political activism toward those ends?

These are just a few of the many difficult questions confronting pastors at the beginning of this third decade of the 21st century. They are questions that need to be addressed, especially in light of dealing with what some are publicly calling a “dual pandemic,”—the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and systemic (institutional) racism.<sup>108</sup> The simple fact is that the issue of racial injustice is so pervasive and provocative that it’s difficult to ignore since the May 25, 2020 death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. That incident, and the explosive social response to it, continues to have world-wide repercussions.

Congregation members face calls for social and racial justice in their daily vocations as employees, citizens, and community members—especially if they access news on TV or online or use any type of social media. The tragic event in Minneapolis triggered riots, looting and massive protests and unrest that swept across the nation for four intense months. Social media exploded with one perspective after another. Black Lives Matter yard signs were planted all around urban and suburban

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<sup>108</sup> For example, in her 2020 school year kickoff address, Dr. Rhoda Mhiripiri-Reed, the superintendent of Hopkins, Minnesota public school system, virtually addressed the faculty and staff noting this dual pandemic and stated, “we need to examine the role that whiteness plays in light of our macro system of white supremacy.” minute 16:15 to 17:56: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=174&v=jEXY3yMho1M&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=174&v=jEXY3yMho1M&feature=emb_logo).

environments, all under the scrutinizing eye of a never-ending news cycle amid a vitriolic national political process.

Pastors need a calm demeanor and the leading of the Holy Spirit through the word of God in order to discern how best to care for and lead their flocks during such difficult days. They need the guidance of God's Word to keep them focused on their task at hand, which, as Jesus says, is to "tend my sheep" (John 21:16). Therefore, pastors will need to consider whether becoming involved in political speech and activity moves them beyond their primary calling to care for souls, preach, teach, and administer the sacraments.<sup>109</sup> True, political action belongs to the vocation of Christian citizen, but pastors need to decide which actions are appropriate in light of their primary calling to the office of the public ministry. To be sure, pastors certainly are called to prophetically speak the truth of God's Word to an unbelieving world and are tasked with publicly leading a flock in doing so. But pastors must balance what the Lord has given them to do as servants of his word, with what he has given them to do as a Christian citizen, so as not to confuse the two vocations or subvert the primary role of the pastoral office in dealing with political chaos in a culture and country.

This is not always an easy balancing act, I realize. Yet history is filled with pastors who have risen up in their dual vocations as pastor and citizen to confront evil and oppression. Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his dual

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<sup>109</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article V, The Ministry: "So that we may obtain this faith the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ's sake." *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 36.

role in caring for his underground flock and opposing the government in Nazi Germany,<sup>110</sup> as well as the pastors involved with the abolitionist movements in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England like Dr. Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London. In 19<sup>th</sup> Century America, we had clergymen like Henry Ward Beecher and Edward Beecher, the well-known brothers of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the classic abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

As noted in the first part of this study, there are varying perspectives on what degree of political involvement a pastor and the corporate church should engage in within any given country or culture. This second part certainly honors those perspectives, but urges the reader to remember that the primary commission of a pastor flows from the Lord and his word to tend the sheep and lambs of Christ with his gifts of love and grace. Opposing government oppression, cultural evil and injustice, or even leading a revolution may indeed be appropriate for pastors in various times and places. But that is the exception rather than the normative role of the pastor. Therefore, Part Two focuses on the care of souls that simply flows from Christ's command to feed his sheep with his word and sacraments (John 21:17).

### ***Racism and Soul Care Through the Word of God***

To offer quality soul care in a social justice age, pastors will first need to be informed about cultural nomenclature, particularly the competing definitions of racism as noted in Part 1. They will need to utilize God's clear word as a means to navigate the issues stemming from these competing definitions and extend compassionate biblical care while advocating

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<sup>110</sup> See Theodore J. Kleinhaus, *Till the Night Be Past: The Life and Times of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002). and Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

for biblical justice. When dealing with sin, the definitions a pastor relies on are those clearly identified by the word of God. Therefore, the word of God, particularly the ten commandments and their meanings, must be the sole standard in a pastor's diagnosis of any presenting malady. (See Luther's Small Catechism). The dictates of political correctness or a critical race ideology are not the normative means of care. Likewise, the passions of a soul will need to be examined in light of those commandments. Even more, they shape the careful assessment of any corresponding wounds received by a troubled soul. Because of the pain endured, these wounds may have also tainted the conscience as well.

Regardless of how an individual may wish to define racism, a faithful pastor's first allegiance is always to the Lord and his objective word if any true spiritual care is going to be offered. Oftentimes this means a laying bare of the soul as one unburdens the intensity of their emotional distress. Faithful shepherds will need compassionate patience and tact to listen while someone rids their soul of all its hurts and passions.

Part of this process includes skillfully uncovering what idolatries a soul might be holding onto that do not allow them to acknowledge a sin as sin.<sup>111</sup> Likewise, a true seelsorger will tactfully explore what wounds may have been inflicted which cause a soul to refuse to give up vengeful indignation. Justified as a person may feel, insisting on vindictive reparation for one's injuries has the potential for tremendous spiritual contamination.

Soul care, therefore, usually involves patient listening and being attuned to what the heart

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<sup>111</sup> A great formal resource to use to help individuals uncover their idols is *Ambassadors of Reconciliation* and their *Lifestyles of Reconciliation* Series, specifically chapter two of "Go and Be Reconciled: What does this mean?" (Billing, MO: Ambassadors of Reconciliation, 2016).

is revealing before a pastor dares to speak a word one way or the other. This is especially challenging when pastors have to deal with what some are calling "the new cult of anti-racism."<sup>112</sup> As Gerald McDermott notes in *First Things*, this cult of anti-racism is also anti-Christian:

This new religion claims to offer a better diversity than God's. While St. Paul says that in the new creation he "now know[s] no man after the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16), the new anti-racism focuses on the old creation and knows men only after the flesh. Its diversity is about skin color alone, rather than God's infinitely more interesting diversity of Jew and gentile, man and woman from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and the Lamb (Rev 7:9).<sup>113</sup>

Undershepherds of Christ will need all the virtues of the Good Shepherd to navigate the challenges of soul care amid this ideological onslaught, especially courage and wisdom. They need courage to stand on the truth of Scripture in a compassionately clear manner, and wisdom to discern the dangerous and festering Critical Race ideology undergirding this social movement.

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## CHAPTER 9

### Soul Care and Critical Race Theory: A Lesson from the Good Samaritan

As noted in Part One, debates about racism and social justice remain a bone of contention for many. It is a debate that invariably affects and

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<sup>112</sup> Gerald McDermott, "Wanted: Pastors with Courage," *First Things*, 9-17-20. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/09/wanted-pastors-with-courage>.

<sup>113</sup> McDermott, "Wanted: Pastors with Courage."

afflicts the members of our congregations and pastors. The effects of racial inequality and the obvious economic disparity resulting from it are elements that impact the souls that pastors shepherd.

What a particular soul believes about their condition, whether they are in fact a victim of injustice or if they merely perceive they are a victim of injustice, invariably shapes how an undershepherd will apply God's law and gospel to that soul. Likewise, it also shapes how a pastor will care for those with uninformed bias towards people of unfortunate circumstances.

