Healing the Sin Sick Soul: Ascetical Theology as an Antidote to Racism

by

Lynn D. Orville

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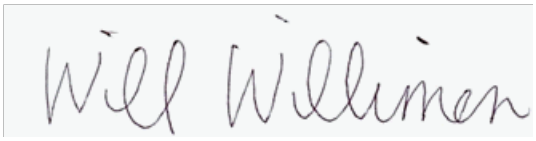

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Dr. Kavin Rowe, Second Reader

Dr. William Willimon, D.Min. Director

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
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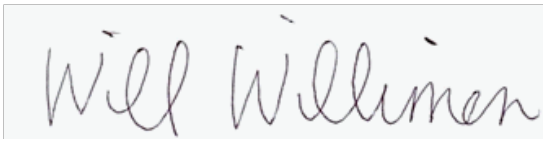

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In *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956,* Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn observed,

> If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"[1]

Jesus is clear that what comes from our hearts defiles us, and that our propensity for sin against God and others is deep inside us.[2] Stereotypes that polarize run deep, as do attitudes from which bad behavior develops.

Racism and attitudes of white supremacy are much in conversation within the church today. Books on racism, its causes, and its consequences abound. By comparison, there much less exploration of why the sin of racism exists and what causes it. Complacency about racism and white privilege afflicts the laity and the clergy alike within the American church, and its complacency in fulfilling the commandments to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves lies at the root of racism. Another word for this complacency is acedia, the root sin at the heart of racism and the role it plays in racism.

This topic is relevant to my own ministry because I am white and part of the systemic racism in American culture, and because the church in which I serve is the Episcopal Church, which is predominantly comfortable and white, and I serve in a congregation and diocese that mirror that reality. The longer I study and contemplate

[1] Good Reads, "Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn," accessed Nov. 20, 2022, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/19771050.Aleksandr_Solzhenitsyn.
[2] Mark 7:20-23, "And he said, 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'"

acedia, the more clearly I see the turn away from God and God's creation that defines the source of our "lack of care," our acedia, at the heart of our racism.

Racial reconciliation is difficult for the church, and the church is affected deeply by the lack of reconciliation found there. The presenting problem is the need for racial reconciliation in the church and the church's difficulty in accomplishing it. This thesis offers a history of racism and a thorough consideration of acedia and its part in racism and white supremacy. Reconciliation, per 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, is explored, as are other texts from the New Testament that pertain to the issue of reconciliation and relationships between people of differing ethnoracial groups. The work on racial reconciliation of Ibrahim Kendi and Jonathon Augustine is explored. The root problem of acedia is considered in light of the scriptures and the work of contemporary authors. Finally, the spiritual disciplines that are effective in dealing with acedia are offered, as well as a mechanism for racial reconciliation based on one's work overcoming acedia.

To Jane, who believed in me.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Years ago, when I was serving at St. Paul's in White Shield, North Dakota, I helped to accomplish a Vacation Bible School for the children of the town that spanned the better part of three summers. We spent nearly a year building a relationship with the people of St. Paul's and listened carefully to their dreams and goals. Youth from White Shield would work with youth who would come there from the Fort Berthold reservation. A significant cultural learning program was developed, led by the leaders of the St. Paul and White Shield communities, to educate the non-indigenous team about Arikara history, culture, and modern life on the reservation. A culturally appropriate curriculum was developed with the priest and educators from the parish. Vacation Bible Schools were accomplished over the two-year project, and the people of St. Paul's continued summer programming in subsequent years.

The grandmothers in the parish told us many stories about their lives, their trials, and their pain. One grandmother told the story of how the dam was built on the Missouri River and all that they lost when their homes were flooded by the rising waters of Lake Sakakawea there. Many tears were shed by the grandmothers, who had never told the stories of what had happened to white people. They expressed that they received healing from God through that experience. It was important that we listen with open hearts, accept their witness to their tragedies, and grieve with them the pain our culture caused.

There is a graveyard at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in White Shield on the Fort Berthold Reservation. I spent an afternoon each trip walking and praying in this graveyard. One of the graves is of a person who was named Looking to be Quiet. I have thought a great deal about the life lesson this person continues to teach me. Job 40:4

records Job answering God by saying, “See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.”[1] God is teaching me that I am to listen first and then bear witness to the pain that white supremacy is causing others. This thesis, in part, carries the record of what I have been hearing and learning about my complicity in white supremacy.

Additionally, this thesis tells of the history of racism and white supremacy, the sin that underlies racism and offers a mechanism for dealing with the evil and the racism. Finally, this thesis provides a trajectory for healing and, ultimately, racial reconciliation.

While this history is not exhaustive, Part One establishes the historical arc of racism from the early Christian church through the Middle Ages to the modern era. Beginning with Jewish scriptures and the scriptures of the New Testament, early church history, and the rise of Constantine, racism rises out of the marriage of Christianity to power. From the medieval period through the Renaissance and the rise of the world explorers to the colonial period, the institutionalism of racism grew. In the United States, with its history of the enslavement of blacks and indigenous, the history of racism spreads to the genocide of the indigenous and racism toward Asians and those considered non-white. Part One concludes by defining terms that are foundational to this study.

Part Two tells the story of the sin of acedia, its history, the extent to which it is a problem, and what it has to do with racism. The most basic description of acedia is that the one who struggles with it turns from God and from those made in God’s image; this may happen for a variety of reasons, several of which are explored. Biblical definitions

[1] Harold W. Attridge and Society of Biblical Literature, *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, rev., upd. (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 728. Unless otherwise noted all, biblical references are from the NRSV.

and the experiences and teaching of Evagrius of Pontus, other Desert Monastics, and John Cassian flesh out the early period of acedia. By the time of the Middle Ages and St. Thomas Aquinas, the definition of acedia began to change to one of sloth. The rise of the "Protestant work ethic" solidifies the understanding of sloth. This thesis argues that there is much wisdom in the early understanding of acedia, which, when recovered, offers significant insight that can be brought to bear on the process of racial reconciliation.

Part Three offers a biblical consideration and theological reflection of both acedia as well as reconciliation. Through a discussion of 2 Corinthians 5:10-21, Romans 5:10-11, Ephesians 2:13-14, and Colossians 1:20-23, the parameters of reconciliation between God and humankind are explored, as well as implications for reconciliation between humans. Additionally, the various ethnoracial identities revealed in Acts of the Apostles, Galatians 3:28, and Colossians 3:11 demonstrate that in Christ, there is no inherent difference between people despite the particularities of their race or ethnic background. Those particularities, though, are not erased but rather are seen as the uniqueness that individuals of differing backgrounds bring to the fullness of the body of Christ—one cannot differentiate between them based on worth. In racism, those particularities are seen in the light of the dominant culture and not necessarily as belonging to the dominant group.

In Part Four, the discussion turns to biases that people have concerning racism and racial reconciliation. Four specific preferences are explored: confirmation bias, loss aversion bias, status quo bias, and optimism bias. Biases often create blind spots where people cannot see their own racism. People begin to erect barriers between themselves and others, and from there, racism develops. Christena Cleveland offers a helpful schema

to understand this dynamic. Ibrahim X. Kendi's arguments about the development of racism are also considered. Jonathan C. Augustine's *Called to Reconciliation* is explored in detail. Part Four ends with an exploration of the nature of God as Trinitarian and how this understanding of God illuminates both humanity's struggle with acedia and racism and can guide the Christian to more complete reconciliation with all people as created in God's image. White supremacy and systemic racism affect all, whether racist or victim, as both have internalized the standards of white supremacy.

Part Five explores types of behaviors and education contexts that have not aided the process of racial reconciliation. The contention of this thesis is that acedia must be dealt with first in the lives of Christians before racial reconciliation can occur in the church. Racist words and actions must be dealt with, but for them to be effectively understood and dealt with, one must deal with the how and the why of racism. Thus, the focus on acedia, which causes one to turn from God and turn from those made in God's image. This thesis proposes a way forward for the church by addressing acedia and its offspring, racism. Included is a step-by-step consideration of spiritual disciplines useful in developing a rule of life that addresses acedia and racism for both the individual and the church.

The church has no hope for racial reconciliation except through the merits of Christ Jesus, who saves all those who sin. This thesis invites the individual and the church to a journey of introspection, conversation, truth-telling, confession, and reconciliation to God and racial reconciliation to others. At its heart, racism and white supremacy are spiritual problems, because to be racist, one must turn from God and from those who are created in God's image. This fundamental turn from God and from others

is best understood as the ancient and ongoing sin of acedia. When the church does not deal with acedia, fixes for racist words and actions are only band-aids masking the deeper problem. It is time for the church to deal with its sin of acedia and pursue racial reconciliation bravely. In Christ, the church has been given the word of reconciliation, and the world is starving for it.

PART ONE

Disparity Marking the Growth and Spread of Christianity

To begin our historical journey, it is vital to explore the biblical record that Christianity embraces. Genesis 1:26 records God's desire to create a humanity that will rule all the animals and other creatures of the earth, sea, and sky. By Genesis 1:28, God's actual commission was for humanity to be fruitful, fill and subdue the earth, and rule "every living thing that moves on the earth."[1] By the second generation, the power to subdue and rule was misused by Cain, and Abel lay dead (Gen 4:8). Who has power over whom, and how that power is used and misused is nearly as old as humanity's creation. When God chose to give Abram a land, a heritage, and a promise to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:1-3), it was to be for the good of all and to make God known to all the world. But by the end of Genesis, jealousy, anger, hurt, and betrayal had affected every generation of Abraham's family. Only through the grace of God and Joseph's forgiveness (Gen 45:4-8a) was Jacob's family restored.

Over the course of ancient history, the extended family of Israel learned the depravity of enslavement in Egypt, the joy of being freed from their bondage by God, the struggle of wilderness wandering, and the patterns of obedience and disobedience in establishing themselves as a nation in the Promised Land. The historical books of the Old Testament are replete with stories of power used rightly and power abused. The prophets,

[1] The Hebrew word רדה (*radah*) used in Gen 1:26, 28 means to steward, rule, or govern rather than have dominion over. So often in our culture, dominion seems to equal dominance, so I translate this word in Gen 1:26, 28 as "steward." See also Mae E. Cannon et al., *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 79.

whose standards were those of God's Torah, railed against injustice, specifically the misuse of the power of the wealthy over the lives of the vulnerable: the widows and orphans, the poor, the strangers in the land, and those without power. Even after the pain of exile and judgment, the Jews used their status of being chosen by God as a bludgeon against the foreign wives and children to send them away rather than allow them to stay and convince them of the need to love God.

Geographically, the land of Israel lies directly on the route that armies took on their way to becoming empires. The Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Romans all ruled over Israel over the course of ancient history. By the time of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, Rome ruled with a heavy hand, and the people of Judea suffered severely with poverty and hunger. Not only were they under Rome's thumb, but they were also ruled by petty kings like Herod the Great and, later, Herod Antipas, who killed John the Baptizer. The people sought a Messiah who would deliver them from Rome's rule. When Jesus began his ministry preaching that God's kingdom had come near, the people believed he was the promised Messiah who would set them free. When it became apparent that Jesus was not the political deliverer who would overthrow Rome, there was great disillusionment among the people; Jesus subsequently died a violent death at Rome's hand as a common criminal.

What turned the world upside down for the people who followed Jesus and believed in him was that on the third day, he rose from the dead. The number of Jesus' followers grew dramatically as people responded to the news that they were freed from the sin that bound their lives and that God's forgiveness was theirs because of the merits of Christ Jesus.

Even though the power of sin has been broken, there were deeply entrenched habits of exclusivity, the misuse of power, and dominion that held sway even in Christianity. An early case in point were the Greek widows who were not being fed in Acts 6. It was easy to remember to feed the Jewish widows because Christianity was a Jewish sect. The apostles believed they were to be teaching, not serving. Serving became delegated to others (the first deacons) who would serve all the widows, Jewish and Greek. This way both sets of women, who were already equal in the eyes of God, would be treated equally in the church and the distribution of food. The apostle Paul taught that in Christ, there is no ethnic or racial difference (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). All are to be welcomed because all are in Christ.

In Judea and Galilee, Christianity initially spread among the poor, who made up the crowds attracted to Jesus. Wayne Meeks argues that as Christianity spread, it flourished in the cities of the Roman Empire among the poor and enslaved.[2] While churches, like the one in Corinth, had wealthier members, Paul chastised them for using their privilege to think of themselves first and not care for the poor in the assembly (1 Cor 11:17-22). While others in the early church were members of Caesar's household or wealthy merchants like Lydia, early Christians were overwhelmingly from the lower socioeconomic and merchant classes during the first three hundred years. Early Christians were subjected to times of deprivation as well as regional and empire-wide persecutions for following Christ Jesus. The persecution of Christians under Diocletian in 303 CE was the worst among Rome's cruel emperors. Yet, even after Diocletian's death, his successor, Maxentius, continued the violent persecution of Christians.

[2] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

When Constantine wanted to be the emperor, he fought a civil war against Maxentius to consolidate his power. The ancient historian Eusebius records the history of Constantine's vision of Christ as Victor and Constantine's subsequent victory in 312. Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah document Eusebius's extended history of Constantine's victory and his becoming God's "chosen" ruler.[3] By 330, Christianity was the Roman Empire's official religion, and Constantine moved his capital to what would become known as Constantinople. Whether Constantine's conversion was genuine or whether it was simply expedient for him to marshal the forces of all the Christians to give him a supportive and thankful block of subjects, while interesting, is not within the scope of this paper.

What is important to note is that between 312 CE and 330, Christianity became wed to political power.[4] As the Roman Empire crumbled, Christians began to take positions of power within the government and used government categories to organize the church. Ecclesial terms like diocese (*dioíkāsis*), for example, once referred to geographically based administrative districts in the Roman government but became districts overseen by bishops and the church.[5] By the time of Augustine of Hippo in the early fifth century, Rome was crumbling. Augustine was the first to articulate a theology of the City of Man (the secular world) versus the City of God (the kingdom of God), as well as a theology of just war, which laid out the grounds by which war was deemed necessary for Christian kings[6] and later, for the state or nation. War would only be

[3] Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2019), 52-59.
[4] Ibid., 57.
[5] Frank L. Cross and Elizabeth A Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 404. Likewise, words like *paroiki* are from Roman governmental use, but today mean parish.
[6] Jeannine Fletcher Hill, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, & Religious Diversity in*

considered just if those with proper authority waged it, and the motive of love would be central to the violence waged.[7] From this vantage point, it is difficult to see love as a central feature of violence and war during the late Roman and early Middle Ages. Augustine, and later, Thomas Aquinas, assumed that the church "stands on the side of justice and that those within the boundaries of Christendom will act justly and stamp out the heretics of those outside of Christendom."[8]

It was in this marriage of Christianity to Roman power that the seeds of what would become first Christian supremacy and eventually white supremacy came into being.[9] At its earliest beginnings, Christianity was a sect of Judaism.[10] By the end of the first century CE, with the Council at Jamnia (Yavneh), Jewish leadership began to differentiate between those who believed the Messiah had not yet come and those who believed Jesus to be the Messiah, and they began to put out of the synagogues those who professed Christ Jesus as Lord. During the second century, Marcion began teaching that the Gospel of Christ was one of only love. This led to Marcion's rejection of what became the Old Testament and Judaism because this represented a law-based understanding of God that had nothing to do with Jesus and his gospel of love.

The teachings of Marcion contain the roots of supersessionism, a theory that articulates that Jesus and the gospels supersede Judaism. Supersessionism eventually

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America (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 41. Between the fifth and sixth centuries, the Nicene Creed became a central part of worship, reminding Christians of the theological position that other theological interpretations were inferior. The Nicene Creed was originally crafted by bishops called to an ecclesiastical council by Constantine. Charlemagne wanted Christians in his realm to affirm the same beliefs. The Nicene creed became a way of solidifying uniformity in a realm as a matter of control.

[7] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 214.

[8] Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 63.

[9] Hill, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 24.

[10] Acts 1:15 numbers the believers at 120, and later additions to their ranks made the Jesus movement sizeable enough to be a sect of Judaism.

came to see Christianity as the fulfillment of and superior to Judaism. By the Middle Ages, Jews became racialized,[11] and by the end of the thirteenth century, a third of the canons adopted by the English church dealt with Jews.[12] At this same time, blacks began to become known in England. Geraldine Heng argues that religious and racial differences began to emerge in the Middle Ages and that there was a "hierarchical politics of color."[13]

By the early Middle Ages, Christianity began to see Jewishness not as a religion but as a race. In 1130, Anacletus II was strongly considered for Pope. The problem was that he had a great-grandfather who was Jewish. Even though Anacletus II was baptized and removed from Judaism by several generations, his baptism had no effect on his Jewishness. A convert from Judaism was a convert in one's soul only, but not in one's body.[14] This pattern of conversion was also seen within colonial attitudes and times about the indigenous and enslaved Africans.

Geraldine Heng, medieval scholar and author of *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* argues in Chapter 2, "State/Nation," for the "absolute otherness" of Jews in Europe.[15] Heng argues that Jews were the "benchmark" for how otherness was defined. Jews were the resident aliens and utterly different than the Christians in Europe around them and were considered worse than Greeks or Muslims.[16] Heng further argues

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[11] Jonathan Tran, "The New Black Theology: Retrieving Ancient Sources to Challenge Racism," *The Christian Century* (Feb. 8, 2012): xx, accessed July 6, 2022, https://christiancentury.org/article/2012-01/new-black-theology.
[12] Kristopher Norris, *Witnessing Whiteness: Confronting White Supremacy in the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 180.
[13] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 42. doi:10.1017/9781108381710.
[14] Norris, *Witnessing Whiteness*, 39.
[15] Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 44.
[16] Ibid., 57.

that England's treatment of Jews was an archetype for how Jews were treated elsewhere in Europe. Given the colonial history of the American colonies and the United States, it is important to understand racializing behavior in England. As scholars have shown, the history of England's Jews is exceptional principally by virtue of the earliness, speed, and intensity of the racializing processes exhibited on English shores, which is remarkable mainly for the inventiveness and energy that was dedicated to the panoply of racemaking mechanisms delivered.[17]

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council began imposing regulations on European Jews in England and Spain and specified that identifying badges were to be worn by Jews.[18] The issue was about the purity of Christian blood and the prohibition that Jews intermarry with Christians or even have relationships with them. This shift to a system of racializing persons on the basis of blood purity was an important step toward white supremacy and made it possible for blood purity to be an issue when the Portuguese, Spanish, and English colonized the Western Hemisphere.

Nearly 100 years before Columbus' initial voyage to the "New World," Portugal and Spain were in competition for the right to explore and colonize Africa. In 1452, Pope Nicholas V issued the papal bull, *Dum Diversas,* which states:

> We grant you by these present documents, with our Apostolic Authority, full and free permission to invade, search out, capture, and subjugate the Saracens and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ, wherever they may be, as well as their kingdoms, duchies, counties, principalities and other property […] and to reduce their persons into perpetual servitude.[19]

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[17] Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages,* 58.
[18] Norris, *Witnessing Whiteness,* 39-40.
[19] Quoted text from a presentation by the Rev. Dr. Bradley S. Hauff, Missioner of Indigenous Ministries in the Episcopal Church, on March 21, 2022. An extended quote can be found at https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/dum-diversas/.