Here the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) offers direction for both love of God and love of neighbor. Though the parable is often preached as all law, “Do this and you will live,” (v. 28) and “You, go and do likewise,” (v. 37), the subject in the parable is the Samaritan—a figure for Christ Jesus himself. A brief meditation on the text will help clarify.

The lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, and so Jesus tells him. Keep all the commandments totally, completely, and perfectly. No small task. Realizing he is unable to do what Jesus says, the lawyer tries to lessen his culpability by asking, “and who is my neighbor?” (v. 29). In response, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan.

We should note that Jesus does not tell this parable to show how one can earn eternal life. That was already made clear. Keep the law perfectly: love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself—an impossibility for fallen sinners to do perfectly. Rather, Jesus tells a story that is rich in love and compassion in order to show how he is himself the Good Samaritan and how he alone fulfills the law perfectly in our place. Jesus is the one who does not pass by the oppressed, or the abused, or the beaten, or

the one left for dead. He comes from heaven to earth as the sinless Son of God to rescue all from sin and bring healing to those wounded and dying from sin.

Yet along the way, Jesus does provide a picture of what rescued people do. Since he secured eternal life for us, freeing us from the impossible burden of earning it for ourselves, he shows what a life of love looks like in the parable and then declares, “Go and do likewise!” Of course, such an ethic of love is only possible to do because Jesus declares from the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). There he bled and died for the sins of the world.

In the end, Jesus wants the hearers and readers of this parable to identify with every person in the parable except the Samaritan. That role he reserves for himself, to show what he had come to do for all humankind—rescue the afflicted, bring healing to the abused, pay our debts, offer forgiveness, and provide hope to the oppressed. Yet, as he does so, Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him—to love and serve as he loves and serves (Matt 16:24).

Reflection on this parable is especially helpful in a racially tense time. Note how Jesus makes a Samaritan, the hated half-breed, the hero of his story. He portrays himself as the despised outcast. Divisions of racial and ethnic superiority are nothing new, in other words.

*HE PORTRAYS HIMSELF  
AS THE DESPISED OUTCAST*

Jesus took care to note those cultural realities and use them to tell a story of divine rescue that points to him as the way, the truth, and the life, while also calling his listeners to a more compassionate way of life. It is an apt Word of truth rich with law and gospel.

Unfortunately, many Christians today remain blind to the complex layers wrapped in our contemporary cultural upheaval. Rather than embracing the truths of this parable, they instead opt for the simpler and more sinister route of siding with what essentially become political parties and the divisions of “us” versus “them”. Here too quality soul care is needed to tend the precious lambs and sheep of Christ in order to keep them from turning away from the Lord and his word and turning against one another.

Thus, pastors do need to do the hard work of cultural diagnosis as well as diagnosing any one individual soul. That means staying abreast of the various ideologies in play in a social justice context and digging into the mistreatment or injustice perpetrated against any one individual or group. It means understanding the plight and struggles of any given people group in their community and the challenges they may be facing.

### ***Understanding the Black Community: Answering Meaninglessness with Hope***

It is vital that pastors honestly consider the challenges facing the black community as a whole and how that translates into the conscience of that community. As noted in Part One, black classic liberal intellectual, Cornel West, provides significant insight into the plight of the black conscience in light of all the oppression they have faced since slavery, Jim Crow, and contemporary forms of racism (redlining, profiling, and prejudice). Whether or not one completely agrees with contemporary allegations of systemic or institutional racism, West’s observations are nonetheless deeply diagnostic and helpful for curates to use in the care of individual souls who have experienced profiling, prejudice, and racism and its cumulative effects.

West notes that a toxic combination of hopelessness and lovelessness are plaguing the black community, leading to a sense of pervasive meaninglessness. This nihilism, he says, is not some philosophical doctrine to explore intellectually, but rather a lived experience of insignificance that burdens the conscience of black persons, particularly among lower and lower middleclass black communities as a whole. In sum, West describes the prevalent black experience as one of nihilism:

[It is] the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others.<sup>114</sup>

This mentality accounts for much of the cyclical despair, as well as the reckless and offensive behaviors that often plague the black community, particularly in low income and high crime communities.

Faithful curates of the soul will take the time to hear these burdens and consider how to intentionally love people who, despite the chip they may have on their shoulder, are really being swallowed up by the emptiness of life and desperately looking for hope and love. Curates of the soul will need to not merely speak words of hope, but also enact those words of hope in a ministry of presence. They need to foster meaningful expressions of Christian love and community, and where possible, offer material care to demonstrate their sincerity. But such Christian compassion and love is accompanied

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<sup>114</sup> Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 14.



by the pastoral enactment of the word of God upon the troubled soul's burdened conscience.

To that end, renowned black pastor and civil rights advocate, John Perkins, founder of the John & Vera Mae Perkins Foundation, has pastored this way for nearly half a century. Profoundly mindful of the role of local congregations as places of hope and reconciliation, Perkins has endeavored to foster among congregations and pastors a theology that embraces both the redemptive justice of the cross of Jesus Christ as well as social and economic justice (biblically understood) in the local communities. He has a heart for all people regardless of their race, while also carefully recognizing the various perspectives of both black and white communities:

The damage that resulted from the old system of segregation has left African Americans in a hard state. The breakup of the family, laws and systems that have kept us from flourishing, redlining in housing developments, and so many other lasting effects of segregation make it so much easier for a black man to rob or hurt an innocent white person without much thought because of the damage that has been done. On the other side, the damage done to white people from centuries of racism makes it easier for them to avoid living in black neighborhoods, fear black people walking in the streets, or even commit vicious hate crimes against blacks. The lasting guilt and lingering fears of racism cause people to view those who are different as being almost subhuman, rather than seeing them as children of God created in His image. This is why we talk past one another when racial incidents flare. This is why we ignore other people's stories or perspectives.

This is why we always react defensively first, instead of humbly listening to and trying to understand the other side of the story.

But there is a better way. There is the way of Jesus Christ, shown up on the cross—the most humble and grace-filled act there ever was. Due to our redemption, we have an obligation to forgive and accept the forgiveness of others. In forgiving and being forgiven, the healing process begins for both parties involved.<sup>115</sup>

In these racially charged times, Perkins is a seasoned and model pastor who champions Jesus Christ as the true source of hope and healing. He strives to cultivate communities of love who prize the traditional virtue of justice and biblical compassion and are willing to stick it out together as they forgive and are forgiven.

### ***Breaking Down the Dividing Wall of Hostility***

Recognizing the above, pastors need to consider how they would care for an angry Christian black man or woman wounded by racism. They also need to consider how they would care for someone who, in their woundedness, has embraced a secular critical social justice ideology. This is particularly so if this ideology has so consumed them that the desire for vengeance and retribution dominates their thinking.

Conversely, pastors need to consider how to care for white people who refuse to acknowledge or engage with the hurt of the black community. They need to contemplate which words of scripture should be offered in the face of such indifference, as well as in the face of perceived

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<sup>115</sup> John Perkins, *Dream With Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 170.

or real systemic injustice. Likewise, they need to consider which words of Scripture should be offered to those who refuse to take accountability for their own behavior.

Pastors need to walk softly through personal suffering and any exhortations to endure it. Jesus does indeed say to “turn the other cheek” (Matt 5:39), but pastors must consider how that would be received should a pastor speak those words to a troubled soul. A pastor must balance a soul’s intense hurt with the call to take up our cross and follow Christ—to know which aspect is to be addressed and when patience should be utilized. Likewise, a seelsorger needs to navigate the intense hurt of injustice, whether merely perceived or real. In short, the care of souls is indeed a complex “art of arts;” it means faithfully applying law and gospel appropriately without compromising either or confusing the two.

Ultimately, soul care takes its lead from Jesus and includes an equal love and care for people regardless of their language, race, or nationality. “Confessing that God created humanity in his image and redeemed us by the blood of His Son, any Christian ethic worthy of the name must contend for the dignity of every person created in God’s image—man or woman, born or unborn, black or white, rich or poor, useful or inconvenient.”<sup>116</sup> The goal, then, is to treat the malady of hate and division with the power of Christ and his cross to bring about peace and reconciliation. As Paul says, Christ is “himself our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14).

Curates of the soul are equipped for this task through the Spirit’s own tools of God’s word and holy sacraments. These must lead the way

<sup>116</sup> Walter Strickland II and Dayton Harmon, *For God so Loves the World: A Blueprint for Kingdom Diversity* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020), 67.

in healing injustice and in changing hearts and minds by the revolutionary power of God’s word. In particular, the gospel alone has the sole power to change human hearts and minds and to amend sinful lives. This is the joy of Lutheran theology. The gospel predominates. Yet it is

### THE GOSPEL PREDOMINATES

tempting to use the law to create our desired outcome—force and coercion are always appealing in the heat of the moment. But pastors must be mindful of such temptations, especially amid various strident appeals for change and action. The law is powerless to bring about the changes it demands from us. Only the gospel, full of love, grace, and truth, has the power to heal, forgive, cleanse, and transform hearts and minds (Rom 12:2). That’s why the chief role of pastors is to preach the gospel and administer the sacramental gifts of Christ.

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## CHAPTER 10

### Social Justice Activism and the Church

Sadly, many clergy do not see the proclamation of the gospel as their primary responsibility. Many American Christians face abusive pressures directly in their vocations as members of a church, often at the hands of a “woke” pastor. The fact is congregations around the country are saturated with the issue of racial justice one way or the other. Consider the example of the Rev. Kenneth Boller, pastor of the Church of St. Francis Xavier, of a New York City, a Jesuit-led Roman Catholic parish. He asked his parishioners to recite a “pledge for racial justice” during Mass, which affirms that “white privilege and the culture of white

supremacy must be dismantled.”<sup>117</sup> The pledge, first created by a Unitarian church and adapted by Boller for his parish asks parishioners to affirm the following:

The Church of St. Francis Xavier joins with people throughout the world, in committing itself to racial justice. And so we pledge together: Please respond YES.

—DO YOU SUPPORT justice, equity, and compassion in human relations?

—DO YOU AFFIRM that white privilege is unfair and harmful to those who have it and to those who do not?

—DO YOU AFFIRM that white privilege and the culture of white supremacy must be dismantled wherever it is present?

—DO YOU SUPPORT racial equity, justice, and liberation for every person?

—DO YOU AFFIRM the inherent worth and dignity of every person?

Therefore, from this day forward:

—WILL YOU strive to understand more deeply the injustice and suffering white privilege and white supremacy cause?

—WILL YOU COMMIT to help transform our church culture to one that is actively engaged in seeking racial justice and equity for everyone?

—WILL YOU make a greater effort to treat all people with the same respect you expect to receive?

—WILL YOU COMMIT to developing the courage to live your beliefs and values of racial justice and equality?

—WILL YOU strive daily to eliminate racial prejudice from your thoughts and actions so that you can better promote the racial justice efforts of our church?

—WILL YOU renew and honor this pledge daily, knowing that our church, our community, our nation, and our world will be better places because of my efforts?<sup>118</sup>

This demonstrates the extent to which the social justice climate is impacting the church. Faithful pastors who keep soul care in the name of Jesus at the center of their ministry will sensitively navigate such pressures for pledges. They will seek to highlight the love of Christ and his transforming power instead of a preferred political or social justice agenda.

The example shows that pastors need to evaluate with their members and congregation whether such pledges are ever proper and fitting in a public worship service. They need to honestly assess whether such pledges only serve to confuse, anger, and alienate members, while ultimately subverting the gospel as the power that brings lasting change.

The emotions evoked by this pledge (pro or con) demonstrates the utter importance for the patient and compassionate care of souls during these fractured and difficult times. Yet as one does so, it’s important for pastors to remain mindful of the whole counsel of God. When dealing with any one particular pressing social issue or sin issue, the whole counsel of God reminds us that life is always bigger than any

<sup>117</sup> Susan Berry, “Jesuit-Led Parish Asks Parishioners to Take Pledge Affirming ‘White Privilege’ Must End” *Breitbart News*, Sept. 5, 2020. <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2020/09/05/jesuit-led-parish-asks-parishioners-to-take-pledge-affirming-white-privilege-must-end/>.

<sup>118</sup> The Church of Francis Xavier website: <https://sfxavier.org/news/a-pledge-for-racial-justice>

one issue. This is by no means to be dismissive toward that issue. But when pastors allow one concern to preoccupy the life and ministry of the church, other maladies present in the body of Christ are often overlooked. The raw emotion of a sin issue can make it easy to become focused on one singular question to the exclusion of the whole counsel of God and the other important matters facing humankind, as well as the sins afflicting humankind.

### ***Social Justice in the LCMS***

Our own church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), which is 95% white, is no exception. The president of the Black Clergy Caucus of the LCMS, Rev. Warren Lattimore, Jr., issued a letter after the death of George Floyd, asking some very hard questions of the LCMS leaders:

The year is 2020. A few years prior, the last remaining Historically Black College and University dedicated to training Black Lutheran teachers was closed by the Synod. The nation is in unrest. Racial injustice is being protested in a nation that has long denied its existence. Black men and women are being killed by those who have sworn to protect them. Breonna Taylor. George Floyd. Ahmaud Arbery. David McAtee. Racial tensions flared into riots in Minneapolis. Black Lutheran pastors knew Minneapolis would not be an isolated case, so an isolated response would not suffice. “If such a crisis should arise in Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee or some other city, where could our black congregations turn for help?” Can we turn to District or Synod? Do they “understand the nature and scope of the crisis [and have a] commitment to try to resolve it?” That

is our genuine hope. Yet there are no Black Lutherans on the Synod Board of Directors. The Seminary Boards of Regents lack Black clergy. To date, there still has been no Synod President or District President who is Black. To paraphrase Dr. Dickinson, when our cities are burning down, does Black ministry have anywhere to turn for some official who is able to understand and bring hope or comfort?...

Since closing Concordia Selma, the last Lutheran HBCU, Synod reduced Black Ministry’s budget and divested from the Black Ministry Family Convocation—a triennial gathering to study God’s Word and celebrate the perseverance of Black Lutherans. With no HBCU to support Black Lutherans, no Black Lutherans are entering seminary this year. We do not need Synod to offer us thoughts and prayers. Prayer is an essential spiritual discipline; platitudes are not...