By August 1544, the first enslaved Africans were brought to Portugal.[20] On January 8, 1454, Pope Nicholas V issued a bull, *Romanus Pontifex*,[21] that was used to give Portugal power over Africa and the "infidels" there and in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1492, Spain was united under Ferdinand and Isabella when Granada came under Spanish control. They petitioned Pope Alexander VI in 1493 to arbitrate Spanish and Portuguese rights for colonization. On May 4, 1493, Pope Alexander divided the world; the east of a line that went from pole to pole would be under Portuguese control, and the west of that line, under Spanish control. The papal bull, *Inter Caetera*,[22] gave Spain and Portugal the right to "make, appoint, and depute you and your said heirs and successor lords of them with full and free power, authority and jurisdiction of every kind." Inhabitants of the land were to be instructed in the Catholic faith and trained "in good morals." These three papal bulls became the basis for the Doctrine of Discovery, which ultimately resulted in a belief in the exceptionalism of white Europeans in all matters, resulting in the enslavement of Africans and indigenous living in the Western Hemisphere, and opened the door for English colonization of North America.

The enslaved Africans and the indigenous of the Americas were not seen as being under God's saving grace. Colonialists used a theological schema to judge bodies spiritually, physically, and socially: brownness and blackness were seen as more than skin deep, but rather color permeated one to the very depths of their soul.[23] Whites had a

[20] Norris, *Witnessing Whiteness*, 41.
[21] The English text is from Frances Gardiner Davenport, ed., *European Treaties bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies to 1648* (Washington DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917), 20-26. Accessed July 4, 2022, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/nichol05/romanus-pontifex.htm.
[22] Pope Alexander VI, "Inter Caetera," accessed July 4, 2022, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/alex06/alex06inter.htm.
[23] Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 105, 108.

high probability of salvation at the top of a sliding scale, and those with brown and then black bodies had the least likelihood of salvation unless, of course, they were enslaved.[24] Willie Jennings observes that "faith seeking understanding mutated into faith judging intelligence,"[25] and in so doing, misses the grace that God makes available to all, regardless of color. While the indigenous were considered blank slates upon which Christians could write the gospel,[26] there was more controversy about the evangelism of blacks and whether a black Christian merited subsequent freedom. Over time, baptism was seen as necessary for salvation but had no relevance in relation to whether a baptized individual could or should be enslaved. In short, baptism had no effect on freedom from enslavement for blacks and indigenous.

Foundational to white supremacy is the history of animosity against those who are black. As early as Aristotle, the bias against those who were black can be demonstrated. "Ethiopian," Aristotle contended, meant "having burnt faces," and the Aristotelian perspective planted seeds of bias that began to come to fruition with the European exploration and exploitation of Africa and Africans.[27] African differences in facial features and hair, and their different manners and dress, led European whites to believe that blackness was more than skin-deep but rather was soul deep.

Kelly Douglas Brown argues that white exceptionalism in England has deep roots, going back to the turn of the first century CE, when Publius Cornelius Tacitus wrote in *Germanica* of a race of people "with fierce blue eyes, red hair, and huge frames"[28] who

[24] Norris, *Witnessing Whiteness*, 42.
[25] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 208.
[26] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 28.
[27] Ibid., 23.
[28] Kelly Douglas Brown, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 5.

defeated the Romans in battle in 9 CE at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest.[29] In 428, the first wave of Germanic peoples began moving to Britain's eastern shore and provided military support there in exchange for food and a monthly tribute.[30] The Anglo-Saxons of Britain descended in part from these early migrating Germanic peoples. Charles and Rah identify the mythological quality of Anglo-Saxon ancestry as providing the "English political and religious institutions [as] the freest in the world" and "their genius" that obligates them to a special leadership in the world. [31]

This Anglo-Saxon mythology became the lifeblood of the English over time. J. Kameron Carter argues that white Christianity became a clan religion where Anglo-Saxonism and other mythological lenses, like Aryanism, came to be worshipped by whites instead of Christ.[32] With this underlying understanding of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, it is easy to see why Puritans and Pilgrims felt they were the ones chosen to reform the Church of England, to rightly govern the church, the land, and the people they colonized in Massachusetts Bay Colony. The colonialists in Virginia brought the same Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism to Jamestown. White supremacy is defined by Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism and the prejudice against any who are not white.[33] Chattel slavery of blacks and the genocide of the indigenous are inherently part of the sin called white supremacy.

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[29] Fergus M. Bordewich, "*The Ambush that Changed History*" *Smithsonian* 36, no. 6 (September 2005) 74:81, as quoted by Nolan R. Shaw, "The Intersectionality of Race, Politics, and the Legal System: Using Theological and Historical Frameworks to Interpret the #BlackLivesMatter Movement," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 49, no. 1 (January 2022): xx, https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiE8N220131000634&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[30] Shaw, "The Intersectionality of Race, Politics, and the Legal System."

[31] Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 75

[32] J. K. Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 145-146.

[33] Allen K. Shin and Larry R. Benfield, *Realizing Beloved Community: Report from the House of Bishops Theology Committee* (New York: Church Publishing, 2022), 21.

Henry VII of Britain in 1496 granted a patent to John Cabot and his sons to claim, investigate, and possess the lands unknown by other Christians, like the Spanish and Portuguese, opening North America to English exploration. The King, although investing no money of his own in Cabot and Sons' explorations, would receive twenty percent of the profits gained. The Doctrine of Discovery began justifying the exploration, conquest, and genocide of indigenous peoples in North America with the earliest English settlements like Roanoke in North Carolina (1587), Jamestown (1606), and the Chesapeake Bay (1607). By 1608, the French and Dutch were also establishing settlements in North America. The first settlers in what would become Massachusetts came from England in 1620. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded by its first governor, John Winthrop, and nearly 1,000 Puritans in 1630.

Before disembarking from the *Arrabella* in Boston Harbor in 1630, John Winthrop preached a sermon that later became the basis for the idea that the colonists had been "providentially chosen for a special destiny."[34] He preached about the colonists' call to grow a nation, based on the Bible, for Calvinist Protestants in the colonies and England to imitate and follow. This sermon equated the Israelites conquering the Promised Land (land given by God) with the colonists conquering the land known as the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Living according to these narratives would bring about the outcomes of the global witness for the gospel and the complete possession of the land.[35] After Winthrop became the Puritan Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony,[36] he contended that

[34] Sarah Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2021), 122.
[35] Cannon, *Forgive Us*, 73-75.
[36] Over four non-consecutive terms from 1629 until his death.

because the indigenous had not "subdued and cultivated" the land,[37] according to Genesis 1:28, God's plan could only be accomplished by white Christian colonialists.[38] It was a kind of theological thinking that was at the heart of how the early colonists approached their task of creating a country. Winthrop's "City on a Hill" incorporated the theology that his interpretation was God's predestined will for all humanity. Those who were not Christian were both "detrimental and instrumental" in building the nation. In other words, the non-Christians could be used, body and soul, to build the new nation. "The labor theft of enslavement was a crucial feature in the birth of white supremacy from the theology of Christian supremacy."[39]

Disparity Marking Westward Expansion in North America

In 1792, Thomas Jefferson declared that the Doctrine of Discovery pertained to the newly founded government of the United States.[40] This had a profound influence on American treatment of the indigenous and blacks, and on American imperialism in its westward expansion. Further, Chief Justice John Marshall said that the "right of discovery" was well-illustrated by the royal commission that England's King Henry VII gave to John Cabot and his sons. The U.S. Supreme Court called this commission a "right

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[37] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 17, 21-25, 27-30. Dunbar-Ortiz documents the extensive cultivation of the land in both the northern and southern parts of North America from the Atlantic to the Mississippi River basin in the production of the "three sisters," corn, beans, and squash. The indigenous were also careful stewards of the land and had a vast network of trade routes throughout the various tribes of North America. She notes (16-17), "The vast reach and capacity of Indigenous grain production impressed colonialist Europeans. A traveler in French-occupied North America related in 1669 that six square miles of cornfields surrounded each Iroquois village . . . thanks to the nutritious triad of corn, beans, and squash—which provide a complete protein—the Americas were densely populated when the European monarchies began sponsoring colonization projects there."

[38] Hill, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 8.

[39] Ibid., 10.

[40] Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, 199.

of domination" in Johnson vs. M'Intosh, 1823, and declared that when the United States won its independence in 1776, the new nation became the rightful inheritor of Great Britain's dominion.[41] William Galbraith Miller, a nineteenth-century American legal scholar, argued:

> Christendom is now the unity, of which Christ's vicar on earth is the head, and the crusaders give a practical direction to this idea, while on the theoretical side, at a later date, it is worked out by the Spanish and Dutch jurists. They divide mankind into (1) believers, (2) infidels and heretics, and (3) heathens. International law, which is tacitly or expressly assumed to be the private civil law of Rome, applies to the first. Toward the second [category], war is the normal and proper attitude, and as to the third, if they do not at once accept the Gospel when offered, war is justifiable. This is exactly the old Greek division, believers being put for Hellenes, infidels and heretics being equivalent to barbarians, and the heathen being outside monsters.[42]

Thus, the Doctrine of Discovery was a part of the working out of white supremacy in the U.S., the outgrowth of which is an idea called racism.

As colonists settled, they displaced the indigenous through disease, hunger, forced removal, violence, and war. King James I attributed the smallpox epidemic among the Pequots after the landing of the Mayflower to God's providential goodness toward the English and the colonists.[43] Frequently targeted for violence and death were women, the elderly, and children who remained in their villages. Bounties were promised for Indian heads, but when that became too cumbersome, the colonial authorities innovated and authorized the scalps of the indigenous to be collected. Their bodies left scalp-less were

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[41] Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty*, 28. In 2005, this decision was cited by Ruth Bader Ginsburg in *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York,* which held that tribal sovereignty was not restored when tribal lands were repurchased.

[42] William Galbraith Miller, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Law, Designed Mainly as an Introduction to the Study of International Law* (London: Charles Griffin and Co., 1884), 404. Quoted in Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008), 109, accessed Aug. 6, 2022, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/reader.action?docID=478758&ppg=102.

[43] Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, 62.

called “redskins.” Indigenous children were often sold into slavery.[44] Roger Williams, for example, identified the captive of his choice, “I have fixed mine eye on this little one with the red about his neck,” but would be happy with any captive Winthrop chose to send him.[45]

Slavery was not for the indigenous in New England alone. In 1617, English Puritan author Paul Bayne wrote a justification for the enslavement of blacks, noting that “some were ‘more slavish’ than others, especially those ‘whose bodies are perpetually put under the power of the Master, as *Blackmores* with us.’”[46] By 1641, slavery was encoded into the laws of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and Connecticut followed suit in 1646.[47] As early as 1648, captured indigenous people were traded for enslaved blacks in the Caribbean.[48] The ship *Beginning,* for example, began its voyage in Rhode Island, sailed to Barbados, and then on to Africa. From the Guinea Coast in Africa, they returned to the Caribbean, sailing first to Antigua and then to Barbados before returning to Boston.[49] By 1650, 824 enslaved persons were transported from North America to the Caribbean and 702 enslaved were transported to North America.[50]

Even before the Mayflower and the Massachusetts Bay Colony, in 1619, English pirates stole between twenty and thirty enslaved Angolan Africans from a Portuguese slave ship and brought them to Point Comfort, the harbor for the Jamestown settlement.[51]

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[44] Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, 65.
[45] Wendy Warren, *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 101.
[46] Ibid., 32.
[47] Ibid., 35.
[48] Ibid., 38. See also Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, 69.
[49] Ibid., 42.
[50] Slave Voyages, *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* Estimates, accessed Aug. 6, 2022, https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates.
[51] Nikole Hannah-Jones and *The New York Times Magazine*, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York: One World, 2021), 9-10.

The ship, the *White Lion,* traded the Africans to the colonists for provisions. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the growing numbers of enslaved persons began to replace the indentured servants of European descent.[52] In 1774, delegates to the Continental Congress approved the Constitutional Association, Article 2, which prohibited the importation of enslaved persons until the end of the Revolutionary War, after which the slave trade resumed. At the time of the ratification of the United States Constitution, the Carolinas and Georgia signaled their refusal to ratify the Constitution without a clause protecting the rights to protect the slave trade.[53] A compromise was inserted in the Constitution, leading to its ratification in 1787. The Constitution also included the "Three-Fifths Clause" in Article 1, Section 2, Paragraph 3, which provides that apportionment of representatives would be based on the population of free persons (excluding "Indians not taxed") and "three-fifths" of all other male persons, those enslaved or of African descent.[54] It is not a coincidence that the authors of the Constitution were Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, both enslavers on neighboring plantations in Virginia.

The invention of the cotton gin in 1794 turned an unprofitable, labor-intensive crop into one that would become an international commodity. With the admission of Mississippi and part of Alabama to the United States in 1798, and the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, millions of acres were opened as potential fields for cotton production.[55]

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[52] History.com, "Slavery in America" (Nov. 12, 2009), accessed Feb. 10, 2024, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery#history-of-slavery.
[53] Nic Butler, "The End of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" (Jan. 26, 2011), accessed Feb. 10, 2024, https://www.ccpl.org/charleston-time-machine/end-trans-atlantic-slave-trade.
[54] National Constitution Center, "The Slave Trade Clause / The Invisible Past: Relics of Slavery in the Constitution," accessed Feb. 10, 2024, https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/interpretation/article-i/clauses/761#article-1-section-9-by-jenny-martinez.
[55] Butler, "The End of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade."

Through 1808, the importation of enslaved Africans expanded, but on January 1, 1808, it became illegal for any U.S. citizen to import enslaved persons.[56] It is estimated, though, that perhaps 250,000 were illegally smuggled into the South along the unprotected coastline.[57] Even so, there was the importation of Africans as late as 1860, when the *Clotilda* brought enslaved Africans up the Mobile River. After the enslaved were divided between the financing plantation owner, the ship's captain, and the remainder who were to be sold, the ship was burned and sunk.[58] These enslaved were freed in 1865 by Union soldiers.

Slaves comprised less than a tenth of the total Southern population in 1680 but grew to 37.97 percent of the total population in the Southern states by 1790. According to the United States Census, by 1860, there were 3,950,511 enslaved persons, 32.27 percent of the total population of the Southern states.[59] Even after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, slaves were not freed everywhere, as in the case of the *Clotilda* above, or those enslaved in Galveston, Texas, who were not freed until June 19, 1865.

The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except where it was a punishment for a crime for which the person was convicted in accordance with the laws. Rather than abolishing slavery, the codification of the criminal justice system and the punishment meted out (prison and

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[56] "An Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves." Ratified by Congress on March 2, 1807. From Butler, "The End of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade."
[57] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492–Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 168.
[58] Allison Keyes, "The 'Clotilda,' the Last Known Slave Ship to Arrive in the U.S., Is Found" (May 22, 2019), accessed Feb. 9, 2024, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/clotilda-last-known-slave-ship-arrive-us-found-180972177/.
[59] "Statistics on Slavery," PDF, accessed Feb. 10, 2024, https://faculty.weber.edu/kmackay/statistics_on_slavery.htm.

work) simply remade slavery into socially acceptable servitude. In *How the Word Is Passed*, Clint Smith discusses at length the legacy of black servitude in Angola Prison in Louisiana. Through convict leasing to companies, Angola Prison and other penal facilities across the South sought to provide the labor that was lost when the enslaved were emancipated.[60] This post-Reconstruction policy also had the effect of stifling the judicial power of blacks and their political power. [61] The charges against blacks were often illegitimate, and the sentences were long.

While the Fourteenth Amendment declared that anyone born or naturalized in the United States was a citizen, not all were considered eligible for citizenship. Even though this Amendment limited states' rights, blacks have not always been afforded the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship, and it was not until the Naturalization Act of 1870 that it legally became possible for blacks to become citizens. The Fifteenth Amendment gave all citizens the right to vote, and that right to vote could not be denied on account of race or previous servitude. Even so, through Jim Crow laws and the modern, "new Jim Crow," even today, some blacks and the indigenous are regularly denied the right to vote.[62]

Within the early history of the United States, it is important to note that white was not simply a matter of skin color. During colonial times, Benjamin Franklin thought that French, Russians, Italians, and Swedes were all people of "swarthy complexion."[63]

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[60] Thomas Fortune, black editor for the *New York Globe* wrote, "the penitentiary system of the South, with its infamous chain-gang . . . the object being to terrorize the blacks and furnish victims for contractors, who purchase the labor of these wretches from the State for a song. . . . The white man who shoots a negro always goes free, while the negro who steals a hog is sent to the chain gang for ten years." As quoted in Zinn, *A People's History of the United States,* 204.

[61] Clint Smith, *How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America* (Columbus: Little, Brown, 2021), 81.

[62] Orlan J. Svingen, "Jim Crow, Indian Style," *American Indian Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1987): doi:10.2307/1184288.

[63] Livia Gershon, "How Churches Helped Make Scandinavians White," JSTOR Daily (June 30, 2020), accessed Feb. 10, 2024, https://daily.jstor.org/how-churches-helped-make-scandinavians-white/.

Immigrants from Ireland at the time of the Potato Famine were considered other and only worthy of being servants. Greeks, Arabs, Syrians, Armenians, and Slavs were also in a "gray zone" of not entirely white.[64] People desired to be seen as white to protect themselves from discrimination and so that they would be acceptable over "inferior" others. Between 1878 and 1952, there were over fifty court cases to determine who was considered white. Christianity was often used as a proxy for racial "belonging,"[65] and white and Christianity became increasingly merged.

In 1848, John O'Sullivan, editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review,* coined "Manifest Destiny" as the name for the unique mission of the United States. Charles and Rah note that Manifest Destiny "explain[s] God's unique mission for America. That mission was to civilize and democratize the North American continent through the acquisition of territory westward to the Pacific Ocean."[66] Johnson v. M'Intosh (1823) opened the door to the removal of the indigenous from their tribal lands. President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, giving the President the authority to distribute land west of the Mississippi to the indigenous in exchange for their tribal lands. The Supreme Court had already declared that the indigenous were in "a state of pupilage" to the government, its "guardian."[67] Not only had Andrew Jackson

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[64] Matthew Wills, "How 'Prerequisite Cases' Tried to Define Whiteness," JSTOR Daily (Sept. 4, 2020), accessed Aug. 13, 2022, https://daily.jstor.org/how-prerequisite-cases-tried-to-define-whiteness/. Wills writes, "Whiteness became a matter of "white performance interpreted through the eyes of judges." A petitioner could first 'point to his own adoption of white values and his personal dramaturgy of whiteness as evidence of his appropriate racial categorization.' A second piece of evidence was 'the assimilation of his ethnic group into the core Western European, Christian tradition as evidence of his whiteness.'"

[65] Ibid.

[66] Quoted in Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 100.

[67] Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, 30 U.S. 5 Pet. 1 1 (1831) Justia: U.S. Supreme Court (website), accessed August 13, 2022, https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/30/1/. "The Indians are acknowledged to have an unquestionable, and heretofore an unquestioned, right to the lands they occupy until that right shall be extinguished by a voluntary cession to our Government. It may well be doubted whether those tribes which reside within the acknowledged boundaries of the United States can, with strict accuracy, be denominated foreign nations. They may more correctly, perhaps, be denominated domestic dependent nations. They

fought a five-month battle with the Creek Nation, who were allies of the British during the War of 1812,[68] but he was also considered the first "frontier" President. His execution of the Indian Removal Act led directly to the "Trail of Tears" and the removal of the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole from their historical lands. Each tribe was removed separately to "Indian Territory," in what would become Oklahoma. In reality, there were multiple trails of tears as the different tribes were driven west at different times.[69] Smallpox, malnutrition, and exposure all took their toll on the indigenous forced to march west.