When we do not seek to end the institution of racism, this nation’s original sin, or worse deny it, we not only fail to recognize the humanity of our black and brown brothers and sisters in Christ, we also fail to recognize the God in them, the Spirit of God Who has given them life and breath.<sup>119</sup>

The letter aims to draw out the sin that has afflicted many in this country, while also expressing the discontent among many in our own Synod. In short, whether or not one agrees with it, there is much mutual conversation and consolation that needs to take place as we together wrestle through difficult questions in the name of the Lord. However, the ultimate

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<sup>119</sup> “Black Clergy Caucus Statement on George Floyd” <https://www.theunbrokencord.com/writings/black-clergy-caucus-statement-on-george-floyd>.

point must be to direct us together to Christ for the remedy of injustice and heartache, rather than to one particular Christian leader of a preferred skin color as the definitive answer to injustice. This is not to minimize the lament of the letter or the maladies it addresses, but rather to focus on the true remedy that we jointly seek as essential to our life together.

Nonetheless, how should his questions be remedied? They are pointed and deserve a frank conversation. Part of it would include a conversation about how to best effectively and fairly remedy the representation of black individuals in the positions of leadership as he notes. Again, our Synod is 95% white Anglo. We must wrestle with this fact. The remaining 5% is divided up among black as well as Hmong, Hispanic, Native American, and African immigrants among other ethnic minorities. For perspective, demographic analysis shows that the U.S. population is 13% black. Questions, then, for us to consider are: Is there a reason why our own denomination does not reflect that percentage? Why might that be? What are we doing well in outreach to black communities? What can we do better? How can we recruit more black pastors and equip them as teachers and leaders in our church? How can we collaborate with voices like Pastor Lattimore's to find faithful ways to address these issues?

More provocatively, the group Lutherans for Racial Justice has created an online petition and movement to remove what the group's leader, Pastor Matthew Gonzalez, says is injurious and harmful systemic racism that is overtly present within our denomination. In a fierce and fiery plea, he notes that the leaders and members of the Synod are the problem, and that they have for far too long failed to acknowledge our own racism and contribution to the racist system of our Synod.<sup>120</sup> However, he does not offer

any specific examples large or small to this accusation.

Unfortunately, the appeal is more emotionally driven than reasonably or constructively presented. Apart from noting that "It's time!" for us to take action, not much is offered to guide that action. What that action should tangibly and truly consist of, as well as how it should reasonably be accomplished, remains vague and buried in raw emotion. The specific indictment regarding systemic racism is only offered in a generalized accusatory manner.

This demonstrates the danger of letting unbridled passions, political or otherwise, lead any call for action or repentance. If systemic racism is indeed present, then by all means we need to address it! But be specific. How is it occurring? Where is it occurring? Who is committing this evil? Speaking in generalities is not helpful when dealing with such an emotionally intense issue. When addressing fellow Christians and Christian leaders, pastors do well to speak the truth specifically, lovingly, and directly to the situation at hand, in the context of God's Word and with the power of Christ's love. Without such thoughtfulness and courtesy, such appeals become more alarmist and inflammatory than biblically encouraging or exhorting.

In short, the vitriolic and dysfunctional age we inhabit makes it all the more urgent for quality and gracious soul care to be of the utmost concern for pastors today. Our church body is just one example. Fingers are being pointed and accusations leveled over racist sins of omission and commission that have occurred within our ranks since the founding of our church body. Even more, given how emotionally provocative these issues are, we can be assured Satan will seek to pit pastor against pastor

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[www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=10&v=kqrUd-8QKyVI&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=10&v=kqrUd-8QKyVI&feature=emb_logo), See also <https://lutherans-forracialjustice.com/lrj>.

<sup>120</sup> YouTube video, minute 4:25 and following. <https://>

and congregation against congregation. But as Paul reminds us, we do not battle against flesh and blood, but against the forces of evil and darkness (Eph 6). The devil and his demons delight when we circle up into camps of “us” vs. “them”. Therefore, as pastors charged with soul care, we need to know the pressures and emotions bearing down upon us and our people as we seek to apply God’s gracious word of law and gospel into the lives of our people.

The danger of indicting others with great fervor and passion is that the passion of Christ gets lost or simply traded for emotional zealotry. Blanket accusations and wholesale indictments are standard fare in the secular world. But true seelorsgers are called to better wisdom and the use of a thousand eyes, so that we might examine the broken hearts and minds of troubled souls from every angle and aptly apply the light and life of Christ to these troubled times and critical needs.

Yet pastors are only human, after all. That’s why we pastors should give only what which we ourselves regularly receive. This, too, is the disposition of physician of souls. As much as we give Christ to others, we ourselves must receive him often and regularly. Pastors need pastors too. That is the truth that lies at the heart

PASTORS NEED PASTORS TOO

of our reformation theology and corresponding pastoral theology. Lutherans have a tremendous robust theological contribution that is ripe for the times in which we live.

### ***History of Black Ministry in the LCMS***

In fact, although we are a predominantly Anglo-Saxon population in our denomination and have our shortcomings, we are blessed with a history

of intentional black ministry that continues to this day. The story of Rosa Young (1890–1971) offers a compelling narrative of not only her life of faith, but of how the fullness of the gospel came clear to her through the passion and compassion of Lutheran pastors who had a heart for black ministry in the American south. In an astounding personal account of her teaching ministry, she notes that Lutherans had garnered a positive reputation even with prominent black leaders of the day like Booker T. Washington. In fact, he was the one who directed her to appeal to the Lutherans for help:

At last one day a letter came from Tuskegee Institute signed by Booker T. Washington himself. In this letter he told me he was unable to help me in the least; but would advise me to write to the board of Colored Missions for the Lutheran Church. He said they were doing more for the colored race than any other denomination he knew of. He liked them because of the religious training which they were giving colored people. He gave me the address of Rev. Christopher F. Drews, who was then the chairman of the board for Colored Missions.<sup>121</sup>

It was at one of the Alabama schools Rosa started that black former first vice president of the LCMS, Rev. Dr. Robert King (1922–2016), was first educated in a Lutheran parochial school.<sup>122</sup> King was elected by seven national

<sup>121</sup> *Light in the Dark Belt: The Story of Rosa Young as told by herself.* (St Louis: Concordia, 1950), p.102–103

<sup>122</sup> “On Christmas Eve I had my first encounter with a Lutheran parochial School when I attended the Christmas program at Good Shepherd. Sitting in a church, hearing Christmas carols for the first time, I am listening to the children sing ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem,’ ‘Silent Night, Holy Night,’ ‘Hark the Herald Angels Sing,’ and more. I’m hearing all about Christmas. My sister Deet, and brother, Fleep, are singing with the Children, too, because this is where they go to school now. The school wasn’t here when Jim and I went to Birmingham. My sister said that this is

Synod conventions as a vice-president. He served as LCMS third vice-president for three terms: 1986–1989, 2001–2004 and 2004–2007; as second vice-president for four terms: from 1989–2001; and as first vice-president for five months in 2001 after the death of then-President Rev. Dr. A.L. Barry.

This by no means exonerates the LCMS from any potential shortcomings in past or present ministry to black people, or any deficiencies in how our national church body is organized. But it does document a sincere desire for intentional and faithful ministry among the black community, which Rev. Dr. Roosevelt Grey faithfully carries on for our Synod today.<sup>123</sup> Imperfect as the LCMS may be, by the grace of God we endeavor to serve and care for the souls of people of every tribe, race, and language, with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Where we fall short, we beg for mercy, strive to do better, and seek to work together for the care of our neighbor, the growth of God’s Kingdom, and the glory of God.