Because of the increasing resistance to the use of enslaved labor, other sources of labor needed to be found. Invitations were offered to Asian nations to send people to the United States for work. In the twenty years between 1848 and 1868, there was an influx of Chinese, as well as other Asian immigrants to California. By 1879, there were 113,000 Chinese immigrants on the West Coast.[70] As Chinese immigration increased, whites became increasingly uncomfortable. Chinese were referred to as "immoral, vicious, pagan," as well as "idolatrous, corrupt, and pusillanimous."[71] The invectives continued against the Chinese, and white Christians were pressured to convert them. If they could be converted to Christianity, maybe they could adapt and become American. The Chinese immigrants were used as labor to build the nation on the West Coast but could not

occupy a territory to which we assert a title independent of their will, which must take effect in point of possession when their right of possession ceases; meanwhile, they are in a state of pupilage. Their relations to the United States resemble that of a ward to his guardian. They look to our Government for protection, rely upon its kindness and its power, appeal to it for relief to their wants, and address the President as their Great Father."

[68] History.com, "Andrew Jackson / Andrew Jackson's Military Career" (Oct. 29, 2009), accessed August 13, 2022, https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/andrew-jackson.

[69] Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 111.

[70] Hill, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 55.

[71] Ibid., 57.

become citizens. The Naturalization Act of 1790 limited naturalization to those whose background was white and European. Whether or not blacks were citizens depended on the laws of the state in which they resided. The indigenous could not be naturalized, and they did not become citizens of the United States until 1924. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited further Chinese immigration and their naturalization. This law was repealed in 1943, ironically, as Japanese Americans were held *en masse* in internment camps at the start of WWII.

Immediately after the Civil War, blacks began establishing and building churches, educating their children, writing petitions, and organizing politically. During the Johnson administration, southern states were allowed to enact "black codes," which limited blacks to working on the plantations or owning and working the land for themselves.[72] There was a terrible backlash as the Ku Klux Klan organized and rose to power in the late 1860s and 1870s, escalating violence against blacks. Union troops, who maintained the peace during Reconstruction and reinforced the rights of blacks, were removed from the South in 1878 by a concession made to elect Rutherford B. Hayes as President. The Southern Homestead Act was repealed, and all the federal lands set aside for black farmers were sold. After Reconstruction, under the Jim Crow laws, blacks were regularly denied the right to vote, the right to own property, segregated, and lynched. At the same time black rights were eroding, the indigenous, who were losing their wars against the white settlers and the U.S. Army, were relegated to reservations, which were relatively small, desolate pieces of land often far removed from their homelands.

[72] Zinn, *A People's History of the United States,* 193-194.

Theological Justifications for Racism

During the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant argued that four races emanated from Adam and Eve in Genesis, but it was the white race that most nearly achieved "the original perfection of Adam and Eve."[73] J. Kameron Carter argues that Kant thought the developmental progress of whites was a destiny of their "perfection" and that the other races had lost that perfection.[74] Quoting Kant, Carter concludes that neither "Americans (the Indigenous) nor Negroes can rule themselves. They serve only, therefore only as slaves."[75]

In 1748, Montesquieu, a French philosopher, declared, "It is impossible for us to suppose these creatures [enslaved Blacks] to be men because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christian."[76] The idea of the humanity of enslaved blacks was a threat to one's own faith, so to preserve that faith, one must deny the humanity of blacks and the indigenous. One's fear, therefore, rationalized racism. The theological implication of this is that when God created humanity in Genesis 1 and 2, is that God only created whites.

The "Curse of Ham" was widely accepted as the biblical and theological justification for the enslavement of Africans. In writings from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, David Whitford identifies a "Curse Matrix"[77] based on the eisegesis and misuse of Genesis 9. This Curse Matrix not only justified the slave trade but

[73] Hill, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 15.
[74] Carter, *Race*, 90.
[75] Ibid., 92.
[76] James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2007), 143.
[77] David Whitford, "A Calvinist Heritage to the 'Curse of Ham': Assessing the Accuracy of a Claim about Racial Subordination," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 1 (2010): 27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23923454.

made the trader and the owner of the enslaved seem almost virtuous. There were three fundamental parts of this Curse Matrix. First, the imprint of God's curse was the black skin of the Africans and was seen as the "signal and sign" of the need for slavery as a remedy for their cursedness. Second, "hypersexuality and libidinousness" were how Africans embodied this curse. Finally, slavery helped the African "heathens" by exposing them to the Gospel of Christ and the culture of their enslavers.

Josiah Priest (writing in 1843) argued that Ham was born black; hence, the name Ham means "black."[78] There is no validity to this argument exegetically. The idea that Ham meant "black" did not originate in the United States but was used in England as early as 1660 and in an 18th-century French dictionary.[79] David M. Goldenberg argues that there is no justification exegetically or etymologically for this argument, as the name Ham does not, in Hebrew or any other Semitic language, mean "'dark,' 'black,' or 'heat.'"[80] Further, it must be noted that the curse was given to Canaan, one of Ham's sons.[81]

A second biblical text, Genesis 4:6-12, tells the story of God's curse on Cain after he killed his brother, Abel. Cain was given a mark that people could see as a result of the curse. The mark was a sign that "demonstrates to him that he will not be killed . . . and that Cain himself was the sign that warned people against murder."[82] The exegetical meaning is suspect when one argues that the curse of Cain was because of the blackness of his skin after the curse, which is not part of the biblical text. Additionally, Cain was to

[78] David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 143.
[79] Ibid., 144.
[80] Ibid., 149.
[81] "When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers" (Gen. 9:24-25).
[82] W. G. Plaut and David E. Stein, *תורה* (New York: Urj Press, 2005), 28.

be condemned to become a wandering fugitive, not enslaved. It also must be noted that Cain's descendants did not survive the Flood, and there would be no one to inherit his supposedly black skin. These difficulties surrounding Cain's curse made the Curse of Ham the more popular theological narrative given for the enslavement of blacks. In 1857, a Presbyterian minister named George D. Armstrong advanced a third theory that Genesis 9:20-25 applied directly to Africans and African Americans in his pamphlet, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery."[83]

In 1682, legislation in Virginia categorized slaves as "all servants . . . who and whose parentage and native country are not Christian at the time of their first purchase."[84] Christian arguments often cited paganism, animism, and Islamic inferiority in Africa as a theological justification for the enslavement of blacks. White supremacy became implicit in Christian power because even when blacks became Christian, they were still considered less than white Christians.[85] James Cone observes, "The claim that whites had the right to control the black population through lynching and other extralegal forms of mob violence was grounded in the religious belief that America is a white nation called by God to bear witness to the superiority of white over black."[86]

Rather than God, the focus of the creation account became white bodies. The theological imagination became rooted in the idea of white superiority; hence, white flesh was imagined over black flesh. The mind, as well as the body and skin, was likewise

[83] Cannon, *Forgive Us*, 88-89.
[84] Hill, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 63.
[85] Ibid., 63.
[86] James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 7-8.

affected, with white intelligence superior to the intelligence of other races.[87] The theological failure is captured by Jennings when he argues that

> white indicates high salvific viability, rooted in the signs of movement toward God (for example, cleanliness, intelligence, obedience, social hierarchy, and advancement in civilization). Europeans reconfigured Christian social space around white and black bodies. If existence between Christian and non-Christian, saved and lost, elect and reprobate was a fluid reality that could be grasped only by detecting the spiritual and material marks, then the racial scale aided this complex optical operation.[88]

From Aristotle's identification of blacks as Ethiopian to the early Pauline injunction that "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11), there are early indications that people thought along racial lines to exclude some from others. Paul would not have to remind Christians that there is no difference if, in practice, there was no difference.

The Romans were impressed by the early Germanic peoples because of their strength and cunning in war and used them as mercenaries to maintain Roman power. By the last century of the Roman Empire, Christianity was the official religion of the realm, and the marriage of Christianity to worldly power planted seeds of dominion that began to corrupt the Gospel. As Rome's control and power over the Empire ebbed, the Western church took over in Rome and its power spread throughout Western Europe during the early Middle Ages.

In what would become England, Christianity and its power became wed to the Anglo-Saxon myth of its superiority and ability to lead. The racialization of Jews, and

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[87] Cannon, *Forgive Us*, 101.
[88] Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 35.

later Africans in medieval England, Spain, and Italy led to laws about racial purity. By the time of the papal edicts of the fifteenth century, which became the basis of what would be known as the Doctrine of Discovery, white Christian supremacy was a foregone conclusion. Hill contends, "theologians are not only responsible for the past constructions of ideologies of White supremacy and conditions of dispossession for people of color. Those past constructions of White Christian supremacy created the conditions of the racialized disparity we experience in the United States today."[89]

Culturally, in Robin Di'Angelo's view, whites tend to see racist actions as individual in nature but are loathe to see racism and white supremacy as a cultural schema in which all people participate. Racists are not rare individuals whose words and actions communicate animosity toward people of color; rather, all people participate in a hierarchical social structure where the people of color are victimized by racism and white supremacy inherent in American and Christian culture.[90]

Definitions

The definition of some terms used throughout this thesis is essential. Words like race, racism, color-blind racism, white fragility, and white supremacy can be hot buttons; therefore, it is helpful to define the terms I am using. Race, for example, is a socially constructed category, not based on biology but rather a humanly created schema that changes over history. In Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's view, "When race emerged in human

[89] Hill, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 81.
[90] Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 8-9, identifies some of the social forces that hold the hierarchy in place: meritocracy and individualism, media-driven portrayals of people of color as well as whiteness being recognized as the cultural ideal. Objectivity and Western individualism, in which we are understood to be unique and separate from others who possess no bias in our thinking.

history, it formed a social structure (a racialized social system) that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the people who became "white") over non-Europeans."[91] As Ta-Nehisi Coates famously observed, "Race is the child of racism, not the father."[92] These systems, known as white supremacy, affected all societies where Europeans held sway. This ideology is used to justify or challenge the racial status quo.[93] DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy use the formula "racial prejudice + social power = racism."[94] Cornell Law School defines racism as:

> the incitation of discrimination, hatred, or violence towards a person or a group of persons because of the origin or their belonging, or not belonging, to a specific ethnic group or race…More broadly, racism can be defined as a set of theories and beliefs that establishes a hierarchy of races and ethnicities based on misconceptions and stereotypes. Racism is a form of discrimination founded on the origin or on the ethnic/racial background of the victim. Interpersonal racism often involves slurs or hateful actions between individuals, and individual racism is an embodiment of the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that 'support or perpetuate racism in conscious and unconscious ways.[95]

People are disparaged because of their physical appearance, character traits, values, aptitudes, and/or defects. Whites are not socialized to see their own race, only the race of others. Race becomes the definition of the "other," those who do not measure up to whiteness. Stereotypes are used to justify verbal and physical violence against the victim of racism. Their dignity and honor are undermined by the hatred directed toward them. "Racism refers to any type of discrimination that occurs when an individual is a

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[91] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 8.
[92] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: One World, 2015), 7.
[93] Ibid., 9.
[94] Robin DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy, "Getting Slammed: White Depictions of Race Discussions As Arenas of Violence," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 17, no. 1 (2012):14, doi:10.1080/13613324.2012.674023, as quoted in K. T. Resane, "White Fragility, White Supremacy, and White Normativity Make Theological Dialogue on Race Difficult," *In Die Skriflig* 55, no. 1 (2021): 2, accessed February 15, 2023, https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v55i1.2661.
[95] Cornell Law School, "Racism," accessed Feb. 24, 2023, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/racism.

victim of disparate treatment because of their actual or perceived race."[96] K. T. Resane argues that racism is a "subliminal attitude so deeply embedded in people's hearts that its removal from the statutes of the state does not erase it at all."[97]

Racism is "the segment of the ideological structure of a social system that crystallizes racial notions and stereotypes."[98] Races are not determined biologically or genetically but socially.[99] Evaluating the habitual strength of racism and white supremacy requires evaluating the recurring contextual cues. In the case of race, the phenotypical characteristics of the color of another's skin, the shape of their facial features, or the texture of their hair can activate a response in memory. Additionally, the strength of this association can actually deactivate alternative responses that are not racist.[100] This is to say that the power of the reaction can disincline a person from making an alternative, better choice. Motivations to do things differently do not necessarily mean that changing habits is any more accessible.[101] "The findings from neuroscience, animal learning, and correlational research on everyday behavior suggest that habits are performed with limited influence from motivations once developed."[102] Once the habit of racism and acting on one's racial privilege is developed, motivations do not easily help one to change those habits.

Per Resane, as an ideology through which racism can be expressed, white supremacy is more severe than simple racism or bigotry. When blacks are deemed to be

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[96] Cornell Law School, "Racism."
[97] Resane, "White Fragility, White Supremacy and White Normativity," 1.
[98] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (1997): 474, doi:10.2307/2657316.
[99] Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism," 472.
[100] David T. Neal et al., "The Pull of the Past," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37, no. 11 (2011): 1428, doi:10.1177/0146167211419863.
[101] Ibid., 1428.
[102] Ibid., 1429.

socially inferior, white supremacy is reproduced through social interactions.[103] The Anti-Defamation League defines white supremacy as a belief system that will have one or more of these four tenets: 1) whites should have dominance over people of other backgrounds, especially where they may co-exist, 2) whites should live by themselves in a whites-only society, 3) white people have their own "culture" that is superior to other cultures, and 4) white people are genetically superior to other people.[104] It is important to remember that beliefs like white supremacy may be conscious and overt or unconscious and covert, and one need not embrace all four tenets of the definition above to be considered to have white supremacist beliefs. So long as one looks down on another (non-white) culture as inferior, one is a white supremacist. Many white supremacists believe that white culture or the white race is in danger of extinction, but again, not all do. White supremacy is the "willingness of those in power to benefit from the privilege afforded them by it." Race scholars define white supremacy as a "sociopolitical economic system of domination based on racial categories that benefit those defined or perceived to be white."[105]

Color-blind racism is where whites "rationalize minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena and blacks' imputed cultural limitations."[106] Color-blindness assumes that racism is an individual act intentionally accomplished.[107] It is, in short, a covert and subtle racism, not based on the overt Jim Crow laws, but rather racism that defies easy definition. "Instead of

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[103] Resane, "White Fragility, White Supremacy and White Normativity," 3.
[104] Anti-Defamation League, "White Supremacy," accessed February 25, 2023, https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-term/white-supremacy.
[105] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 30.
[106] Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 2.
[107] Kristopher Norris, "Race and Resurrection," *Theology Today* 77, no. 1 (2020): 35, accessed May 21, 2022, doi:10.1177/0040573620902409.

proclaiming that God placed minorities in the world in a servile position, it suggests they are behind because they do not work hard enough"[108] or that interracial marriage is not wrong along racial lines but problematic because of the children. It is a stealthy and institutional kind of racism that can extol a university's affirmative action program while at the same time decrying the system as discriminatory against whites.[109] White people are protected from seeing their color by color blindness; whites are "blind to our own racial formation."[110] Whiteness is invisible, and whites universalize themselves as representing all and are blind to the experiences of others.

White fragility, as defined by D'Angelo, is an internalized sense of superiority of which whites are unaware or to which whites are unable to admit. When whites talk about meritocracy, individualism, and color blindness, white identities as moral people are challenged. Whites understand as unfair and immoral any effort to connect all whites to the system of racism. Whites respond defensively and with guilt, anger, and fear. Silence, withdrawal, and argumentation are all employed to defend against this challenge and to reinstate racial comfort and dominance. Even minimal amounts of racial stress are intolerable and defensive moves are made to reinstate white racial equilibrium.[111] Objectivity, taboos about discussing race, expectations of and entitlement to racial comfort, white solidarity, white racial innocence, meritocracy, white authority, an expectation that people of color will serve whites; white centrality and the universality of white supremacy all contribute specifically to white fragility and trigger a response of

[108] Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 3.
[109] Ibid., 4.
[110] Norris, "Race and Resurrection," 35.
[111] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 2, 99-103.

defensiveness which is charged with emotion.[112] White fragility is the "sociology of dominance" where whites have been socialized into white supremacy and will protect, maintain and reproduce that supremacy.[113]

White normativity is "an internal or subconscious conviction that whites are privileged to establish and maintain certain norms and standards to which others must adhere."[114] Whites are defined as the norm for what it means to be human, and persons of color are not the norm but a deviation.[115] Whites control policies and practices as a way of controlling public spaces; likewise, whites control the narrative about being smarter, kinder, and more intellectual than persons of color.[116] Whites, generally, have the inability to see the perspectives of people of color because of their immersion in and the universally white perspective of the dominant culture.

Christians are not immune to the effects of racism and white supremacy. In the Western Hemisphere, racism and white supremacy originated with the Christian colonists. Christianity devolved from its earliest love of Jesus and the radically inclusive nature of the church to become an entity that created "others," people who were seen as subhuman and only suitable for enslavement and the destruction by genocide. Right belief became more important than right relationships.[117] This became a worldview that refused the vast diversity of God's creation and institutionalized hatred of those who were not white.[118] According to Hess, "these commitments have come to be shaped

[112] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 103-104.
[113] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 113.
[114] Resane, "White Fragility, White Supremacy and White Normativity," 3.
[115] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 25.
[116] Resane, "White Fragility, White Supremacy and White Normativity," 4.
[117] Mary E. Hess, "White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility: Lessons From Mystics," *Religious Education* 112, no. 1 (2016): 49, doi:10.1080/00344087.2016.1253124.
[118] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 63-83.

through time into a particularly narrow understanding of Christianity, which built a pernicious construction of race."[119]

At the root of white supremacy and racism lie many types of sin. These habits of sin developed over centuries and are knit deeply into our culture's DNA and who we are as a people. Habits like sin develop when people give the same or similar ungodly responses repeatedly in a particular context. Sinful associations form in the memory between the recurring contextual cues and the responses one gives.[120] Besides the particulars that are believed and acted upon about race that point directly to Christian racism, there is a deeper sin of complacency that undergirds white supremacy and racism. This sin brings about the effect that whites are content with how things are, racially speaking, and satisfied that nothing needs changing. This complacency suggests that other habits and motivations are at work within racism. I will argue that in the case of racism and white supremacy, the underlying motivations and habits of sin are called acedia.

[119] Hess, "White Religious Educators Resisting White Fragility," 50.
[120] Neal et al., "The Pull of the Past," 1428, doi:10.1177/0146167211419863.

PART TWO

Acedia: The Noonday Demon

"My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word" (Psalm 119:28).

In the acrostic meditation on Torah known as Psalm 119, the psalmist considers how the instruction of the Lord was to be applied throughout the psalmist's life. Amid the early meditations is v. 28. In the Septuagint passage cited above, the sorrow that melts the soul is ἀκηδία,[1] known within the tradition of the desert fathers and mothers as *accidie*, or in today's English, *acedia*. Acedia has been defined as "despondency, depression, listlessness, a distaste for life without any specific reason,"[2] but its definition is far broader than what Benedicta Ward offers. Acedia, or "lack of care" in Greek, is a spiritual malady often referred to as the "noonday demon" that hindered the early desert monastics in their devotion to God. The history of the sin of acedia dates to the fourth century CE in the Egyptian desert hermitages. Evagrius Ponticus is the first to articulate the eight types of evil thoughts one has,[3] one of which, acedia, would become known

[1] ἀκηδία, literally "lack of care." It is synonymous with *accidie* and the English, acedia. Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 2-3, offers a history of the various uses of acedia and its synonyms over the years. Frank L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 10, defines accidie as negligence or indifference. Acedia is the exact transliteration from Koine Greek.

[2] Benedicta Ward, SLG, ed., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Studies, 1975), 249.

[3] Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer* (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 16-17, 26. Gluttony, impurity, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride are the eight general and basic categories of thoughts and are included in every thought. Evagrius writes, "It is not in our power to determine whether we are disturbed by these thoughts, but it is up to us to decide if they are to linger within us or not and whether or not they are to stir up our passions." Evagrius refers to these eight thoughts also as demons. "The noonday demon [acedia], however, is accustomed to embrace the entire soul and oppress the spirit."

over time as the sin of sloth. In this thesis, acedia will be the term used when discussing this vice, except when accidie or sloth is used in specific quotes.

Evagrius was born in 346 and lived in Constantinople until he moved to Mount Nitria, some fifty miles southeast of Alexandria in Egypt, where he lived until his death in 399. A student of Origen, he also studied under the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. The monks among whom Evagrius eventually lived were mostly uneducated Egyptian peasants. They were, however, spiritually intense, having ascetic and mystical practices.[4]

It is from Evagrius that we get the clearest picture of acedia:

> The demon of acedia—also called the noonday demon—is the one that causes the most serious trouble of all. He presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour. First of all, he makes it seem that the sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is fifty hours long. Then he constrains the monk to look constantly out the windows, to walk outside the cell, to gaze carefully at the sun to determine how far it stands from the ninth hour [about three o'clock and dinner time], to look this way and now that to see if perhaps [one of the brethren appears from his cell]. Then too, he instills in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life itself, a hatred for manual labor. He leads him to reflect that charity has departed from among the brethren and that there is no one to give encouragement. Should there be someone at this period who happens to offend him in some way or other, this, too, the demon uses to contribute further to his hatred. This demon drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities, more readily find work and make a real success of himself. He goes on to suggest that, after all, it is not the place that is the basis of pleasing the Lord. God is to be adored everywhere. He joins to these reflections the memory of his dear ones and of his former way of life. He depicts life stretching out for a long period of time and brings before the mind's eye the toil of the ascetic struggle and, as the saying has it, leaves no leaf unturned to induce the monk to forsake his cell and drop out of the fight. No other demon follows close upon the heels of this one (when he is defeated), but only a state of deep peace and inexpressible joy arise out of this struggle.[5]

[4] Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2017), 4.
[5] Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos*, 18-19.

Acedia was known and described by Evagrius as both a sin and the "noonday demon" based on Psalm 91:6 (90:6, LXX).[6] Christianity possesses no single definition or description of what is meant by the word demon. While the Hebrew *qotob*[7] means destruction or pestilence,[8] the word used in the Greek Septuagint and the New Testament is *diamon* (demon). Evagrius saw the "noonday demon" as a literal demon as well as a sin with which monks had to contend. Descriptions of the personification of acedia as a demon and how that demon torments and leads to the destruction of a monk's vocation are found within the writings of Evagrius (see above) and other desert monastics (below). They attribute to acedia evil will and power. The gospels, for example, contain forty-seven instances of the word "demon," attributing to them things like mental illness or epilepsy or of a being that otherwise tormented people. Even Jesus was accused of having a demon, but he was clear that he did not, but rather did the will of God his Father (John 8:48-52).

If one pictures acedia as a caricature of a demon with a pitchfork, it is helpful to recall Plato's *Apologies of Socrates,* where a demon is "a voice which comes to me and always forbids me to do something which I am going to do, but never commands me to do anything."[9] Rather than understand acedia as an evil being, one can understand acedia as a voice within a person, a voice that forbids one from turning to God and leaving one to remain self-reliant. This is one more way to appreciate Evagrius' description of the

[6] "or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the *destruction* that wastes at noonday" (Ps. 91:6).
[7] For the other three uses of *qotob* in the Old Testament scriptures, see Deu 32:24, Isa 28:2, and Hos 13:14.
[8] Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 881.
[9] "Plato, The Apology of Socrates," 31d, The Center for Hellenic Studies, last modified March 2, 2021, https://chs.harvard.edu/primary-source/plato-the-apology-of-socrates-sb/.

"noonday demon." Acedia then becomes a sin when one acts on that voice inside and turns from God and creation.

Other traits of the temptation called acedia are found in other works of Evagrius. One suffering from acedia has a life where they are still too attached to sensual pleasures, and they long to leave the cell and the company of the other monks to seek salvation elsewhere. Acedia is called "the most dangerous as well as 'the most oppressive' of all temptations"[10] because it opens the door to every other temptation and may cause one to leave the life of faith altogether. It is also said to be "the most subtle [of sins] and most to be feared."[11] The best remedy for acedia is to pray assiduously[12] while practicing endurance and patience. Reciting the Psalms, shedding tears, and meditation on scripture will also remedy the soul struggling with acedia.

Benedicta Ward wrote this about one of the most famous desert fathers, Anthony the Great:

> When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert, he was beset by *accidie* and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, "Lord, I want to be saved, but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?" A short while afterward, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, "Do this, and you will be saved." At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.[13]

Amma Theodora taught:

> It is good to live in peace, for the wise man practices perpetual prayer. It is truly a great thing for a virgin or a monk to live in peace, especially for the younger ones. However, you should realize that as soon as you intend to live in peace, at once

[10] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 5.
[11] Jeffery B. Russell, cited by Christopher R. Putney, "Nikolai Gogol's 'Old-World Landowners': A Parable of Acedia," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 47, no. 1 (2003): 3, doi:10.2307/3220107.
[12] Cross and Livingstone, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 11.
[13] Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 1-2.

> evil comes and weighs down your soul through *accidie*, faintheartedness and evil thoughts. It also attacks your body through sickness, debility, weakening of the knees, and all the members. It dissipates the strength of soul and body so that one believes one is ill and no longer able to pray. But if we are vigilant, all these temptations fall away.[14]

Evagrius described the evil thoughts that disturb one's inner peace as *logismoi* (passions or evil thoughts), the tools that demons used as instruments of temptation.[15] Maximus the Confessor taught that demons seize control by stirring up impassioned thoughts, which then war within the mind and lead to sin in thought. When this is accomplished, it is often the case that this warring leads one to sin, not just in thought but in deeds. Because acedia is referred to as both a demon and an evil thought, for Evagrius, it shares characteristics with the other seven "evil thoughts."[16] The desert fathers described a listlessness in one's joy in the Lord as a symptom of acedia, and that one who suffers acedia is "spiritually tepid as a lukewarm pot of milk the flies can settle on."[17] Acedia is manifest not just in listlessness in one's relationship with God but in apathy toward life that can manifest itself as despondency and "a feeling of feelinglessness—the acute sense that the most one feels is a dull ache."[18]

Acedia can also be manifest as a continual restlessness and a relentless search for anything that can replace one's relationship with God. At its core, acedia is apathetic about God and the things that are important to God, like loving one's neighbor. Responses to acedia can be found anywhere on a continuum from sleep and laziness to

[14] Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 83.
[15] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth* 14.
[16] Ibid., 16.
[17] Ibid., 32.
[18] Vincent Colapietro, "Acedia: A Case Study of a Deadly Sin and Lively Sign," *Semiotica* 117.2/4, 1997, 357-380, cited in Putney, "Nikolai Gogol's 'Old-World Landowners'," 16.

mindless busyness and frenetic work.[19] Acedia is about "going through the motions" without "a due consciousness of where we are going or what all our activity is for.[20]

Evagrius was the first to establish a system of eight chief vices or evil thoughts, although none of them rose to the level of acedia, which for him was the pre-eminent vice.[21] The neglect of the highest spiritual good (loving God), combined with the weariness at noon, the monotony of the desert monk's cell, and the temptation to walk away and quit, all defined the sin of acedia.

A scholium by Origen states, "The 'noonday demon' he calls acedia or negligence. The 'noonday demon' attacks some people. Now and then they suffer this attack when the mind is broken by love of pleasure, when the heart grows slack and is weighed down by fleshly love, when it grows weary on account of the works of piety and grows old on account of its pains with regard to [the pursuit of] virtue."[22] Michael Mangis argues that acedia is the antithesis of worship and neglects the greatest commandment: to love God with one's heart, soul, mind, and strength.[23] The Cappadocian Fathers, particularly St. Basil, Athanasius, and others whose lives were greatly influenced by Egyptian desert monasticism, wrote about acedia, affirming that it was a common experience among the desert monastics.[24] Within Eastern Christianity, acedia continued to be understood in this vein. St. John Chrysostom counseled: "Those

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[19] Jana Bennett and David Cloutier, eds., *Naming Our Sins: How Recognizing the Seven Deadly Vices Can Renew the Sacrament of Reconciliation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2019), 92.
[20] Ibid., *93*.
[21] Bennett and Cloutier, *Naming Our Sins*, 17.
[22] J. B. Pitra, ed., *Analecta Sacra Spicilegii Solesmensis*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1876), III, 170ff. Cited in Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 7.
[23] Michael Mangis, *Signature Sins: Taming Our Wayward Hearts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 52.
[24] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 11

who think about the lofty, and not the earthly, should overcome not only anger and lust and the other passions, but also despondency [acedia] because it can cause us more harm than those other passions, and those who do not want to perish entirely must bravely struggle against it."[25]

How Acedia Shifts in the West

Within Western Christianity, the use of the word and meaning of acedia began to change with John Cassian. Late in the fourth century, he visited the monks' colonies in Egypt and got to know Evagrius, who was to influence his life profoundly.[26] Cassian eventually arrived in France, setting up monastic communities in Marseilles. He wrote two treatises on monastic life,[27] one in which he articulated the eight chief vices. His description of acedia is instructive:

> Our sixth combat is with what the Greeks call acedia, which we may term weariness or distress of the heart. This is akin to dejection and is especially trying to solitaries, and a dangerous and frequent foe to dwellers in the desert; and especially disturbing to a monk about the sixth hour, like some fever which seizes him at stated times, bring the burning heat of its attacks on the sick man at usual and regular hours. Lastly, there are some of the elders who declare that this is the "midday demon" spoken of in the ninetieth Psalm [LXX, Psalm 91:6].[28]

Wenzel notes that, for Cassian, acedia instills not only an abhorrence and disgust for the cell, but also a contempt for the brethren,[29] imagining he could do better elsewhere; becoming confused, he seeks other's company, and if it becomes a habit, "the

[25] Putney, "Nikolai Gogol's 'Old-World Landowners'," 4.
[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] *De Institutis Coenobiorum* (425CE) and *Collationes Patrum* (426-428 CE).
[28] *De Institutis Coenobiorum*, Book X as quoted in Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 19.
[29] This feature of contempt for the brethren, leaving one's profession of faith, and the opposing virtue of fortitude/courage will factor into my argument about acedia at the root of racism.

monk will soon give up his profession altogether."[30] For Cassian, the virtue that opposes acedia is fortitude or courage.

It must be noted that up until Cassian, acedia was very much tied to the experiences of the monks of the Egyptian desert. It was a particular struggle for the solitary to maintain their life with God. The boredom, social isolation, and other challenges for the desert fathers made this sin a threat. Within Western monasticism, however, where the monks lived in community, acedia began to take on new meanings and new associations that expanded rather than limited their understanding of acedia. With Cassian's work systematizing the list of vices, one can observe the interconnectedness of acedia to sadness and wrath. This interconnection between the vices later would become a regular feature for understanding the vices.

By the time of Pope Gregory I in the sixth century,[31] acedia was replaced by the descriptor *tristitia,* a sin of grief or sorrow. Gregory did not discuss each vice with the thoroughness of Evagrius or Cassian, but rather identified two kinds of sorrow that could be experienced: a sorrow that leads to repentance and a sorrow that is from the frustration of sinful desires.[32] It is also in the sixth century that, in the Rule of St. Benedict, the transition from *tristitia* to sloth can also be seen.[33] In the end, Gregory's categorization of

[30] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 19.
[31] Gregory the Great was the first ancient pope to come out of the Benedictine monastic tradition.
[32] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 26.
[33] The Prologue of the Benedictine Rule states, "so that by the work of obedience you may return to Him from whom you had withdrawn through the sloth of inobedience." Quoted in Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth,* 27. "Understand with will mind and effectually fulfill thy holy father's admonition; that though mayest return, by the labour of obedience, to Him from Whom, by the idleness of disobedience, thou hast withdrawn." Benedict of Nursia, "The Rule of St. Benedict," Solesmes Abbey, Community of Benedictine Monks, Gregorian Chant, accessed December 26, 2022, https://www.solesmes.com/sites/default/files/upload/pdf/rule_of_st_benedict.pdf.

the vices became known as the "seven deadly sins" and became a usual way of teaching and preaching about the vices.

In the eleventh century, David of Augsburg identified three different manifestations of acedia, calling it a vice. The first is where one's mind cannot be satisfied by things that are good or pleasant; one loathes relationships with others and is disgusted by things that are wholesome, and is suspicious of everything being moved to despair, grief, and reticence. The second manifestation is one of laziness: the love of sleep and creature comforts, the shunning of work, preferring instead to be idle. This second manifestation often goes by the name sloth. The third manifestation is boredom and fatigue with activities that orient one toward God. One afflicted by acedia is bored by prayer and devotion, preferring anything else to God.[34]

By the thirteenth century, for both monastics and the laity outside monastic communities, acedia was a spiritual malaise, weariness, and a general lukewarmness about one's life with God that kept one away from religious exercises and prayer.[35] Those who struggle with acedia desire anything other than God, doing God's will, and they have an aversion against those things, like the love of God, from which one should not run away.[36]

Building on the work of Cassian and Pope Gregory I, Thomas Aquinas identified sloth (acedia) as when one "sorrow[s] about spiritual good in itself," oppressing a person so as to "draw him away entirely from good deeds," and where one longs for things that are reckoned "evil and worthless."[37] Charity (love) is the foremost of the theological

[34] *Formula novitiorum, 51,* cited in *Norris, Acedia and Me,* 291.
[35] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 35.
[36] Ibid., 44.
[37] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed November 23,

virtues, and love is the virtue at which sloth (acedia) takes specific aim. Charity is love that has spiritual joy, where a person rejoices in God and in the Divine good. "Sorrow in the Divine good about which charity rejoices" is the sin of sloth (acedia).[38] Charity helps individuals to love God, love their neighbor, and love themselves; when acedia is in action, the converse is true. Charity corrects disinterest in God and hatred of others.[39] Aquinas argues that sloth (acedia) is a mortal sin because "it destroys the spiritual life, which is the effect of charity, whereby God dwells in us . . . sloth is sorrow about spiritual good in as much as it is a Divine good."[40] The slothful individual is one who is sorry to have to be or do something for God's sake. Aquinas references Gregory I, who attributes to sloth several other children, other issues of sin that derive from sloth, as "wandering after unlawful things."[41] Bitterness, idleness, wandering from thing to thing, negligence about pursuing God, and omission of obedience to God are but some of the children of sloth (acedia).

It was not until the Fourth Lateran Council that confession for all Christians at least once a year, and preaching on Christian faith and morals was mandated. Teaching and preaching on the seriousness of acedia as not only a sin itself but a doorway to many other sins was common.[42] The rise of confessional instructions (codifying sin and penances), catechetical handbooks, and handbooks for preachers in the English church, and to a lesser degree, the French church of the late medieval period[43] all helped to

2022, https://ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/summa.SS_Q35_A1.html.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Christopher D. Jones and Conor M. Kelly, "Sloth: America's Ironic Structural Vice," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2017): 123, doi:10.1353/sce.2017.0036.
[40] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 80-82.
[43] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 78.

educate clergy and laity alike concerning acedia. By the late medieval period (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries), acedia continued to transition to sloth, from spiritual dryness to laziness, from "a vice of the spirit to a vice of the flesh."[44] By the time of the Renaissance, with its humanistic emphasis, away from the God-centered world of the first millennium and early medieval period, acedia, with its inappetence, became sloth, physical laziness. With the Protestant Reformation, and especially the theology of Calvin, sloth would become a chief sin because to be lazy was a breaking of God's commandment to work.[45]

Writing in the early 1900s, Max Weber argues, "Waste of time is thus the first and, in principle, the deadliest of sins . . . because every hour lost is lost to labour for the glory of God."[46] The person who opposes sloth by working conscientiously fulfills the two greatest commandments to glorify God and love one's neighbor.[47] Jones and Kelly write, "Given God's transcendence and inscrutable will, the best way to be assured that one is, in fact, a member of God's elect is by demonstrating faith through work."[48] They conclude by quoting Weber, "In practice, this means that God helps those who help themselves."[49] "Hard work, therefore," they conclude their reflections on Weber, "gives glory to God, demonstrates faith in God, and avoids the vice of sloth."[50] An unwillingness to work equated with a lack of grace in one's life.

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[44] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 165.
[45] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 64, cited in Jones and Kelly, *Sloth, America's Iconic Structural Vice*, 124.
[46] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 158.
[47] Ibid., 109, 182-83, cited in Jones and Kelly, *Sloth, America's Iconic Structural Vice,* 124.
[48] Jones and Kelly, *Sloth, America's Iconic Structural Vice,* 124.
[49] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 115. He attributes this quote to St. Augustine of Hippo in endnote #63, 232 "*si non es praedestinatus, fac ut praedetineris*" (if you are not predestined, make sure you are predestined).
[50] Jones and Kelly, *Sloth, America's Iconic Structural Vice,* 124.

The pattern from history seems clear, continuing to the present. The individualism that continues to mark American culture and the ancient ethos of acedia/sloth come from the same root. Love of God and love of neighbor both give way to love of self. Charity fosters a relationship with God and with others, whereas acedia denies relationships. Work is done for personal gain and fulfillment rather than for the sake of God and the community, and inherent competitiveness makes one need to be number one, individually or as a culture. Competition with others, especially those who may be different, fosters xenophobia and racism. The supreme desire to have one's needs met without thought for another can lead to violence: verbal, coercive, and physical violence against others, especially those who are "other." The slothful individual uses people because they are deemed to be less important. The virtue of charity pursues the common good, while acedia pursues its own selfish interests, denying one's dependence on others and the need to be responsible for caring for others.

The Impact of Acedia

First and foremost, acedia is a spiritual problem. Solomon Schimmel observes that with acedia, one loses "one's spiritual moorings in life, and the ensuing spiritual vacuum manifests itself as despondency, and flight from the worship of God and service to humanity [man]."[51] The Holy Trinity is a community of three persons in which humanity is invited to dwell in the very life of God. Acedia leads one to turn away from the infinite God and God's will for one's life. It becomes impossible to pray, and one drifts slowly away from God and toward one's very finite self. As one loses focus on

[51] Cited in Dennis Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins: Learning from the Psychology of Ancient Monks* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), xx.

God, God becomes more abstract. The more one exchanges participation in the life of God for an abstract concept of God, the further one drifts. It becomes easier to worship the idea of God rather than God. Spending time in the scriptures is more difficult because they reveal God. Understanding God's will in one's life becomes impossible, and one can become involved in endless "godly" activity, exchanging that activity for obedience. Acedia is a turn from God and the way of Christian salvation toward a path of seeking earthly satisfaction elsewhere. Elsewhere acedia has been called a "revolt against the grace of creation.[52]

When the relationship with God breaks down, it affects all of one's experience. The relationship with creation breaks down, and the world becomes a repository for the resources that can be extracted from it. Human exploitation of the environment happens in many ways: extensive strip mining and over-extraction of natural resources, pollution because of industrialization, and overuse of chemicals in farming and pest control. A lack of love for God's creation fuels a lack of love for our neighbors. An example is that Americans and other nations over-depend on burning fossil fuels and coal, which some believe contribute more greenhouse gasses into the air and have an adverse effect on climate. In this view, as the planet heats and the amount of carbon in our atmosphere grows, the weather becomes less predictable and more severe. What is demonstrated in this example is a lack of love for others who are in danger because of less than responsible use of our planet's natural resources. God's command to humanity to be stewards of creation is exploited for the sake of industrialization, without much care given to the people who suffer the most.