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## CHAPTER 11

### Human Identity with Christ at the Center

There is much to be offered by Christians to address racism within the church. But it ought always begins and ends with Christ and his shed blood. That is what the Lutheran contribution to soul care offers—what it means to be a theologian of the cross and not a theologian of glory.

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school started because of Rosa Young in Rosebud, Alabama... It is January 1932. Jim and I are not returning to Birmingham. We are enrolled in Good Shepherd Lutheran School.” Robert King, *Pastor Jenkins said “Hang on to Matthew 6:33”*: *An Autobiography* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 33–34.

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/national/black-ministry>

Pastoral care deals with souls as they are situated in the sin of this world, dealing with the sins they have committed as well as sins committed against them. The goal is to give them a good conscience, a cleansed soul, and life transformed by the hope and promise of the Gospel. This is done through the application of Christ to both victim and perpetrator alike, but each according to the requirements of their circumstances.

For example, the identity of Christ is applied to someone who has been sinned against. When one has been the victim of racist mentalities, hatred, or discriminatory policies, the baptismal identity of Christ is wrapped around this wounded soul as a healing balm. The goal is to restore in them the precious and beloved identity they have as a redeemed child of God. This also lets the life of Christ go to work in their life (Gal. 2:20). Here shame and hurt are most often the malady being treated.

To be sure, social intervention on behalf of an oppressed people demonstrates advocacy for them. But the first duty of an undershepherd of Christ is to bring wounded souls into the presence of the advocate, Jesus Christ, who fights for them, with them, and alongside them against the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh.

In the case of those who have suffered racism, a skilled pastor will be needed to treat the great heartache and hurt a soul may have endured. He does not excuse or explain away racist treatment in any way, but rather simply enters into the angst of the soul in the confidence of the Gospel to bring cleansing for the shame suffered and release for the anger raging within.

Pastors do well to know when and how to enact God’s Word upon wounded and troubled souls. This goes for offenders against God’s Word as well. Perpetrators of sin certainly need to come

to repentance. However, they will then also need to receive the balm of the Gospel. The love and holiness of Christ is the remedy for all sin, but the art of soul care includes confronting and exposing the evils of racial discrimination as well as applying the holiness and light of Christ, especially when treating the sins and wounds of racism.

### *Applying the Light of Christ*

The joy of using Christ's holiness is that it is the light no darkness can overcome. It shines on the darkness of a troubled soul, be that guilt, shame, brokenness, heartache, headache, rejection, defiance, or depression. For pastors this becomes especially significant as we care for burdened consciences and hurting souls. However, the art of pastoral care is more than a generic application of Christ's holiness to a troubled soul.

Rather, like light that splits into a rainbow of colors, the art of pastoral care is to know how to direct the light of Christ's holiness in the color specific to the malady of a particular soul. As they do, pastors will need to be mindful of a soul's felt need, and yet address their actual need in Christ. This means being able to attend to the soul's affliction in a way that identifies the best starting point. Namely, does it begin with "sin in relation to me" or "sin in relation to God?" Here "sin" includes the offenses they commit, those committed against them, and those pressing upon them from the fallen and disordered world. The art of this soul care aims to retain close proximity to God's holiness so that spiritual cleansing, purging, and healing can ritually and regularly take place. As Chrysostom said, "The shepherd needs great wisdom and a thousand eyes, to examine the soul's condition from every angle."

Thankfully, the word of God confesses the depth of God's holiness and delivers God's holiness.

Consider Psalm 103:

<sup>1</sup>Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!<sup>2</sup>Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup>who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup>who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup>who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.<sup>6</sup>The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. <sup>7</sup>He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. <sup>8</sup>The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Ps 103:1–8).

This Psalm not only clarifies the content of God's holiness, but also delivers that holiness through God's audible and written word. It is the living voice of the gospel. From God's "holy name" come all his benefits. As the Psalm progresses, his benefits include forgiveness, healing, redemption, love, mercy, satisfaction, righteousness, and justice—a colorful rainbow indeed!

What ails the soul, be it from racist experiences or others, will by faith certainly find remedy in one or more dimensions of God's healing holiness. The pastoral art of extraordinary care is to bring aspects of God's holiness to people in such a way that it engages the soul with an array of their senses—cognitive, emotional, verbal, spiritual, and ritual (i.e., frequently, routinely and regularly). The goal is for them to formally and intimately experience that holiness amid their extraordinary circumstances.

Of course, it's important for this extraordinary pastoral care to dovetail with the ordinary care being received through the word and sacrament of the Divine Service (public worship).



Extraordinary circumstances require intensified and deliberate proximity to God's holiness; it flows from and leads to the holy things God himself provides in the Divine Service. Whenever contact with God's holiness is lost, the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh fill the void, wasting little time to defile God's people.

### ***Caring for Those Who Have Been Sinned Against***

When someone has been defiled or sinned against in some manner, there are always intense emotions that result from the offense. If someone has experienced racism, the emotional result often includes anger, shame, sorrow, and indignation. Quality care will include listening intently to the rawness, hurt, and/or anger of a wounded soul, while keeping the word of God as curative treatment on hand, ready to meet the spiritual diagnosis gained from such attentive listening.

Treating the malady of a soul is important. The danger lies in that if left untreated, such suffering can lead to other temptations that deceive and mislead into despair and other great shame and vice. For example, consider the largescale rioting and wanton destruction of property and disregard for law and order following the George Floyd tragedy. Though these outbreaks stemmed from collective indignation at apparent systematic police brutality against black people, sadly there was significant destruction of black and minority owned businesses as well—"other great shame and vice" indeed.<sup>124</sup> This of course

<sup>124</sup> Brad Polumbo, "Here Are Just 10 of the Many Minority-Owned Businesses Destroyed in the Riots" (June 5, 2020) *Foundation for Economic Education*. [https://fee.org/articles/here-are-just-10-of-the-many-minority-owned-businesses-destroyed-in-the-riots/?\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_\\_=ec6b-f82ec1245341e08c9be2dfa3a6c0a15ebae7-1615040615-0-AUTZyG41Oe7Me81tlucFaTHB6ebAryCmGdCA-JUSx5F5j1Qe44v99FA254odql8LGc8\\_ZkfPSwGdF3n9ly-E0uN5DuWlcPx7zXR7NjgsgS7Hf8IicAAA79T-UOY-QHVVP17MZVhnQkvOq52fRo3luVVn-tetWACcK-UdFMW8W4VFLU2yZ6J\\_nTz90PactFzeNz0QJbhR-](https://fee.org/articles/here-are-just-10-of-the-many-minority-owned-businesses-destroyed-in-the-riots/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk__=ec6b-f82ec1245341e08c9be2dfa3a6c0a15ebae7-1615040615-0-AUTZyG41Oe7Me81tlucFaTHB6ebAryCmGdCA-JUSx5F5j1Qe44v99FA254odql8LGc8_ZkfPSwGdF3n9ly-E0uN5DuWlcPx7zXR7NjgsgS7Hf8IicAAA79T-UOY-QHVVP17MZVhnQkvOq52fRo3luVVn-tetWACcK-UdFMW8W4VFLU2yZ6J_nTz90PactFzeNz0QJbhR-)

not only violates the seventh commandment, but brings no ultimate peace to the hurting soul.

Worse still, those caught up in this type of violent and destructive protest can go from being victims of racism to becoming perpetrators of the same hatred. When we are injured, our fallen condition is such that we deceive ourselves into thinking we're entitled to lash out in retaliation to get revenge, either to exact vengeance for the injury suffered or to receive reparations for the wrong that was endured. This is to the devil's delight. And he is busy at work, to be sure. But good pastoral care will lovingly address this with both law and gospel.

### ***Caring for Those Who Have Sinned Against Others***

Conversely, those who are perpetrators of racism and have committed sinful acts certainly need pastoral care as well. Those racist acts include any discriminatory mindset that views people of any race as less than human, including acts of prejudice, as well as any discriminatory or bigoted behavior, teaching, or deeds that violate the commandments and so injure another precious human being. A person who speaks prejudicially about black people, indigenous people, Hispanic people, Hmong people or white people based on racial profiling, caricature, or an ignorant disposition violates the eighth commandment and fails to put the best construction on everything.

The pastoral art here is to tactfully call a sin a sin. This includes calling a sinner to repentance

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and the new life in Christ, and then applying the grace and salve of the gospel. Not always an easy task. No sinner is happy to hear they have sinned and grieved not only their neighbor, but God himself. Yet, this delicate task is also part of good soul care and cultivates the baptismal identity both perpetrators and victims of sin have in Jesus Christ.

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## CHAPTER 12

### Promoting Baptismal Identity and Character<sup>125</sup>

Lutherans have a robust theology of baptism that gives profound insight to understand redeemed human character and identity. Critical Race Theory and social justice ideologies seek to reduce character to collectivist identities defined by their own dictates. Therefore, Lutheran Christians, pastors especially, do well to give care to others based on the clear confession of faith and life inherent in our baptismal theology. This is an especially important foundation for pastoral care, particularly as it promotes a vital ethic for life given all the racist tensions, injustices, and unrest present in our communities.

The baptismal life calls us to die to self and live to Christ by serving our neighbor. We do so in the confidence and character of our baptismal identity. This identity certainly carries with it moral implications for daily living. The Small Catechism helps us understand this life as it confesses what the baptized life truly entails:

It indicates that the old Adam in

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<sup>125</sup> For a full theological and pastoral development of this see, Woodford, “Preaching the Virtues of Christ: Telling the Story in the way of the Gospel for a Moral People Living in Immoral Times.” *Seelsorger: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls*. Vol. 3 (2017); and “Vice, Virtue, and Baptismal Therapy in the Care of Souls.” *Seelsorger: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls*. Vol. 2 (2016).

us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

*THE BAPTISMAL LIFE  
CALLS US TO DIE TO SELF  
AND LIVE TO CHRIST BY  
SERVING OUR NEIGHBOR*

Our baptismal identity as child and heir of God united to Christ provides a spiritual way of life, which is also an ethical way of life. Baptized Christians walk the path of the dead. That is, we are united to the death of Christ (Rom 6:4). This path puts to death all our sins and evil desires (racist or otherwise), as the “new man” united to Christ daily emerges to live with the character and virtues of Christ as we face temptation, affliction, and adversity. In other words, while dangerous passions and “evil desires” disorder life, lead to sin and defile our lives, the ethic of baptism daily calls every sinner to repentance and prayer, and bestows confident hope rooted in a new identity in Christ.

To be clear, this means that a person not only confesses their sin, but also turns away from that sin with its “evil desires” in sorrow and contrition. Sinful thoughts, behaviors, and vices stop and are confessed as wrong, for which the sinner pleads for mercy and forgiveness.

Thus the sinful self is spiritually crucified and buried with Christ—it is spiritually drowned and killed. All of this has clear moral and social implications. This most certainly involves behavioral changes and actions that flow from the virtues of Christ and the fruit of the faith (Gal 5:22–23). Most Christian virtues ethics

offer little or no treatment of such baptismal repentance and prayer as central components in the moral and spiritual life. Yet they are utterly essential to the Christian way of life and faith. This is especially true in light of our social justice society with its competing Critical Race ideology rooted in arbitrary definitions of equality.

Therefore, the central habits of baptismal virtue ethics are the spiritual acts of prayer, contrition and repentance. Curates do well to be mindful of these acts in their care of souls. In short, the same faith that enacts contrition and repentance also enacts the virtues of Christ. In theological language, the law is at work accusing the sinner, condemning the sinner, and driving the sinner to repentance, bringing the sinner to the death of his sinful self. But because the sinner is also baptized, he or she is simultaneously a beloved and precious child of God, an heir to the kingdom of God (Gal 3:26–27).

In that very confidence and faith, the Christian exhibits other virtues of Christ—patience, long suffering, wisdom, courage, humility—and faces the evils, temptations, and afflictions of this world. This does not in any way reduce the egregious nature of racism and evils of prejudice but rather empowers Christians to actively navigate life in this fallen world through their identity in Christ. Day by day the baptized Christian engages the world with the moral character of Christ in genuine repentance and true faith for the good of the neighbor and to the glory of God.

Delivered from the hands of the Evil One by his cross, our Lord Jesus baptismally equips Christians to live with a divine identity, with moral integrity, and with the eternal destiny of a heavenly kingdom. Pastors can deliver these gifts again and again, Sunday after Sunday, year after year, care session after care session.

They call Christians to begin each day in their baptism, trusting in Jesus who conquered injustice, oppression, and death.

This is all lived out by faith. Through baptism Christ actualizes his virtues within us, not by magic or some secret, but through the washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5–8). As the sanctified life flows out of Baptism, so the virtuous life flows out of Baptism. Luther brings this out in his Large Catechism:

Every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to do all his life. For he has always enough to do by believing firmly what Baptism promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts.

Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after. For we must keep at it without ceasing, always purging whatever pertains to the old Adam, so that whatever belongs to the new creature may come forth. What is the old creature? It is what is born in us from Adam, irascible, spiteful, envious, unchaste, greedy, lazy, proud—yes—and unbelieving; it is beset with all vices and by nature has nothing good in it. Now, when we enter Christ's kingdom, this corruption must daily decrease so that the longer we live the more gentle, patient, and meek we become, and the more we break away from greed, hatred, envy, and pride. This is the right use of baptism among Christians.<sup>126</sup>

Therefore, pastoral care in our age of social justice is enriched by the awareness of what can be called baptismal virtue ethics. You might call

<sup>126</sup> *Large Catechism*, Fourth Part: Baptism, 41, 66–68/

the pastoral application of this daily dying and rising “baptismal therapy.”<sup>127</sup> This approach emphasizes that the gospel, rather than the law, operates as the power and force behind ethical living. This is the strength of our Lutheran theology. Christ is always at the center.

CHRIST IS ALWAYS  
AT THE CENTER

### ***Pastoral Care Through Baptismal Therapy***

To be clear, the law can certainly describe the Christian life, demand that life, and guide that life, but it cannot give that life. That power comes from the gospel alone. Therefore, while the law provides essential guidance and direction for the Christian life, it is critical in quality pastoral care to lift up the virtues of Christ in the way of the gospel, as a gift, by grace through faith, rather than as a demand for hearers to imitate, emulate, or adulate.