[52] R. J. Snell, *Acedia and Its Discontents: Metaphysical Boredom in an Empire of Desire* (Brooklin: Angelico Press, 2015), 5.

When God becomes an abstract ideal, one loses relationality with God, who created humanity for relationship. Once this relationship is broken down, the slothful individual (the one suffering acedia) will lose perspective, not simply about God but about everything in all of God's creation. The individual's world is reduced to their own sphere of experience. They lose perspective on their relationships with other people. Interaction with people becomes transactional, where desired outcomes are based not on what God may want but on what is deemed best by the individual. When desired outcomes are thwarted, anger and disappointment are the results. It becomes too easy to draw further away from God. People then pursue "what is earthly, perishable, and trivial as if it were transcendent and exalted."[53]

As the relationship with God wanes, and love for God is diminished, human relationships break down. Once the relationship with God has broken down, cracks are seen in all the human relationships surrounding the one plagued by acedia. For example, rather than worship God, a person will worship themselves, a family member, a friend, or neighbor instead of God. It is inevitable that the "worshipped" individual will eventually disappoint, often causing bitterness and resentment to grow in the heart and mind of the "worshipper." People are not meant to be worshipped, nor are they meant to be objectified.

Aggression and violence toward others are expressions of acedia; Cassian wrote about "an aversion for one's brethren" and having "rude behavior."[54] Acedia causes one to be irascible when irritated by things presently happening, while at the same time, one

[53] Putney, "Nikolai Gogol's 'Old-World Landowners'," 1.
[54] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth,* 21.

will be deeply desirous of possible things in the future.[55] Evagrius articulates some of the symptoms of acedia as

> hatred of industriousness, a battle against stillness, stormy weather for psalmody, laziness in prayer, a slackening of ascesis, untimely drowsiness, revolving sleep, the oppressiveness of solitude, hatred of one's cell, an adversary of ascetic works, an opponent of perseverance, muzzling of meditation, ignorance of the scriptures, a partaker in sorrow, a clock for hunger.[56]

John Cassian later observed, "Once [acedia] has seized possession of a wretched mind, it makes a person horrified at where he is, disgusted with his cell, and also disdainful and contemptuous of the brothers who live with him or at a slight distance, as being careless and unspiritual."[57]

Conversely, acedia can also manifest in ennui[58] and listlessness, where one becomes despondent or even depressed.[59] Withdrawal from the spiritual life is but one manifestation of acedia; the other is a rejection of the stresses of the spiritual life, in essence, a rejection of the highest good, God, for something earthly.

While different distinctive manifestations of acedia have been observed throughout the history of the theological conversation about acedia, turning away from the love of God and the love of one's neighbor are acedia's underlying constants. Acedia's subtlety, as compared to other sins, and its danger as a doorway to all other types of sin makes it a most significant and dangerous sin to ignore. And yet, while acedia's breadth and depth encompass a multitude of manifestations, the understanding of acedia today has devolved into sloth and a lack of industriousness, and for some, a

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[55] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 8.
[56] Evagrius, *On the Vices Opposed to the Virtues 6* cited in Fiona R. Gibson, "Overcoming Listlessness: Learning from Evagrius of Pontus," *Foundations* 74 (May 2018): 49.
[57] As cited in Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins*, 136.
[58] "sort of material-less, object-less smog of inert boredom," Gregory of Nyssa as cited in Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4th Century* (London: Routledge, 2016), 87.
[59] Ibid., 138.

clinically defined mental illness called depression.[60] Because of acedia being a doorway to all types of sin, this thesis explores acedia's influence on the sin of racism and the devastating impact of the presence of acedia in the lives of those who are victimized by racism. For the Christian, it is inherently important to understand acedia's undergirding of racism, because unless the roots of acedia are addressed, racism will continue unabated in the church.

Acedia has many faces. Dorothy Sayers identifies acedia as "the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for."[61] It is seen as a listlessness of joy where one's devotion to God has waned; a spiritual malaise about one's life with God where lukewarmness describes, at best, one's involvement in worship, prayer, and service; one may be bored completely by God.

At its heart, acedia causes one to neglect loving God with one's heart, soul, and mind and loving one's neighbor as oneself. Acedia can manifest as idleness and the shunning of work or as a frenetic activity that takes one away from the love of and obedience to God. Devotion to God devolves into a desire for anything but God or doing God's will, and love for one's neighbor disintegrates into contempt, disgust, and xenophobia, where coercive verbal and physical violence against others who are deemed less important becomes commonplace. Racism is a manifestation of the sin of acedia.

[60] This definition of acedia as depression can be found in the discussions within Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins,* and in Norris, *Acedia and Me.*
[61] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed Or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 81.

Because acedia is the sin from which all other sins originate, it is the water in which humanity swims.

Acedia and Racism

To understand racism in the context of acedia, it is necessary to go back to the beginning and carefully consider where a "lack of care" for God and others is evident. When humanity was created, according to the first creation story (Gen 1:1-2:4), male and female were made by God in God's own image (Gen 1:26-28). God looked over the whole creation and saw it as very good (Gen 1:31). In the second creation story (Gen 2:4b-25), the first human was made from the humus (Gen 2:7),[62] and the second was made from the first human's ribs (Gen 2:21-22). Within the first account, there is an established equality[63] of the first man and woman as they were both created in the image of God, and both were given authority to rule over the other creatures of the earth. God did not give instructions in the first account about which tree not to eat from or not, as God did in the second account. It is important to note that the instructions about what not to eat were given to the first human.[64] The woman was not created until after God gave those instructions, so she would have received the admonition not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil[65] from her man. Where she got the idea that she should not touch the tree for fear of death[66] was either from what her man told her or from within

[62] *Ha-adam* from the *ha'adamah* (human from the humus). Adam is not a proper name until Genesis 4:25.
[63] Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler, *The Bible with and without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020), 75.
[64] Ibid., 108.
[65] Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 19. "It is more satisfactory, however, to understand 'good and bad' as undifferentiated parts of a totality, a merism meaning 'everything.' In the present passage, it is best to understand 'knowledge of good and bad' as the capacity to make independent judgments concerning human welfare."
[66] W. G. Plaut and David E. Stein, eds., *תורה The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union for

herself. The serpent, rather than acting as a deceiver, is a "truth-teller," insinuating craftily that God did not tell the first humans the whole truth. The issue of knowledge becomes, then, a matter of trust. Can the woman and the man trust God?[67] With both the man and the woman turning away from God and trusting themselves, the trust between humanity and God became broken.[68]

When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that she would be like God, knowing good and evil (Gen 3:5-7), she believed the serpent,[69] and thinking that she could be wise without consulting God, she ate the forbidden fruit. She ceased seeking God for wisdom and reached for it by herself. The man simply ate it because she gave it to him. There is no indication, one way or another, that the man had any particular thought or hesitancy about eating the fruit. For the man, was it acedia that led him to acquiesce to the woman, even though he knew to eat it was wrong? After their forbidden dinner, the man blamed God and the woman, and the woman blamed the serpent (Gen 3:11-13).

While acedia is not a term specifically used in Genesis, its manifestation of "lack of care" can be seen throughout Genesis 2. It is important to note that the scriptures, particularly the two accounts in Genesis, do not portray humanity as perfect. They were

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Reform Judaism Press, 2005), 47. In the Talmud (San. 29a), the Rabbis observe that an opening wedge into sin comes when we embroider the truth.

[67] Terence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes*, vol. I, Bruce C. Birchm, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 361.

[68] Athalya Brenner-Idan, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 70.

[69] William S. Babcock, "Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 52, accessed March 25, 2023, doi:108.72.60.106. Babcock quotes Augustine in *De Genesi ad litteram [Literal Commentary on Genesis]. 11.30.39*, "How could these words persuade the woman that it was a good and useful thing that had been forbidden by God if there was not already in her heart a love of her own independence and a proud presumption of self which through that temptation was destined to be found out and cast down?" While this quote talks about "proud presumption of self," acedia can also be a "love of . . . independence" rather than love of God.

created with the potential to grow and make choices in how they exercised dominion over the earth and all its inhabitants. Given the freedom to choose, there was always the possibility of making wrong choices. They were given the skills and responsibility to care for each other, for the earth, and the ability to love God. The moment they turned from God, the woman to entertain the words of the serpent, and the man to not care, one way or the other, and simply take the fruit to eat it is to demonstrate that "lack of care" for God and what God said, and each other. Rather than be content as a creature with creaturely knowledge, the woman thought she could obtain wisdom herself as a result of eating the fruit. She chose not to trust what God said before she ate the fruit, exchanging the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10), for the forbidden fruit of obtaining wisdom on her own. When God sought them out and questioned the two humans, their immediate response was to blame and heap scorn rather than accept responsibility for their wrong actions. Even with all this blame and scorn, Genesis 1-3 does not use the word "sin" specifically, and within later Jewish theology, there is little notion of original sin as there is in Christianity.[70] Within Wisdom literature, though, there is the notion that people always sin (Job 15:14; Ecc 7:20) and that God is free to punish.[71]

Augustine of Hippo[72] contends that the woman's and the man's wills were already evil[73] before the eating of the fruit. The shift in their orientation from God to self is where they gave in to evil, not taking pleasure in God and God's instruction, but rather taking

[70] Levine and Brettler, *The Bible With and Without Jesus*, 128.
[71] Ibid., 122.
[72] Augustine of Hippo, "That in Adam's Sin an Evil Will Preceded the Evil Act," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: The City of God*, vol. 2, Philip Schaff, ed., Marcus Dodsm, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1886), 273, accessed Feb. 12, 2024, https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102/npnf102.iv.XIV.13.html.
[73] See also 4 Ezra 3:21-26 (written about 100 CE) "For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him . . . [all the inhabitants of Jerusalem] transgressed, in everything doing as Adam . . . had done, for they also had the evil heart."

pleasure in themselves. This shift in the first two humans makes God no longer the object of their love or the focus of their existence. The man, for example, in taking the fruit from the woman, chooses to love her rather than God.[74] The man's sin of simply accepting the fruit and eating it seems more to be acedia than pride. At the heart of this shift in wills, for Augustine prior to 415,[75] is pride and the desire for self-exultation. He quotes Sirach 10:13 (NRSV), "The beginning of pride is sin"; however, the verse immediately preceding states, "The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker." This withdrawal of the heart from God is exactly what happens when the sin of acedia afflicts people; they cease caring about God.

It seems that the lack of care for God can turn into prideful actions of self-exultation. Pride, however, begins in the root sin of acedia. In Augustine's later anti-Pelagian works, he writes about disordered love and ignorance,[76] from which a case for acedia can also be made, as those who are afflicted by acedia have, by definition, disordered love because they have a "lack of care" toward God and others. Augustine believed sin to be often ignorant, weak, and foolish. A return to the writings of Evagrius and Cassian finds these traits in the sin of those who suffer from acedia. Barth argues that sin is our slothful response to God.[77] Sloth manifests itself in "disobedience, unbelief, stupidity, inhumanity, dissipation, care or anxiety, even panic, and is described as misery or bondage of the will."[78] He adds:

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[74] Augustine of Hippo, "That in Adam's Sin an Evil Will Preceded the Evil Act," 273.
[75] Jesse Couenhoven, "'Not every wrong is done with pride'," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 1 (2008): 41, accessed March 25, 2023, doi:10.1017/s0036930607003821.
[76] Ibid., 44.
[77] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol., 4, pt. 2, G. W. Bromiley, trans. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1958), 403.
[78] Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Gender, Sin and Grace: Feminist Theologies Meet Karl Barth's Hamartiology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1977): xx, accessed March 31, 2023, doi:108.72.60.106. Quoting, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol., 4, pt. 2, 404-405, 412, 432, 452, 468, 482-3, 494.

> In its form as man's tardiness and failure, sloth expresses much more clearly than pride the positive and aggressive ingratitude which repays good with evil . . . It may be that this action often assumes the disguise of a tolerant indifference in relation to God. But in fact, it is the action of the hate which wants to be free of God, which would prefer that there were no God or that God were not the One He is—at least for him, the slothful man. . . . But sin as man's subservient and obsequious sloth is from the very outset his desire not to be illuminated by the existence and nature of God, not to have to accept Him, to be without God in the world."[79]

Throughout his work in paragraphs 65–66 of *Church Dogmatics,* Barth uses the term sloth exclusively, and yet the definitions and ideas he used to express the sin of sloth are also definitive of acedia, which historically undergirds sloth and offer a broader description of the thoughts and actions than the word sloth.

For racism to be understood in the context of the scriptural record, and particularly in light of acedia, it is important to return to the story of the first man and woman and their children. An additional definition of sin will be helpful: "those free, discrete acts of responsible individuals that create or reinforce these structures of oppression."[80] To examine scripture with this definition in mind is to look specifically at the ways that oppression plays out. This will be an overview of some of the oppression found in scripture rather than an exhaustive list. While the word "sin" is not mentioned until the fourth chapter of Genesis, sin is what was manifested in the lives of the man and the woman.

By the next generation after Adam and Eve, Cain did not love God well enough to give an appropriate offering to God as Abel had (Gen 4:2b-5). When God pointed out that Cain's offering was not to be regarded, Cain became angry at his brother, Abel, blaming

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[79] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, 405.
[80] Mary P. Engle, "Evil, Sin, and the Violation of the Vulnerable," in Susan B. Thistlethwaite, ed., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990), 155. As quoted in Greene-McCreight, "Gender, Sin and Grace," 419.

him rather than himself, and he murdered Abel. When God confronted Cain after the murder, he responded with the first question asked of God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9).[81] The rest of the Bible contains the answer to this question. The remainder of Genesis[82] tells of the struggle and failure of the people to care for each other and love God.

Throughout the scriptures of the Tanakh, the interplay can be seen between loving God and loving the people of God or not loving God and the people of God. From the time of the Abrahamic covenant, the Jews, as the chosen people of God, stood in contrast to those of all other nations. They were to be unique and dedicated only to God. In the Exodus from slavery in Egypt and the subsequent wandering in the wilderness, issues of not loving God and not loving one's neighbor are continually seen as the children of Israel blame God and Moses for their plight, quarreling and enticing one another to sin. The stories are rife with disobedience toward God and with competition and violence toward others. When the Jews entered the Promised Land, they were to remain separate from Gentiles and not mix with the local inhabitants,[83] but mix, they did. The people's desire for a king and the subsequent monarchies were filled with conflict and not caring for God or God's standards or caring for others.

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[81] Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1036. As quoted in BibleWorks 10, meaning to keep, watch, and preserve.

[82] The times of Noah, the building of the Tower of Babel, the story of Abraham's extended family and his descendants. Throughout Genesis, there is a continual struggle over birthright and blessing. Much of the conflict is around blessing not going to the firstborn but to other brothers: Ishmael or Isaac, Esau or Jacob, Joseph or the other elder brothers.

[83] There are exceptions: Moses' wife, Zipporah, Rahab, who sheltered the Hebrew spies, and Ruth, the Moabite refugee who married Boaz, all of whom were Gentile women married to Jews. Generally, Jewish men could marry Gentile wives, but Jewish women did not marry Gentile men. By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, after the Babylonian captivity, foreign wives and children were sent away as they brought foreign ways and other gods into the house of Judah.

The prophets bear witness to these patterns of sin in Israel's and Judah's communal life. The annihilation by the Assyrians in 722 and the exile to Babylon in 598 are seen as God's response to Israel's and Judah's disobedience and idolatry. The prophets also bore witness to God's future promises to give the people a heart of flesh and a new spirit with which they would love God and care for each other. The wisdom literature wrestles with theodicy and what it means to love God, love God's people, and be faithful despite suffering and failure. The hymns of Zion, the Psalms, are replete with praise and lament toward God and about the people's propensity to both succeed and fail in their relationship with each other and God.

In the fullness of time, God became manifest in the person of Christ Jesus of Nazareth. The gospels are filled with parables, stories of miracles, and Jesus' teaching, all pointing to the need for people to love God and love each other (Mar 12:30-31; Joh 13:34). While Jesus was born into a patriarchal culture and world, he valued not just men but women and children as well. Even though he initially saw his ministry in terms of reaching the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Jesus was continually surprised by and embraced the faith that Gentile individuals displayed.[84] By the time of the writing of the Gospels, Jesus' ministry was understood to be for the whole world (Mat 28:19-20; Joh 3:16).

What preceded the written Gospels and influenced the people and churches that wrote down the oral tradition that became the Gospels were the letters of Paul, the earliest documents of the New Testament. Within those letters, Paul wrote to both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, clearly articulating the universality of God's love and grace in

[84] Christ Jesus became seen as the embodiment of Isaiah 49:6 (NRSV).

Christ Jesus and our need to love God. Equally clear in both Pauline and Deutero-Pauline literature is the truth that there is no distinction between people (Gal 3:28; Rom 10:12; Col 3:11). The story of Peter's experience with and about Cornelius was written after the Pauline letters, but his understanding may well have been instructive to Paul (Acts 10:34-36).[85]

Deeply ingrained in racist ideas and practices are tenets of hatred grounded in acedia that have been taught in the church over the centuries. While racism (discrimination, hatred, coercion, and violence based on one's identity, ethnicity, or another group to which they belong or do not belong) is reprehensible and inherently wrong, it is widespread in our culture, in Christianity, and in our world today. For the Christian, it is against all we theoretically believe about humanity's creation in God's image and Christ's work in having broken down the walls that divide us (Col 1:19-20). The biblical ideal is that there is no distinction on account of skin color, ethnicity, gender, economic background, or nationality because Christ Jesus "is all and in all" (Col 3:11).

As its definition suggests, the basic element in acedia is lack of care. According to Evagrius, Cassian, Thomas Aquinas, and others, acedia is specifically apathy about God and what God wills and desires for humanity. If one does not care about God, one will not care about the things of God. When hindered by acedia, it is impossible to love God with one's whole heart, mind, and strength. That lack of wholeheartedness means that people are easily deceived into thinking that the love for God they have is sufficient,

[85] "Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.'" While the language sounds vaguely Pauline (Phi 2:11, Eph 2:15-16), it is impossible to determine from Acts any specific chronology. Who informed whom is beyond the scope of this paper.

leaving whole parts of themselves that do not respond to God. Acedia causes one not to seek repentance for their lack of devotion to God; they think the love they have is enough. But in those areas of our lives where we have that lack of love for God, other sins can grow and fester.

When God is rejected, even in part, the understanding that one has of God's will and desires will only be a partial understanding at best. The two great commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mar 12:29-31).[86] If one loves God only partially, it is impossible to love one's neighbors any more than partially. Christians who struggle with acedia in this way need to seek God for repentance, as unaddressed acedia leads to many wrongs. The sin that grows out of the lack of love for God and neighbor is pernicious and wide-ranging. Acedia can be a passive "not caring" or an active hatred, a doorway to every other temptation, one of which is acedia's child, racism.[87]

In Genesis, God created humankind in God's image. According to the first creation story in Genesis 1, humankind was created as male and female. In the second creation story, a human was made from dust and God breathed life into that human. Later, from that human's rib, another human was made to be a companion to the first. There is much discussion about what it means to be made in God's image, but one thing is certain: all humanity inherently bears the image of God. At creation, there is no distinction between humans besides gender. All are fundamentally created of the same

[86] Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mar 12:29-31). Jesus' words are in reference to Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. See also Galatians 5:14.

[87] Pope Gregory I and Thomas Aquinas referred to the sins that are birthed because of or from acedia as "daughters." I will refer to it in a less gender specific way: acedia's children or child.

substance in the likeness of the Creator; have equal worth in the eyes of God. The Creator, who is beyond the gender and color of humans, chose to create a humanity that would manifest great diversity. While we are diverse, we are fundamentally the same. This diversity glorifies God and is intended to be a blessing for us.