To be sure, the law instructs in Christian character, virtue, and habits, and certainly has its valid place and uses: The law 1) describes—it shows what God in Christ accomplishes in the life of the forgiven sinner by His Spirit; 2) the law proscribes—it forbids things that are contrary to God’s will and dangerous to human life; and 3) the law prescribes—it teaches what is pleasing to God by way of a life linked to Jesus by Baptism into him. But the gospel alone motivates and must always predominate.

Nonetheless, there are essential truths of the law that must be taught in an immoral age filled with injustice and oppression. Yet the law is utterly

<sup>127</sup> For an exposition of the pastoral application of baptismal therapy including case studies, see Woodford, “Vice, Virtue, and Baptismal Therapy in the Care of Souls.” *Seel-sorger: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls* Vol 2, (2016): 35–64.

powerless to produce in us what it demands, describes, proscribes, or prescribes from us. It cannot deliver character, virtue, or habit. It leads us to repent of racism in all its forms, but it cannot produce true repentance, godliness and holiness. That’s why we need the gospel to justify, sanctify, and deliver everything the law demands. As Paul says, “Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4). Christ is all in all. He supplies all that we need. We are no longer under the law or “slaves to the law,” but in Christ we are under grace (Rom 6:14).

The Christian, then, believes we have access to moral character, virtue, and a holy, righteous identity through Jesus Christ. This is imperative for pastors to promote and enact as they care for people in an age of social justice. It’s much more than a mere mental thought or intellectual exercise designed to encourage someone to act like Jesus. This is an exercise of faith, believing what Jesus has given us and then clearly acting upon it. As Paul said, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). Plain and simple, baptized believers have put on the virtues of Jesus. Consequently, baptized into Christ “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

Faith calls us to believe the gospel and trust that Jesus not only gives us his forgiveness, righteousness, and holiness to secure our standing before the Heavenly Father and gain eternity in Heaven, but that he also gives us his own life to live (Gal 2:20). Buried with him

HE ALSO GIVES US  
HIS OWN LIFE TO LIVE

in Holy Baptism we are given Christ's own character, his identity as a son of God, and his virtues to take as our very own to lead us in a moral life in this contemporary social justice culture, now at this time, here on this earth.

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## CONCLUSION

### Final Observations

Finally, we need to consider some specific ways that pastors can enact these profound spiritual and ethical truths for those under their care. What I offer below are some possible methods for specific pastoral care. They can certainly be utilized in our social justice society but are apt for addressing all kinds of sin.

#### *1. Caring Conversations*

Caring conversation is simply the beginning point of any extraordinary pastoral care. Part of this process involves creating a safe, comfortable, and confidential one-on-one pastoral care environment for troubled souls to openly express the malady, sin, or struggle of life that afflicts them. The desire is to offer the troubled soul compassionate listening and understanding so the curative remedy of Christ and his holiness can be readily, regularly, and ritually received. Thus, active listening, a compassionate voice, and a calm demeanor are important to facilitating these conversations. A pattern of listening might be: listen–clarify–listen–ask–listen–clarify–listen–ask. Utilizing this listening approach will foster the ability to better diagnose any particular spiritual condition. When the time is right, another consideration is perhaps the use or eventual use of sacred space (chancel, kneeler, or altar) and liturgical aesthetics and rituals (vestments, anointing oil, or candles) to accompany these conversations and enactments of pastoral care.

#### *2. Diagnosing the Malady: Trusting the Remedy*

Once adequate listening and understanding has taken place, steps toward diagnosis can begin. Helpful to this process is to review with the individual the impressions that were received, i.e., the circumstances of the person's life, the problems they are enduring, the feelings they have, and the temptations they face. Begin peeling back the various layers of affliction. In other words, like a physician, the pastor begins with the presenting symptoms and works toward a diagnosis and cure/treatment. What is the chief complaint? What spiritual symptoms can be detected? What responses are emerging? How are they handling things on their own? How is the individual functioning? Healthy or unhealthy; inwardly as well as outwardly? Note that multiple combinations of symptoms may surface. These usually are not in and of themselves the actual problem. Rather they disclose the particular misbelief, unique idolatry, deep wound, or affront that lies at the heart of their spiritual condition or malady.

It's important to be mindful of the various categories of symptoms that emerge so an accurate diagnosis might be obtained, and a corresponding proper cure offered. Careful consideration of the spiritual, emotional, and physical symptoms that are manifested, along with emerging behavior patterns, is a significant step toward proper diagnosis and cure. Often spiritual distress may be accompanied by emotional and physical symptoms, for which examination and treatment by qualified therapists and physicians may be necessary. In fact, pastoral care should not be substituted for quality work by a qualified mental health therapist that may also be needed. There can be great benefit when a pastor and Christian therapist work in tandem for the good of a troubled soul.

In our social justice context, it's important for pastors to be sensitive to racist language and feelings of oppression, as well as the experiences of racial oppression and injustice a soul may have experienced. These realities will be crucial for a pastor to keep in mind in the diagnostic process, but always keeping the Word of God and the will of God as the predominate factor shaping interaction and care.

Again, the aforementioned beloved black pastor, John Perkins, has led by example in this way for five decades. He was brutally beaten by police in southern Mississippi in 1970 and thrown in jail for protesting civil rights. He tells of how this great injustice and suffering actually became a positive and transformative event in his life. While recovering in the hospital from the severe beating, Perkins tells of the anger and rage that so consumed him that he was seething with hatred for all white people. Yet, he could not reconcile those feelings with how the white doctors and nurses were so compassionately caring for him. He realized his rage and anger would ultimately destroy him if he did not release it into the hands of Christ.

From that point on, as difficult as it was to let go of that anger, Perkins, along with his whole family, has been committed to Christ-centered racial reconciliation driven by the Word of God. Even with all the bumps and bruises that go with it, they see this Christ centered reconciliation as the genuine remedy for racial injustice and oppression. In his words, "God is all about reconciliation, but we run the risk of missing him when we allow racial reconciliation, or any kind of reconciliation as the dominating force—if we allow it rather than God himself to become the ultimate goal."<sup>128</sup> For Perkins, gospel centered reconciliation must be at the

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<sup>128</sup> John Perkins, *Dream With Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 81.

core of the church's ministry:

[R]econciliation is the heart of the Gospel. It is the process by which God brings us to him and keeps us. It is the main activating force withing the redemptive idea. It is the process of forgiveness of sin. The Bible makes it clear that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself' (2 Cor 5:19 NKJV). It is also the process by which believers in Christ are joined to one another: 'His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility' (Eph 2:15–16). He's working out our forgiveness. It's his intention to hold us together through reconciliation. Reconciliation is working in the process of forgiveness—being forgiven and forgiving others. It's an ongoing, living thing in the Bible.<sup>129</sup>

Perkins is a profound pastoral example of the Christ-centered hard work needed as pastors go about caring for their flock in the face of racial injustice and hurt.

Another example is from Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li. In their book, *Leading a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*, Li recounts the bumpy journey of how their inner city congregation became the large and healthy multi-ethnic congregation it is today. At one point these two lead pastors and one of their youth pastors engaged in difficult conversations stemming from the different racial and ethnic misunderstandings they were having about each other. One is of Chinese ethnicity, one is Hispanic, and one is African American.

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<sup>129</sup> Perkins, *Dream with Me*, 79.

Their differences became rather intense at one point. But they tell of their reconciliation and living out of Christ's command to love one another (John 13:34). They desired to be intentional in the way they led the congregation through racial tension and so they led by example using the ritual enactment of God's Word. Harry Li recounts how the culmination of their reconciliation process led him to wash the youth pastor's feet in front of the congregation as a visible act of love toward him and an enactment of John 13.<sup>130</sup> Though they are not a sacramental congregation, this act has become a regular church year ritual (done on Good Friday) as they address the racial challenges and tensions that arise within the congregation.

### ***3. Pastorally Applying the Holiness of God<sup>131</sup>***

When one is defiled by sin, especially sin resulting from racism (either as victim or perpetrator), enacting God's holiness upon the soul is a wonderful pastoral approach to soul care. When someone has suffered offense, the devil will be sure to tempt the victim to retaliate. Addressing both aspects—whether one is a perpetrator or a victim—takes careful attention.

One manner in which God's holiness can be applied for this specific malady when a pastor is caring for a perpetrator is through confession and absolution. This can be done formally, following a liturgical rite with the pastor being vested, or informally in the pastor's study as part of a caring conversation, to purify his or her guilty conscience and prepare the sinner to

participate in a life of God's holiness as a freed, redeemed, cleansed child of God. Likewise, a blessing can be bestowed by the pastor placing his hand on the troubled soul's head and blessing him or her with God's holy triune name; the same name that was placed upon them in baptism.

Engaging the physical senses in this way helps fortify the truth that this blessing is enactment—performative speech that actually gives what it describes. Here it's good for pastors to be specific in the language used to assure the troubled soul what is being done. For example, it's not, "May the Lord bless you and keep you," but rather, "The Lord bless you and keep you." Such blessings actively deliver certainty and enact God's holiness upon the troubled soul. Undoubtedly, this pastoral care will not be a onetime session and will very likely need to be repeated, particularly as new dimensions of spiritual defilement and contamination surface and are diagnosed.

Blessings also provide visceral treatment for a victim of racism or prejudice. Such individuals are sure to have a bad conscience with feelings of extreme hurt, sorrow, and/or anger. The pastor can instruct such a person how to use the biblical practice of lament to name the perpetrator of their injury, describe the injuries inflicted, and ask for God's righteous vengeance and intervention to heal the resulting hurt. The individual will likely suffer immensely and horribly from the shame inflicted upon him or her. That shame has undoubtedly wreaked havoc on his or her life and contaminated them in countless ways. The consolation of God's holiness actively bestowed by means of blessing brings cleansing to this defiled soul and bestows honor to cover the shame.

Repeated careful enactment of God's holy word upon a troubled conscience can bring relief and

<sup>130</sup> Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 175–178.

<sup>131</sup> For a full theological development and more detailed pastoral explanation of this section see, Woodford, "Holy God, Holy Things, Holy People: Pastoral Care in Proximity to God's Holiness." *Seelsorger: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls* Vol 1 (2015), 105–135.

renewal for the affront to their identity. It will not resolve the injustice that was suffered, but like anyone who has endured injustice, pastoral care directs the victim to Christ for vindication, even as a pastor may sensitively help the individual work toward obtaining justice as appropriate to their situation and ability.

*PASTORAL CARE DIRECTS  
THE VICTIM TO CHRIST  
FOR VINDICATION*

### ***The Power of God's Word***

Pastoral care can be enacted upon the troubled conscience in the above situation by utilizing the narrative word of God in a way that allows for 1) cognitive reframing, 2) emotional unveiling, 3) imaginative engaging, and 4) spiritual sustaining in order to bring the light of God's holiness to bear upon the various wounds of the soul.

Specifically, it could be done by verbalizing a particular portion of narrative from the scriptures, tapping into the emotion and vividness of that narrative and bringing it to bear upon the troubled soul in a way that unlocks the hurt and emotion of their own soul. In their imagination they can begin to see themselves in the narrative as the one receiving the compassion and holiness that Jesus delivers. In this case, perhaps Luke 10:25–37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan) could be used. The portrayal of someone being assaulted, beaten, stripped, left for dead, and then deemed unclean and unworthy of help, could very well resonate with a victim of racism or prejudice.

A pastor can bring the victim of racism into the story to let them hear how Jesus, the Good Samaritan (himself despised and rejected, the innocent victim of injury), has intervened for

them. Spiritually enabling them to see how Christ Jesus has come to their aid, washed their wounds, paid for their care, bound up their injuries, and intimately cares for them, can enact God's holy healing upon the troubled soul by bringing the purging forces of God's word to bear upon the injustice and trauma they endured.

Another more formal ritualized blessing might be for the pastor to lay his hands upon the head of the victim and speak 1 John 1:7 over them. This is done only after adequate conversation about the verse has taken place, and specifically uses the person's name as part of the ritual. "Name, the blood of Jesus cleanses [you] from all sin." Such enactment can be an incredibly powerful outpouring of God's holiness upon a fragile soul. The declaration of the verse names the sin inflicted so cruelly against the victim, but now absorbed and removed by the blood of Christ. It was first nailed to his body. Then he took it far away and buried it in his tomb, leaving it there and replacing it with resurrection hope and his everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

If appropriate, this could then be followed by the administration of the Lord's Supper with the context of the great sin against the victim in mind. The body and blood of Christ is given into the victim's mouth. His sacred body and most holy blood sacramentally delivers the remission (removal) of all sin and strengthens and preserves the communicant in both body and soul to life everlasting.

In other words, the Holy Supper purges every spiritual contamination of all abuse suffered from the inside out. But it also frees the victim from the shame the abuse created and imputes to the victim the purity of Christ to cleanse and sanctify that person entirely—in body, mind, and soul. At the same time, it also brings a



soothing healing to the victim's conscience. Obviously, this too is likely not a one-time occurrence of care. The intensity of such an emotional offense will likely need repeated treatment just as a single treatment of a soul will not necessarily relieve all the mental trauma a victim repeatedly relives. It may need to be repeated regularly and ritually (formally), with great care and compassion. The likely reality is that the contaminating effects of the sin against the victim may emotionally linger and be relived continually.

### ***The Last Word***

In the end, the present trauma of social justice distress is a clarion call to active ministry. Combined with acts of compassion and love by the whole body of Christ, we pastors have been given the high privilege of serving as emissaries of the Lord Jesus—the Great Shepherd of the sheep. With his words in our mouths and his sacraments in our hands we have the privilege of serving as spiritual physicians for desperately hurting souls. We can enter calmly into extremely troubled situations, because we know that we are fully authorized and commissioned servants of Christ Jesus. Our confidence is that the healing does not come from us, but from him.

The remedy for all sin, hurt, injustice and oppression is the hope and healing that comes through our Lord Jesus Christ. Pastoral care is always rooted in him and his gifts of love and grace. He is the Lord of the Church who breaks down dividing walls of hostility, reconciles the aggrieved, forgives sin, removes shame, and gives holy identity and moral character. Despite the utter chaos of our troubling times in this age of racism and social justice, pastors are given the incredible privilege and honor of caring for souls in the confidence and power of Christ and His Word.

Within the holy fellowship of sinner/saints of all races and ethnicities, Christ Jesus makes brothers and sisters of people once locked in defiant prejudice and discrimination. The old is gone; the new has come. There is only one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope that belongs to us all by God's grace: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Eph 4:5–6)

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