Racist attitudes are based on the rejection of humanity's diversity. Acedia's child, racism, is born out of this basic rejection of God's valuation of people. The refusal to see white[88] as one of many colors in humanity is a rejection of all of humanity being in God's image. The differentiation of people based on racial categories is a false construct and a way of dividing people into "us" and "them," creating enemies. This categorization of people is antithetical to love for one's neighbor as oneself and is a rejection of the God-given status of all humanity. Over time, whiteness became correlated to goodness, intelligence, reason, creativity, and civilization, and black or brown skin with ignorance and depravity; anything that deviated from the norm of whiteness seemed degenerate by comparison.[89] For Christians, specifically, it further becomes a denial that a diversity of Christians make up the body of Christ (1 Cor 12) and that all in the body of Christ are to be celebrated.[90] In the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline letters, issues of ethnicity and race[91] threatened to divide Christians against Christians.[92] To reject this unity is to reject God and God's people.

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[88] Whites are enculturated to see other colors as race, but not their own color, assuming the white perspective is universal and that other races should be measured by white standards.
[89] Norris, "Race and Resurrection," 38.
[90] "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12-13).
[91] Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11.
[92] The first-century churches were found primarily in the large urban centers of the Roman Empire, where people from different parts of the empire. Several letters in the Pauline corpus address divisions in the churches and conflict between Greeks, Jews, and other peoples in the churches. Paul was continually reminding people that they are to be one in Christ.

Acedia is not a compartmentalized sin but one that affects the entire perspective of the person. One's apathy toward God becomes a relentless search to replace one's relationship with God. This leads to a search for other things to love wholly and to which one can be devoted. People find all kinds of things to replace God, from sports to celebrities to ideologies. When one is engrossed in racist ideas and actions, what grows in the soul is a hatred that is specifically directed toward people of other colors or ethnicities. For some, it becomes all-encompassing. For others, it can be more covert and subtle, a penchant for racism no less encompassing that simmers in the heart. One of the features of acedia is contempt for others, especially in the community of faith. As racism festers, it erupts into words and actions that express contempt and hatred. When one replaces God with something else, like racism, it is spiritually destructive, and over time, one may even give up the profession of faith altogether. While hatred can grow out of envy or another of the "seven deadly sins," acedia, that apathy toward God, is at its root. According to Aquinas, someone with acedia, over time, will be sorry to have to be or do something for God's sake.[93]

Undergirding racism lies acedia, where one is drawn away from good words and actions and wants things that are "evil and worthless."[94] Another manifestation of acedia is not just apathy about God and the things of God, but there is boredom about pursuing good. Fatigue sets in and makes tasks seem impossible to accomplish. In the case of racism, people cannot rouse themselves to change. This boredom and fatigue are manifestations of acedia that are called to mind by the term sloth. Evagrius observed that this boredom and fatigue instilled in the heart of a monk a hatred of one's life and of

[93] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica.*
[94] Ibid.

one's need to work.[95] Not only are Christians not roused to work on changing their words and actions of racism, but they hate the idea of working on the changes required to become anti-racist. Acedia enables one to develop a blind spot about one's racism. Racism and white supremacy are so enmeshed in our culture and our world that it is easy to find other ways to become successful and attain all that one needs for life without working on the racism inherent in our culture and in the church.

Accompanying this boredom and fatigue is a nostalgia for how things used to be. Like a monk, one can begin to long for a previous time when racism was not an all-consuming issue for them, ignoring the lessons of history that teach that it has always been a consuming issue for people of color. This nostalgia for a time before the Civil Rights Movement, or even for the old South, can lead a Christian to abandon the struggle for equality and stop identifying racism as something Christians need to address.

Besides fatigue and boredom, acedia is also manifested as a continual restlessness where one is constantly looking for anything else that can replace God. This restless, frenetic search for something else can lead the racist to become relentless in searching out others who share racist ideas and actions and become persistent in creating an alternate god who validates racism. This is readily seen in the utterly unbiblical god of the KKK and Hitler.[96] Once racism finds its expression in a quasi-religious practice, the mission to spread racist ideas and practices ensues. It must be stressed that racism may be subtle and covert or bold and overt. What is at stake is that God is abandoned for another god, and some people are thus not seen as belonging to or in the image of God. In the case of white

[95] Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 18-19.
[96] Michael Harriot, "A Brief History of People Using Romans 13 to Justify White Supremacy," *The Root* (June 15, 2018), accessed Feb. 13, 2024, https://www.theroot.com/a-brief-history-of-people-using-romans-13-to-justify-wh-1826875704.

supremacy, whites alone are seen as the image of God, and people of color are seen as something less.

Acedia is about going through the motions of what is required of a Christian. Covert racism creeps into those places where the motions fall short. Looking like one is loving others is much different than loving others. Instead of love, contempt slowly creeps in, and the person begins to seek out only those they want to love. If the contempt is based on the color of skin, national origin, or ethnicity, racism is evident.

PART THREE

Sin, Acedia, and Reconciliation

The notion of a fall from a perfect state caused by sin is pervasive throughout Christianity. It is said that the first sin caused the fall from humanity's perfectly created state when the first humans disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. And yet, humankind was created with a predisposition to make choices and the possibility to grow and mature. The Garden was idyllic; nonetheless, the pain of hunger existed (how would they know when to eat if they did not have hunger pangs), as did the reality of loneliness. Anxiety existed in the Garden, or why would the woman fear death? The choice to trust and honor God with obedience was as much a possibility as the choice to decide something that was not in step with God.

When God created humanity, God did not create automatons who would respond to God without thought or choice or like marionettes on strings, which only move by God's initiative. Part of being in God's image is that humans can make choices freely. Rather than an inherited bent toward sin, we are part of God's good creation who, nevertheless, made and continues to make choices that do not reflect God or God's will. Whether our wrong choices were made willingly or ignorantly, we created a separation between humanity and God,[1] a separation that we cannot repair and a relationship with God that we cannot reconcile. Our ability to love God and love others wholeheartedly is damaged beyond our ability to repair it.

[1] "For there is no distinction since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22b-23).

This has profound implications when we consider the sin of acedia. Acedia has its root in turning away from God, where humans do not love God and God's ways and cease caring for others. Our wrong choices become offenses against God and others. Without God, we cannot choose to love God and others; the separation between people is as vast as our separation from God. This is one reason racism, a child of acedia, is hard to address and remedy effectively. The offenses against others are deep and pervasive, and without God, there is little ability to remedy the damage, engage in equitable relationships, and prevent racism from returning. Human fixes alone can only be temporary bandages that do not bring deep healing to those victimized by racism and its long legacy, nor can they bring changes of heart to the offenders.

It was in this morass of pain and suffering that God's grace provided a way out.[2] It is only by faith in Christ Jesus that our offenses are forgiven, but more than forgiveness is needed. What is needed is a reconciliation[3] between God and humanity and reconciliation between humans.[4] In the same way we are justified and forgiven, we are

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[2] "But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:21-26).

[3] Gerhard Kittel, ed., "*Katallassō* in the NT," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 254. It means to change, or exchange, to effect a change. James Earl Massey, writing about the concept of reconciliation, *katallassō,* observes, "The image in the word shows something having been set aside or put down (*kata*): an attitude, a grievance, a position, a deed a distance, a result, in order to induce or bring about a change for the better. A new disposition is exhibited, a new stance is assumed, a new framework is established granting a rich togetherness where enmity and distance previously were the order." James Earl Massey, "Reconciliation: Two Bible Studies," in Timothy George and Robert Smith, Jr., eds., *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 205, cited in Allan A. Boesak and Curtiss P. DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012), 12.

[4] "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even

reconciled to God through God's action alone in Christ Jesus. Second Corinthians is examined in detail to glean from it the riches to be found in God's reconciling us to God's own self and the reality that reconciliation between peoples can be accomplished in Christ.

It must be noted, though, that reconciliation is quite a loaded word, especially when we talk about racial reconciliation in the church and in the U.S. This is because true Christian reconciliation has been so misunderstood and mis-practiced. Willie Jennings states, "I have purposely stayed away from the theological language of reconciliation because of its terrible misuse in Western Christianity and its tormented deployment in so many theological systems and projects."[5] He identifies that theological discussions of reconciliation are often merely negotiations of power. It is difficult for Christians to let go of acedia and its children such as white supremacy, and truly imagine the kind of reconciliation that sets people free to have relationships based on true equity. Douglas Foster raises the question of whether reconciliation is possible because of our nation's history of racial inequality. Foster argues that "conciliation," based on harmonious and compassionate relationships between whites and people of color, has never existed in the American context, so "reconciliation" or returning to "conciliation" and to a better time or relationship is not possible.[6] A Dine elder (Navajo), George Erasmus, observes,

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though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, *who reconciled us to himself* through Christ, and has *given us the ministry of reconciliation*; that is, *in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,* not counting their trespasses against them, and *entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.* So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, *be reconciled* to God" (2 Cor. 5:14-20), emphasis added.

[5] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 9-10.

[6] Douglas A. Foster, "Reclaiming Reconciliation: The Corruption of 'Racial Reconciliation' and How It Might Be Reclaimed for Racial Justice and Unity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 55, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 63-81, accessed August 7, 2023, doi:10.1353/ecu.2020.0015.

"Where common memory is lacking, where people do not share the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created."[7] White Christians must understand their complicity in the white supremacy of the church and society and refuse to see reconciliation as merely a transactional act with automatic removal of guilt and forgiveness of sins without restitution for people who are sorry.[8] Reconciliation means more, as Second Corinthians articulates.

Reconciliation in Second Corinthians

Corinth was a colony in Greece established by Rome in 44 BCE. For the most part, the colonists were "*Libertini,*" or freed slaves. As such, they were not predominantly Roman or Greek but mostly Syrians, Egyptians, and Jews.[9] Corinth grew quickly under Claudius (41–54 CE) and became a thoroughly Hellenized city, known as "the epitome of crass materialism and moral decadence."[10] The religious life in Corinth reflected the cultural backgrounds of the colonists, including the cult of the Roman imperial family along with Roman, Greek, and Egyptian gods and goddesses. Corinth, a predominately Gentile city, was not attracted to the monotheism of the Jews. Jews had been twice expelled from Rome (in 19 and 41) and settled in Corinth; however, there was pervasive antisemitism in Corinth during Hellenistic and Roman times because of their monotheism.[11]

Into this Corinthian mix of a thriving Roman seaport, festivals and athletic competitions dedicated to various gods and goddesses, and the various economic and

[7] As quoted in Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 204.
[8] Foster, *Reclaiming Reconciliation*, 65.
[9] Appian, quoted by Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984), 7.
[10] Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 13.
[11] Ibid., 15-19.

cultural classes, the Apostle Paul[12] came to Corinth to plant a church (in 50–51).[13] Initially, he argued in the synagogue, trying to convince both the Jews and the Gentiles there about Christ Jesus; however, he eventually left the synagogue and went to the house of a proselyte and laid the foundations of the church there, baptizing many.[14] This fledgling church was made up of Jewish Christians who were still attached to the Torah, as well as Gentile Christians from a variety of backgrounds. The religious tensions in the Corinthian church were significant, and there were also tensions over economic class.

Within the first few years of the church's life after Paul's departure from Corinth, he wrote at least three letters to the church there, two of which we have in the biblical record.[15] There is much controversy over the number of letters that make up 2 Corinthians,[16] but that is outside the realm of this study. First Corinthians was written to teach and correct the young Christians in Corinth about their excesses and tolerance of sinful behavior. By the time of the writing of what makes up Second Corinthians, there had been other "super-apostles" actively proclaiming a different gospel, people from

[12] Paul was a Jew, and as such was part of a religious and cultural minority in the Roman Empire, because of this he understood what it meant to be colonized and oppressed. See Boesak and DeYoung, *Reconciliation,* 14-15.
[13] Charles K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: HarperCollins College Division, 1973), 4-5. See also Act 18:1-18 below.
[14] "After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized" (Acts 18:1-8).
[15] It is possible that 2 Co 2:14-7:13 were originally another letter written to the Corinthian Christians. This theory, however, will not be debated in the context of this paper. See Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians,* 11-17.
[16] Ibid., 5.

Jerusalem who went along with these false "apostles," and consequently, there were Corinthian Christians who had been "seduced from loyalty to Paul and Christ."[17] Paul's argument was with those false "apostles" who were leading the Corinthian Christians astray because they "boast in outward appearance and not in the heart" (2 Co 5:12b).

In contrast, Paul found his motivation in the love of Christ. His experience of conversion after his confrontation by Christ Jesus on the road to Damascus,[18] the subsequent healing of his eyes, and his baptism brought about a dramatic change in his life.[19] Paul had been an enemy of God, persecuting Christ Jesus and the Christians. God reached out to his enemy with grace and forgiveness, reconciling him to God. Paul was converted by the forgiveness and reconciliation he was given by God and became a Christian himself, and not only that, but one called by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was changed by his encounter with the crucified and risen Christ and was made a "new creature."[20] Paul is referring to his own conversion, being made a new creation in Christ, as the context of his own defense of his apostleship.[21]

Being motivated by the love of Christ, Paul was convinced that because Christ died for all, all have died (5:14). "Paul says when one has come to the judgment that Christ's death was for all, and that all who believe in him have also died, then one has come under the control of Christ's love."[22] One consequence of Christ Jesus' death is that we would live not for ourselves any longer but rather for Christ, who died and was raised

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[17] Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians,* 10.
[18] See Acts 9:1-18.
[19] Corneliu Constantineanu, *The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul's Theology: Narrative Readings in Romans* (London: A&C Black, 2010), 64-76, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/reader.action?docID=1644289.
[20] Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 174.
[21] Constantineanu, *Social Significance of Reconciliation, 69.*
[22] Victor P. Furnish, "The Ministry of Reconciliation," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4, no. 4 (August 1977): 212-213.

for us (5:15). Paul expresses this similarly in Galatians.[23] God's love is proven in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 5:8), and when he died, he died for all (Rom 6:10a). The reconciliation of the world by God is not limited to only those who have had the experience of God's love, rather it is an "objective reality," and whatever else is said, reconciliation (whether personal, social, or political) must be seen from that perspective.[24] Reconciliation cannot be separated from Christ Jesus. The effect of this love is far-reaching and permeates the hearts and wills of those for whom Christ died. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we are empowered to turn away from the sin of acedia that continually beckons us to turn away from God. Because Christ died, we who are in Christ have died, and we have "become free for a new life with new aims and new purposes."[25]

One of the consequences of this death to self in Christ is that we are no longer bound to the limitations of understanding people from a sin-based, human perspective (5:16). Because Christ is now the crucified risen one, so we are, from now on, those who belong to Christ and are to be evaluated and evaluate others only according to the cross and what it requires.[26] We have been raised to a new life with new knowledge and have the potential to see God and others in a new way. No longer bound to a life governed by pulling away from God because of acedia, we can live a new life dedicated to God. One consequence of this is that understanding people through the eyes of racism and prejudice is totally antithetical to understanding people through the eyes and love of Christ. If we

[23] "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:19-20).
[24] Constantineanu, *Social Significance of Reconciliation, 72.*
[25] H. Windisch, quoted by Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians,* 169.
[26] Furnish, *II Corinthians,* 332.

view people from a racist, human perspective, *kata sarka*, according to the flesh, we are acting as if the death and resurrection of Jesus have not taken place.[27] Viewing and understanding people from the world's perspective of sin and hatred is, in Christ, something that has passed away. If we continue to view people, *kata sarka*, and practice racism, we are setting our minds on death.[28] In Christ, we are freed from the human perspectives that keep us bound to sin against God and each other. Another consequence of being dead to self and alive to Christ is that we can disregard worldly standards, which include prejudice and racism, and live by the standards of Christ: there is no place in Christ for judging others by external, worldly standards.[29]

Because our death to self is possible only through the death and resurrection of Christ, it is only in Christ that we become a new creation (5:17).[30] Just as God created anew in the beginning, so God creates anew anyone who is in Christ. In Christ, God is doing a new act of creation, inaugurating the new age to come.[31] In this eschatological context, not only are we shaped personally by the message of the new kingdom, but as a community of Christians, we live under Christ Jesus' rule, here and now, as part of the eschatological order brought about by his death and resurrection.[32] We are no longer independent and autonomous but part of a new creation wholly dependent on God. Just as

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[27] J. P. Sampley, *Second Corinthians*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 11, Leander E. Keck, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 93.
[28] "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:5-6).
[29] Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 329.
[30] See also Gal 6:14-15, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!"
[31] Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 173.
[32] Svetlana Khobnya, "Reconciliation Must Prevail. A Fresh Look at 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2," *European Journal of Theology* 25, no. 2 (2016): 132.

all died (5:14) through our own sin, so *all* in Christ are created new by God (5:17). The old, former things have passed away, and in Christ, new things have come into being.

What has not changed in this new act of creation is the particularity of gender, race, or ethnicity; we remain as we are in terms of our gender identity, our race, and our ethnicity. While we must deal with our sinful lives (we live in a fallen world), those who are in Christ are freed to live their lives by faith and in terms of the new act of creation which God has already wrought in Jesus' death and resurrection.[33] "What is gone is the world of relationships that are characterized by knowledge according to the flesh" (5:16);[34] we have abandoned worldly standards of judgment and have become wholly new in Christ.[35] "To be in Christ, and thus a participant in the new creation means we are claimed by the rule of love instituted by the cross and are liberated from the powers of this present age."[36] Our thoughts, speech, and actions are to be used to convey that we see everyone, regardless of race, gender, and ethnicity, through the light of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

All this is from God, Paul writes (5:18), who reconciled us to himself through Christ. We are not the agents of this reconciliation; God is. There is nothing we can do to reconcile ourselves to God; the act of reconciliation is accomplished in and through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. It is a gift of pure grace, undeserved. Those who are in Christ are made a new creation by God and reconciled to God. The enmity between humanity and God was destroyed on the cross,[37] and in Christ, we are made new through

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[33] Barrett, *A Commentary of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians,* 175.
[34] Ibid., 174.
[35] Furnish, *II Corinthians,* 332.
[36] Ibid., 333.
[37] See also Rom 5:10-11 "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

the resurrection and life of Christ. As a result of this reconciliation with God, God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Our relationships with people, based on worldly judgments of outward characteristics, are crucified in Christ's death. "There is an intrinsic relationship between the message of reconciliation and the messenger's own reconciliation and life."[38] We are reconciled by God to God's own self and have the power to become reconciled to each other, becoming agents of God's reconciliation.

The church in Corinth began with the ministry of Priscilla and Aquilla in the 40s[39] after they had been expelled from Rome. Paul eventually joined them, working side by side with them as tentmakers, witnessing first among the labors, then next, in the synagogue where Paul argued for the message of God in Christ with Jewish members and Gentiles who attended synagogue as proselytes, or "God-fearers."[40] Eventually, the arguments became so entrenched that Paul left the synagogue to form a church in a Gentile home, yet the first baptized member of the fledgling church was the Jewish leader of the synagogue. By the time Paul wrote Second Corinthians, the divisions over religious belief and practice had become deeper still.[41] Between the "super-apostles" and the Jewish believers from Jerusalem, who stoked conflict and rivalry in the Corinthian

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[38] Constantineanu, *Social Significance of Reconciliation, 72.*
[39] Douglas A. Campbell, "Paul Wrote 1 Corinthians to a Community in the Middle of a Culture War," *The Christian Century* 135, no. 1 (January 2018): 2, accessed August 3, 2023, https://www.christiancentury.org/print/pdf/node/33543.
[40] See Acts 18:18:1-8, "After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized."
[41] See 2 Co 11:1-15.

church between some of the Jewish Christians and Paul's "faction" of the Jewish and Gentile believers, the Corinthian church was deeply in need of the message of God's reconciling love. But to become ministers of God's reconciliation, they must come to terms with their reconciliation,[42] first with God and then with each other.

As part of being reconciled to God and each other, we no longer judge people by externals (2 Co 5:16). Clothed in Christ by baptism, there is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, "for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28).[43] Reconciliation means that the enmity between people is overcome in Christ—our identities become Christ. It is not that our ethnicities, religious backgrounds, gender, or race are unimportant; it is that in Christ, we no longer make or live by judgments as the world does. We can no longer discriminate based on human divisions; all are equal and equally inform what it means to live as a diverse unity in Christ. Just as our gender is not erased in Christ, so the particularity of our ethnicities and races is not lost in Christ either. It takes all the human diversity across time to begin to reflect what it means to be in God's image. No one race, gender, or ethnicity is representative of God's image. The diversity found in humanity is a closer approximation for understanding the image of God than one type of person or group of people. An ancient proverb says, "You will never look into the eyes of a person God does not love."

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[42] It is important to note that in the Graeco-Roman context of Paul's world, reconciliation is related to interpersonal relationships and the sociological and political realms of life. See Constantineanu, *Social Significance of Reconciliation, 65.* To have a reconciliation between God and humans was a completely new idea.

[43] See also 1 Co 12:13, "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit," and Col 3: 9-11, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal, there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!"

It is imperative that we embrace all humanity in all its diversity to begin comprehending God's image.

2 Corinthians 5:19[44] continues to explicate the meaning of reconciliation with God: through Christ Jesus' death and resurrection, God does not count our trespasses and sins against us; there is no longer separation between God and humanity. In addition to that, God entrusts God's divine message of reconciliation and forgiveness to us. Furnish suggests that this verse was previously formulated material, perhaps a creedal statement[45] or, as Barrett suggests, a possible hymn fragment.[46] While these possibilities do not change the meaning of what Paul is saying, he may have used material already known and important to the church to elucidate his teaching on the ministry of reconciliation God has entrusted to Christians. This is important because, already in the experience of the church, divine forgiveness for all in Christ, and divine reconciliation between God and humanity were unique distinctions that separated Christianity from other practices of religion in the ancient world, and which essentially comprise a "whole new order in which Christ's love rules."[47]

Therefore, Christians, who have been given the ministry of reconciliation are ambassadors for Christ (5:20), "with the full authority of Christ who has sent me."[48] Paul then turns from teaching about the new act of creation that Christ's death and resurrection

[44] See also Eph 2:13-14, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us."
[45] Furnish, *II Corinthians,* 334.
[46] Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians,* 177.
[47] Furnish, *II Corinthians,* 335.
[48] Ibid., 339. The Koine Greek verb *preseuein,* here translated as *ambassadors* would be better translated as "we are serving as ambassadors" and means "one who carries a message for or in some other ways represents another." The word was specifically used in the Greek-speaking Roman Empire for the "official representatives of Caesar."

make a reality[49] to pleading with the Corinthian Christians to accept God's gracious offer of reconciliation and be reconciled to God. This is the message of reconciliation with which Christians are entrusted. In accepting God's offer of reconciliation, we are accepting for ourselves what God has already done for us in Christ. It is important to note that the ministry of reconciliation that God gives Christians is two-fold: the message that God has reconciled sinful humanity to God's own self has been given to Christians, and the message of reconciliation we proclaim means that we, likewise, are to be reconciled to one another.

In Christ Jesus' death, Christ was made to be sin so that we might become God's righteousness (5:21).[50] On the cross, sin was put to death, and in Christ's death, we have died. In the elaborate argument making up 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, Paul teaches what is at the heart of the gospel message: it is by the love of God in Christ Jesus that we are made a new creation of God's righteousness by the cross and resurrection, through which God reconciles us to God's own self. We are no longer bound to see others through the world's values and judgments but must live with each other as reconciled members of Christ. This is the message we are to proclaim.

Reconciliation in the New Testament

This message of reconciliation is further elaborated in later writings of the New Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount, reconciliation is an integral part of making one's offering to God. Jesus instructs his disciples to reconcile with those who have something

[49] Christ's death and resurrection institutes a new act of creation, no more judgment based on externals, God's reconciliation, and our role in proclaiming God's appeal of reconciliation to the world.
[50] Barrett, *A Commentary of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians,* 180.

against them before the disciple makes their offering (Mat 5:24). In this instance, the onus is on the disciple who knows there is a breach in a relationship and, therefore, is responsible for righting the relationship. Later, in Matthew 18, if one is sinned against, they are to go to the offender to point out the fault in the hopes that the offender will be turned around to the right behavior.[51] The church becomes involved when the offender does not respond to the individual's prompting. This passage only speaks of forgiveness, part of reconciliation, when Peter asks how many times he is to forgive when someone sins against him. The forgiveness a disciple is to offer is based on how God perfectly forgives. This idea of forgiveness, based on God's forgiveness of believers, is spelled out in the Lord's prayer, where Christians obligate themselves to forgive others, just as God has forgiven them (Mat 6:12). Given that Paul's epistles were the earliest documents of the New Testament, one wonders how Paul's teaching on reconciliation influenced the faith community where Matthew's Gospel was written.

Colossians 1:20-23 writes that reconciliation is accomplished through the cross of Christ. While hostile minds and evil deeds made people estranged from God, peace was made (and forgiveness given) by the death of Christ, where believers are restored and made blameless. Likewise, Jews and Gentiles were reconciled to God and each other by the blood of the cross (Eph 2:16ff). Whether in Paul's earlier letters or later writings, reconciliation and inherent forgiveness are integral to the message of the cross for Christians.

Acedia, on the other hand, turns people away from these biblical injunctions. For the person bound by acedia, the reconciliation God offers is of little or no interest; they

[51] See also Gal 6:1, in which Paul teaches Christians to restore the offender with a spirit of gentleness.

practice turning away from God and the whole proposition of being in and doing God's will. Acedia causes people to turn away from God and other people. For those afflicted with acedia, the notion that they are crucified with Christ and need to live for God is too difficult; they often rationalize that they can serve God any way they want. Acedia views the world with the eyes of self-interest alone and is content to practice disdain for God and others. There is a reason that acedia, in ancient writings, is referred to as a demon. Acedia is utterly opposed to God and, at the same time, is deceptive and subtle, turning one away from every opportunity to be rid of its "demonic" hold. There are many shades of acedia, and they all start with turning away from and not caring for God. This manifests directly to turning away from and not caring for one's neighbor. To repent from acedia is to do the opposite, to turn away from the very sin that occurs in every part of one's relationship with God and each other.

The one affected by acedia may think they are urged on by the love of Christ, when in fact they have turned this love inwardly and see it as something for themselves alone. Christ died for them, but they do not need to die to themselves, and they do not need to live for Christ fully. The one struggling with acedia still regards people from a human point of view and accepts their own human judgments as correct and authoritative. The independence and autonomy that are most highly prized in American culture lead one easily to believe that one's own views are authoritative in themselves. It is easy for one plagued by acedia to judge people by the world's standards, or even by universalizing their own perspectives, and wrongly use scripture to validate their views. An American historical example of this is the justification of chattel slavery, which misuses scriptural texts by interpreting them out of context and in ways that reinforce

one's own biases. Equally damning is the propensity to believe that God's image is expressed in only one type of person, denigrating all others as less than God's image.

Those bound by acedia do not see themselves as newly created by God in Christ and often express a lack of connection to God. The person with acedia is often uninterested in being reconciled to God and even less interested in being a true ambassador for Christ or pleading with others to come to Christ. When Christ became sin on our behalf, he took on acedia, that the one with acedia would become instead the righteousness of God. Those struggling with acedia, however, see themselves as already righteous and may even believe it is from God. They live for themselves and can even use religious-sounding rationalizations when judging others. Barth observes that acedia [sloth] "assumes a disguise of a tolerant indifference in relation to God," and it is marked by an "aggressive ingratitude which repays good with evil" and a "hate which wants to be free from God" preferring that there would be no God.[52]

Racial Identity in the First Century

Jews, Greeks, slaves, free, male, female, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, and Scythian were the named ethnicities, stations in life, and characteristics identified in Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and Colossians. There are other ethnicities identified in the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels.[53] In Paul's day, ethnicity and race were fixed constructs, meaning they were understood as a given in life. The boundaries

[52] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, pt. 2, G. W. Bromiley, trans. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1958), 405.
[53] These include Ethiopians, those from Cyrene (eastern Libya today), and those from the Mediterranean basin and North Africa listed in Acts 2:9-11 as present at Pentecost as well as Jews "from every nation under heaven" (2:5).

between civic identity, religion, ethnicity, and philosophy, however, were often blurred.[54] If one were born a Jew or a Gentile, a male or female, it was simply how it was. It is often thought that Christianity was a universal and voluntary movement that rejected ethnic identification for membership, but it was not always that way. As Christianity became part of the dominant culture, rejecting one's ethnicity or heritage to become Christian became the norm. Over time, Christianity became increasingly identified with the culture at large. For example, Christianity was initially a Jewish sect, but over time, the incorporation of Gentiles meant that not all Jewish practices (kosher food and the prohibition of relationships with Gentiles) remained intact. Eventually, all foods were considered clean (Mar 7:19; Act 10:10-15), as were the relationships between Jews and Gentiles in the church. The question of permissibility to eat meat offered to idols (Act 15:20; Rom 14:20-21; 1Co 8:1-13, 10:24-29) eventually became an issue of liberality; early Christians could eat meat, but not if it offended the consciences of others.

As the dominant culture was Hellenized and Roman, it is important to remember that Romans paid little attention to common ancestry but rather favored factors such as "education, observance of Roman laws, morality, piety, and citizenship."[55] During the times of persecution in early Christianity, being "in Christ" often replaced the ethnicity, heritage, and race that deviated from the dominant Greco-Roman culture. Jewish Christians, for example, were seen as ceasing to be Jewish, having left their heritage for Christ. Like being white today, being Christian and Gentile became the standard and was seen as a universal over ethnic or racial identity.

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[54] Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 37.
[55] Buell, *Why This New Race*, 40.

Denise Kimber Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge identify the paradoxical effects of this understanding of Christianity.[56] If Paul is understood as defining religiosity as distinct from racial or ethnic identifications, when Christian practice being racist and oppressive, it is seen as contradicting the ideals inherent in early Christianity. This is the basis for an alternate view of human relationships where differences are embraced and transcended. On the other hand, this understanding of Paul's teaching can be interpreted as anti-Jewish and racist. If Christian universalism is non-ethnic, we may, for example, ignore our own racist interpretive framework and make anti-Judaism a positive element of Christianity at Judaism's expense.[57] Consequently, Judaism becomes seen as less than Christianity, legalistic, and limited.

Buell and Hodge propose an alternate position that avoids the paradox previously stated: "By attending to how ethnicity and race are always shifting, always implicated in political and ideological structures, we can imagine ways of transforming ethnoracial oppression currently structured around notions of absolute difference."[58] Differences can be a source of strength that can mean transformation for Christians rather than something that must be obliterated in the name of a universalized Christianity.[59]

This means that Galatians 3:28[60] can be seen not as over and against racial or ethnic identity but as a model of connection where differences can be maintained, and there need not be a homogenized, universal Christianity that obliterates those differences.

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[56] Denise K. Buell and Caroline J. Hodge, "The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 2 (2004): 236, doi: 108.72.60.106, accessed May 17, 2023.
[57] Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 3, cited by Buell and Hodge, "The Politics of Interpretation," *237.*
[58] Buell and Hodge, "The Politics of Interpretation," *237.*
[59] Ibid., 238.
[60] "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Thus, Christianity is a community made up of people who do not have to sacrifice their unique gender, ethnic, and racial identities. The particularity of individuals is crucial. As we are one in Christ Jesus, being Greek, Jewish, slave, free, male, and female, so all equally inform what it means to be Christian; no one is greater or lesser than another. We are only one in Christ where all are welcome and equal. Each person's ethnic and racial background, therefore, adds texture and depth to what it means to be in Christ. There is a fluidity to what it means to be in Christ and a Christian. Thus, the unifying precedent within Christianity (that one is Christian and a part of the body of Christ) means there is to be no discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, or social or economic standing.

Over time, however, being Christian became increasingly seen as an ethnoracial marker in and of itself that, and in the narratives of the martyrs, was juxtaposed with Romanness.[61] "I am Christian" became the response when Christians would not participate in the cultic practices of the Roman Empire because Christians worshipped their own "emperor," Christ Jesus. Early Christianity was not based merely on belief but on practices and character attributes for what it meant to be Christian.[62] Christians were to be Christ-like, bearing the attributes of God and having behavioral practices that were consistent with being Christian.[63]

Today we think of ethnicity and race as social constructs that serve political and ideological interests.[64] For example, race is not a biological construct but is based on attitudes about color, characteristics, and stereotypes that change over time. And yet,

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[61] Buell, *Why This New Race*, 54.
[62] Ibid., 45. "The linking of religious practices with ethnoracial transformation and coherency appears in 'Christian' texts as early as 1 Peter. This text describes the addresses (in 'Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia') as ones who have given up 'the futile ways inherited from [their] fathers' (1Pe 1:18) and taken up a new holy code of conduct from another father (1:14-17)."
[63] Ibid., 60.
[64] Buell and Hodge, "The Politics of Interpretation," 236.

biblical interpretation often uses a hermeneutic of race and ethnicity that damages both the scripture's message and the people who respond to it. The Bible, over time, has been read and interpreted within the context of specific communities who assumed that the way they interpret the Bible is what it says and means.[65] One example, cited earlier, would be those who supported the industry of chattel slavery because the scriptural record identifies slaves as a part of the early Church; those scriptures were used to justify and normalize slavery throughout history, and which Americans practiced from colonial times to the Civil War. Another example would be that because Judaism is based on the Torah, the Law, Judaism is rigid, legalistic, and without grace; the scriptures that refer to Judaism are to be interpreted in that light. Both these examples offer a limited perspective that is based on misinterpretations of the biblical text.

If, however, Christians were to embrace the ethnoracial identities of all those in Christ and celebrate those differences rather than using them as a basis for discrimination, racism would be seen and understood as the sin it is. Barth identifies sin as "that which God does not will, in which he has no part, which he did not create, which has no possibility before him and is absurd before him, and therefore which God has rejected and forbidden."[66] God created humanity in all its diversity, and nothing in scripture suggests that when God creates anew in Christ (2Co 5:17), the diversity found in humanity has been erased. God has rejected the sin of racism, and to practice discrimination and racism, in Barth's words, is forbidden.

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[65] James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), Preface, xxviii-ix.

[66] Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 400. Cited by Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Gender, Sin and Grace: Feminist Theologies Meet Karl Barth's Hamartiology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1977): 424, accessed March 31, 2023, doi:108.72.60.106.

In contrast to the biblical ideal, James Cone observes that white Christians "do not recognize the narrowness of their experience and the particularity of their own theological expressions. They like to think of themselves as universal people."[67] White Christians are blind to their own whiteness and fail to see the need to incorporate rather than reject Christians who are ethnoracially different. White color-blindness assumes that racism is something that individuals do intentionally, rather than seeing that all whites are implicated in racism, and attributes structural racism to non-racial factors.[68] This means that in the church, whites see their cultural and denominational preferences as normative and do not welcome other ethnic or racial expressions of Christianity. As acedia causes one to focus on self to the exclusion of most, if not all, others, one then refuses to desire or to live according to God's desires, blinding the one struggling with acedia to the narrowness of their views.

[67] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1975), 126.
[68] Kristopher Norris, *Witnessing Whiteness: Confronting White Supremacy in the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 23.

PART FOUR

Tackling Reconciliation in the Contemporary Church

Often today, we hear calls within the church for racial reconciliation. Yet, at the same time, those calls often mean little more than an apology from white Christians for past bad actions and an expectation that forgiveness will be given once that apology has been offered, and the offenders will be off the hook. Part of the problem, too, is that many white Christians believe or assume that only overt actions on the part of individuals constitute racism.[1] Efforts to hold the church corporately accountable for racial sin backfire when only individual words and actions by particular bad actors are seen as racism, which is a denial of systemic racism. Equally problematic is the belief that whites are victims of reverse racism that stems from a misunderstanding of what racism means, denying the power dynamic of white dominance that fuels racism. The church, which, through faith in the reconciling God, has in its possession the best tools to address and fight systemic racism, does not always see the need for reconciliation.[2] Because white Christians fail to "acknowledge ongoing discrimination embedded in systems and structures,"[3] black and white Christians do not see eye to eye on the problem of racism. To begin the process of true racial reconciliation, however, the different racial perspectives of the groups involved need to be explored and understood.

[1] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise Study Guide: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2019), 181.
[2] Ibid., 184.
[3] Ibid.

Ibram X. Kendi argues that it is racial discrimination that leads to racist ideas and that, in turn, culminates in ignorance and hate.[4] It is impossible to know what action started racial and ethnic discrimination initially. Still, it is possible to posit that fear of someone different, or the desire that some have for power and domination over others, are part of what is at the heart of racial discrimination. But fear and a desire for power and control are not the only things from which racial discrimination can spring. Political, economic, cultural,[5] religious, or social self-interests are often at the heart of how and why discrimination develops. For example, a Christian's self-interest frequently leads to ideas of superiority over others who believe or practice Christianity differently.[6]

Kendi and the Deep Challenge of Racism

From that basis of racial or ethnic discrimination, Kendi argues that racist ideas develop. When one distinguishes another on the basis of difference, any trait that another has can be exploited and turned into racist views. Based on the differences discerned, it becomes easy to universalize traits, words, and actions about another to others like them. Once their traits (and actions and words) are universalized, they can become racist ideas. This is complicated by the fact that when others' traits are liked and admired, people are more likely to see themselves as like those they admire and different (better) than those others they dislike or despise. It must be added that racist ideas can easily be established when one does not detest or abhor another; it is possible to love someone and still have

[4] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2016), 9.
[5] Ibid., 10.
[6] Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 11-23.

racist ideas and practices. The universalizing aspect of these dynamics is at the heart of racist ideas; all one must do is take a negative belief about someone and universalize it to everyone with the same traits.

For Kendi, racist ideas are the fertile ground from which ignorance and hate grow. Once an idea or trait about someone is universalized to others, the idea or trait can morph into other, more out-of-proportion ideas. For example, knowing someone is poor can easily change into believing that their poverty is caused by laziness; laziness then becomes generalized to all poor people. If someone also believed they were poor because they were not intelligent, then all who belong to that group of people are seen as lazy and unintelligent. The void of ignorance in the human mind can be easily filled by superstitions, suppositions, and biases[7] about which they have no real knowledge. When those biases and suppositions are believed and acted upon, they can become weapons directed toward others, especially when the opposite of those ideas (industriousness and intelligence) are universalized to one's own group or race. This is how white privilege begins. Once blacks, indigenous, Asians, Latinos, or Muslims become the target group, systemic racism is set in motion.

Our biases are often our blind spots.[8] When one identifies with a group based on commonalities of thought and discounts other information that contradicts what they believe, it is a confirmation bias. To reduce the effect of this bias, one must admit they have this blind spot, and one must seek out others who will challenge this bias with other

[7] Project Implicit from Harvard University offers helpful tests one can take to access one's own biases. See https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html.
[8] Ken Evers-Hood, *The Irrational Jesus: Leading the Fully Human Church* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 31.

information.[9] If one who is white becomes aware of systematic racism, they must seek out people who will help them by pointing out things that are racist in their words and actions.

A second type of bias is loss aversion.[10] If one gains pleasure by being in a like-minded group, then a loss is felt when leaving or changing their mind about the group. Loss aversion bias means that people will think and act in ways that protect themselves from the loss. If one is a member of the KKK, changing one's thinking and stopping being part of the group would mean a significant loss. To overcome that loss and leave the group would be painful. That is why many may stay in the KKK even though they know it is racist and denigrating, and even when it leads to hateful acts.

A third bias is the status quo bias.[11] This blind spot means that people accept things the way they are. Ken Evers-Hood argues that when people are pressed for time or when they are in a new situation, people often opt for the status quo. Again, people often need help and support to see or do things differently. If the status quo has a history of black enslavement, Jim Crow, and segregation, it is easier to see blacks in an inferior way. Those in this mindset must become aware of how much culture influences their attitudes and actions, and they must educate themselves about the pervasiveness of racist thinking and activities.

A fourth bias is the optimism bias, which means others may be biased but not oneself.[12] It is easier to see another's racism than one's own. To put it in biblical terms,

[9], Evers-Hood, *The Irrational Jesus* 33.
[10] Ibid., 34-35.
[11] Ibid., 36-37.
[12] Ibid., 37-38.

someone tries to take the speck out of another's eye, all the while having a log in their own eye, per Matthew 7:3-5.

It is important to note that these biases are not sins in themselves; what makes biases sinful is when one decides to give in to them and negatively act upon them. "Sin is the human freedom to respond to God's desire for partnership, divine 'Yes,' with a sad, meaningless 'no.'"[13] In the case of racial discrimination, one must challenge the implicit biases with new information and assistance from others who will challenge and support the person as they address the bias and how they have acted upon it negatively.

For racial discrimination to begin, Kendi's process that ends in hate and ignorance, one must have a schema in mind to explain the "how" of discriminatory thinking. Christina Cleveland turned to psychological research and identified the phrase "cognitive miser" to explain how people conserve their cognitive resources by spending time with people who think like them or those who are like them.[14] Humans categorize information to keep track of it; it is a natural thought process, a mental shortcut. Making categories helps people not just keep track of information but it helps them to conserve mental energy.

The problem that develops, though, is that people randomly erect internal mental boundaries and group people into smaller homogeneous categories. This is where biases come into play. Physical characteristics, ethnicity, economic station in life, language, and theology are examples of distinguishing characteristics that are less significant and help divide larger, diverse groups into smaller, homogeneous ones. For example, if someone meets a Christian who is black or indigenous, it is easier for some to think of them first as

[13] Evers-Hood, *The Irrational Jesus*, 67.
[14] Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ*, 44-45.

black or indigenous and second as a member of the body of Christ (which is worldwide and inherently diverse). People worship differently, use different styles and/or language dialects, and may practice their Christianity in vastly different ways. Predicting a large, diverse group's actions is more energy-consuming than doing the same for a smaller, homogeneous group. People are often seen not as individual believers belonging to the greater family of God but as members of a cultural subgroup within Christianity.[15]

When people categorize others by ethnicity or race, religion, and language, the distinct barriers people erect often contain smaller and smaller groups defined by particular characteristics. The smaller the group, the more concentrated and universal the traits seem. Additionally, not all divide people into categories using the same criteria, so there is no universal consensus about what a characterization of a person means. The longer these mental barriers stand, dividing people by traits, the more firmly those characterizations are held. It is a simple step to understand people with certain characteristics as "them" and "not us." The next step is the conclusion that "we are special and unique" and "they are all the same." This determines the "ingroup" and the "outgroup," according to Cleveland.[16] Once a person reaches this conclusion, members of the ingroup are no longer motivated to interact or learn about the outgroup. This is where racial discrimination begins.

Additionally, the ingroup purports to know what the *outgroup* thinks; worse, the ingroup "knows" what the outgroup thinks of them. This creates a barrier that is difficult to overcome. For example, if the ingroup "knows" what the outgroup thinks, the first group will reinforce their negative behavior toward the second group. These assumptions

[15] Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ*, 48-49.
[16] Ibid., 51.

made of others further color one's perception as racial discrimination hardens into racism. Once one believes to know what "they" think, ideas about others become tainted by exaggeration and misperceptions. Those inaccurate views take on new lives of their own by distorting and ignoring objective reality.[17]

Racism then distorts our memories and our interpretation of those memories because we remember information consistent with our worldviews. This, in turn, reinforces what is already believed. The more deeply the misperceptions are held, the more likely hate and ignorance of the truth will grow.[18] "The sinister side effects of categorizing—erecting divisions between *us* and *them*, thinking that *they* are all the same, automatically thinking that *they* think poorly of *us*, recalling false memories of *them* and inaccurately interpreting their behavior—all reinforce the divide between different groups in the church."[19] Kendi's understanding of racial discrimination, which leads to racism and culminates in hate and ignorance, is seen more concretely and less abstractly through using this psychological schema that Cleveland articulates. Understanding the pathway from discrimination to hate and ignorance through people's inner thoughts will assist in providing a wider perspective as reconciliation is considered.

When one considers acedia through the lenses that Kendi and Cleveland articulate, one gains insight into how and why racism can be seen as an offspring of acedia. Recall that the sin of acedia is, at its most basic level, a turning away from God and not caring about what God values. For Christians, this turning from God may be episodic, but it may also be a turning in one or more areas of one's life. Our biases

[17] Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ,* 57.
[18] Ibid., 60.
[19] Ibid., 60.

(confirmation, loss aversion, status quo, and optimism) can all be affected by acedia. One struggling with acedia makes choices based on one's biases where they turn from God and God's creation.

To understand the world, people naturally categorize others into groups and create groups within groups. Using an example from nature, one may categorize all things that are alive and that swim as fish. But the discerning person who fishes the ocean or watches nature documentaries knows that not all things that swim have gills or lay eggs. Some things that swim give birth and nurse their young, like seals, porpoises, manatees, and whales. Scientifically, they are categorized as mammals and are not fish. The diverse sea creatures are then subdivided into smaller groups that share specific traits: fish and mammals. It is like this with humans, too. It takes a great deal of cognitive energy to comprehend the diversity of humanity, and so people categorize other people by their traits and behaviors. People, though, do not categorize others in the same way as everyone else because not everyone uses the same criteria.

This process of categorization bears the marks of acedia because we judge others by our own standards of similarity and difference rather than God's. As soon as people make judgments, implicitly or explicitly, based on their own standards, acedia is manifested. It is not simply the categorization of others that is the fruit of acedia; it is the judgment of worth made about the group or groups. Once people begin to categorize others into smaller groups by creating mental barriers around characteristics and traits, the more homogeneous those groups become. At this point in Cleveland's schema, people begin to spend time with people who think like they do. Many suppositions are made about others because people do not use the same criteria for their mental

characterizations. The views one holds become more concentrated, and the longer one's views are held, the more firm they become.

At this stage, Kendi's development of racist ideas can be seen to occur. When people begin to spend time only with others who think as they do, acedia is activated, which tempts the person to judge the different group. The one struggling with acedia makes judgments, not on the basis of what it means to be in God's image, but on human criteria about the quality of the people (who are "special" and who are not). The one struggling with acedia excels at disliking and even despising people as less important, ultimately breaking off relationships with them.

Once these groupings are established in one's mind or in a group of people who think alike, ingroups and outgroups develop. Within the ingroups, the supposition of uniqueness and being special is reinforced, and the assumption is often made that the ingroup knows what the outgroup thinks about them. People struggling with acedia become increasingly well-defended about their perceptions and misperceptions and become defensive when questioned about their beliefs. Kendi and Cleveland highlight the ignorance of those who view others from a racist perspective. Personal memories and agreed-upon history become distorted, and people ignore objective reality and are unwilling to examine their views and perspectives openly. Within monasticism, acedia was marked by one's hatred of one's brother, and, by extension, the rejection of another can be seen based on one's personal hatred of that other person's race.

One held in acedia's embrace can appear to love God, sound holy, and live a successful Christian life. The turn away from God can be quite small, like a nickel preventing a door from being closed. At the hinge, it looks barely a problem, but the door

cannot close. The further one follows the discrepancy over the width of the door, one finds that there is a significant gap between the outer edge of the door and the doorframe. One may turn only a little away from God, but following the trajectory of that turn can lead to significant areas of wrong thinking and wrong behavior, like assuming superiority to people in an outgroup whom God created and then acting negatively on that feeling. This is how "wonderful Christians" can be racist and can participate in systemic racism.

Jonathan Augustine's Push Towards Reconciliation and a Friendly Pushback

Jonathan C. Augustine argues in his recent book, *Called to Reconciliation: How the Church Can Model Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion,* that there are three types of reconciliation for Christians: salvific reconciliation, social reconciliation, and civic reconciliation. [20] Salvific reconciliation, he contends, is accomplished *through* Jesus; social reconciliation is *because* of Jesus and "moves toward a political ethic rooted in an egalitarianism, or at least an equal treatment of others,"[21] while civil reconciliation is "humans seeking governmental redress for social ills."[22] This work lays out a schema for understanding what God has done in Christ, how God desires that the church respond, and how Christianity influences the public sphere. Augustine's work opens the door for a deeper discussion of the sin that is foundational to racism.

Ultimately, the title of Augustine's book, *Called to Reconciliation: How the Church Can Model Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion,* clearly sets out for the reader that the church is called to model behavior that is not racist but equally inclusive of all. While

[20] Jonathan C. Augustine, *Called to Reconciliation: How the Church Can Model Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 4.
[21] Ibid., 21.
[22] Ibid., 100.

this modeling is necessary for the Christian and the church, the Christian's obligation to bring the message of reconciliation to the world is about more than modeling inclusive, non-racist words and behaviors for the world. Those who have been reconciled in Christ know not only the forgiveness God offers but also have a growing awareness of the depth of the sin that causes the separation of God in the first place. Racist words and actions are sinful in and of themselves. Simply correcting racist words and behaviors does not deal with the underlying sin of acedia that leads to those behaviors and words. Here, Augustine's work gives rise to further discussion about the sinful origins of racism.

While I agree that salvific and social reconciliation are both found within the biblical record, his emphasis on the differing roles of Jesus in salvation and social reconciliation seems to be an artificial distinction. The biblical texts Augustine cites (Rom 5:10-11; 1 Co 11:17-22; 2 Co 5:18-19; Gal 3:27-28) speak of Christians as being in Christ and that we receive from God through Christ. Both reconciliation between God and humanity and the reconciliation of one Christian to another happen in (*en*) and through (*dia*) Christ Jesus.[23] Augustine argues that people are reconciled to God *through* Jesus and are reconciled to each other *because* of Jesus.[24] It is when people are in Christ (2 Co 5:17) that a new creation has occurred. God reconciles those in Christ to God's own self by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (2 Co 5:18; Rom 5:10; see also Eph 2:16 and Col 1:20) and gives Christians the ministry of reconciliation (2 Co 5:19). Christians have the potential to be reconciled to each other because they are in Christ, because of the salvific work Christ has accomplished. It is impossible to separate a

[23] *En* is used in 2 Co 5:17,19; *dia* is used in Rom 5:10-11 and 2 Co 5:18. The meaning of these prepositions passages is virtually the same.
[24] Augustine, *Called to Reconciliation,* 21.

Christian's life in Christ from the work Christ accomplished by his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. It is equally impossible to separate a Christian's obligation to bear the ministry of reconciliation to the world. Social reconciliation is part and parcel of salvific reconciliation as well as a faithful outgrowth of it.

Augustine's discussions of social reconciliation in the church, the body of Christ, are thorough. He offers three criteria for evaluating social reconciliation: "equal treatment of others," "forgiveness for previous transgressions," and "recognition that forgiveness is a part of the ministry of reconciliation Jesus left to the church."[25] What he does not do is articulate how and on what basis people treat each other equally. He argues for gender, ethnic, and social equality and equal standing regardless of economic class without offering any steps to address the underlying prejudices beneath these issues. While it is true, it is not enough to say that there is no black nor white in Christ; there must be a dismantling of why this is so difficult to attain in the church.

Humanity is created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2), and there are no humans in which this divine image is lessened or absent. God instructed the first human in Genesis 2:16-17 about which trees were good for food and the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," which was forbidden, and eating it would result in death. The first man passed this injunction to the woman God made from the man's side; God did not, in the scriptural record, directly instruct her. When the serpent came to tempt the woman, she embellished[26] God's instruction not to eat from the tree by saying that

[25] Augustine, *Called to Reconciliation,* 49-50.
[26] Deu 12:32 ("You must diligently observe everything that I command you; do not add to it or take anything from it.") and Pro 30:5-6 ("Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or else he will rebuke you, and you will be found a liar.") both make clear that this embellishment is sin.

touching the tree was also forbidden and death would be the result. What happened with that embellishment was humanity's subtle turning away from God to believe their own perspective rather than God's. When the humans turned from God to their opinion of what God said, they thought of themselves as equal to God, and a subtle substitute for God[27] was the result. This turn away from God is acedia. There is a further turn away from God when the woman sees that "the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (Gen 3:6); she coveted[28] the fruit, took it, and ate it. This progression of sin from turning away from God (acedia) to embellishment, coveting, and eating the forbidden fruit demonstrates the damage that can result in a turn away from God.[29]

Likewise, racism begins with a simple turn away from God. The dependence on one's own opinion about another human, rather than understanding that they are a creature in the image of God, is the first step toward exclusivity and racism. This turn away from God is the "nickel in the doorframe" and the beginning of a journey away from God and God's desires. Once one sees another human as less than in any way and generalizes that denigration to people of the same color or ethnicity, racism is born, and one is on a trajectory toward a multiplicity of evil actions.

Because racism and its subsequent evil words and actions are sins compounded upon acedia, forgiveness becomes quite complicated. When a person or a community is

[27] While the commandments given at Sinai are later than what occurred in the Garden of Eden, the uniqueness of God was not something to be assumed by humanity. Exodus 20:3 clearly shows there are to be no other gods but God. When Eve believed that touching the forbidden tree would make one die, she thought her own understanding was superior to God's instruction to Adam (Gen 2:16-17). In this, she thought herself to be like God.

[28] Exo 20:17 states, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." The tree of the knowledge of good and evil belonged to God.

[29] While God gives the Ten Commandments in a later part of the Pentateuch, it must be remembered that the editing process to merge the existing accounts (J, E, P, and D) occurred around the time of the Babylonian Exile. All of the Pentateuch informs any reading of the Pentateuch. The first humans foreshadowed the giving of the commandments forbidding other gods and coveting.

repentant, God can forgive both the outward manifestation of sin and the underlying sin. Sometimes, people can forgive the person whose racist actions injured them, but people cannot forgive the sin of turning away from God. Forgiveness of racist words and actions alone is only a bandage covering a much deeper problem. The essential turning away from God and God's desires is at the heart of every sin. While racism is a moral problem of words, attitudes, actions, behaviors, and systems, at its heart it is a spiritual problem. It is only when one understands the inherent turning away from God in every racist thought, word, and action that the possibility of repentance and restitution for racist actions and words can become a reality.

According to Augustine, forgiveness is to be given for previous transgressions. He argues that Galatians "implicitly calls for both repentance and forgiveness in its emphasis on equitable treatment and communal relations among all people as equals."[30] These are two different issues. Forgiveness versus repentance and forgiveness are not discussed in Galatians 3. For those who are in Christ, Christians are to forgive as we have been forgiven (Mat 6:12; Luk 6:37). Only in Luke is there an expectation of repentance before one forgives another (Luk 17:3-4).[31] Augustine posits that Christians are to "focus on Paul's theology of equality, which is the heart of social reconciliation."[32] This formulation is backward: Paul's theology of reconciliation is at the heart of equality.

In the case of racial inequality, there are many levels of injury. The church's history in the U.S. is fraught with sin against racial minorities. Systemic racism and

[30] Augustine, *Called to Reconciliation*, 51
[31] One might also reference Mat 18:15-17; however, repentance is only implied. Mat 18:18-22 talks about forgiveness directly and the obligation of Jesus' followers to forgive entirely, without reference to repentance.
[32] Augustine, *Called to Reconciliation*, 35.

individuals' sins must be addressed if reconciliation is to occur. This begins with acknowledging what occurred and its effects on people's lives. It is only through deep conversation that this kind of acknowledgment can happen and begin to build trust. Repentance for wrongs one has committed against another is the next step. It means taking ownership of one's sin and the sin done on one's behalf. For this confession to affect change, it must be genuine. Finally, there must be evidence of restitution toward the offended. Again, restitution can only be adequate to the offenses through deep and trusting conversation. Forgiveness may be offered at any point; however, it must be noted that sometimes forgiveness never occurs because the hurt is too deep. Acknowledgment, repentance, and restitution are part of Christian discipline, as is forgiveness. As black theologian J. Deotis Roberts observed, "Forgiveness and reconciliation come to sinful humanity through the incarnation, which includes the cross and resurrection. . . . Knowing the measure of God's love expressed in God's redemptive act in Christ should humble the Christian and enable one to love and forgive."[33]

With systemic racism, the problem is compounded over centuries and across generations. How does one forgive for the enslavement of one's ancestors? How does one forgive the genocide of a people? What is it that God forgives, and to whom is that forgiveness given? The church in the U.S. is accountable for the myriad ways that discrimination has been and is still being accomplished by the church. An apology and request for forgiveness that does not include mechanisms for change and redress is not an apology for actual wrongdoing as much as it is a shortcut to feeling better. What is needed in the church is an understanding of not only how pervasive racism is but it must

[33] James D. Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 62-63.

also be seen as a corporate turning away from God and the people God made. The church must be willing to listen to the truth that blacks, indigenous, Asians, and Latinos tell about their experiences of living under the racism of the white church and white culture. "Reconciliation for the powerful and privileged means trusting those who have lived under oppression and even following their lead in becoming one new humanity."[34]

Augustine acknowledges that while salvific and social reconciliation is necessarily Christian, civil reconciliation is not, nor is it expressly religious. Civil reconciliation is a "moral ethic that seeks government redress to remedy injustice,"[35] which stems from "a biblically based theological ethic rooted in the equal treatment of others."[36] His chapters on civil reconciliation and the response to civil reconciliation contain an historical discussion of the Civil Rights movement and Black Lives Matter up to the present. While individual actors like Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Cone come to the fore in the struggle for racial justice due to their commitments to Christ, not all do. The teachings of the black church continue to inform many of those who work for racial equality today. The difficulty for those pursuing civil reconciliation today is that there are only limited acknowledgments of past wrongs and brief apologies with no meaningful restitution. Without the mechanisms to have these deep conversations, there are only limited ways in church culture to address the rampant racism of our time.

Finally, Augustine argues that the church must return to "her apostolic era embrace of diversity and inclusion."[37] Interestingly, Augustine turns to the books of Revelation and 1 John to call the church to accountability, where love is said to inform

[34] Boesak and DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation,* 20.
[35] Augustine, *Called to Reconciliation,* 26.
[36] Ibid., 27.
[37] Ibid., 99.

the diversity of the "church militant and the church triumphant."[38] One of the hopes Christians have is that when all is summed in Christ, there will be the future reality of love for all and between all. At this point in time, Christians look to the dream of unity in God and hope for the future that Revelation articulates. In the meantime, Christians are called not to live by the standards of the status quo but rather to live as new creatures of God, bringing God's much-needed word of reconciliation to our world of division and disunity.

God's Choice to Reconcile Us through Christ

Love for all and between all is not only a future reality, but it is also available here and now. It is inherent in the nature of God. Reconciliation is only possible because God is a God of conciliation. Conciliation is the word, action, and process of ending a disagreement.[39] The disagreement and breach in the relationship between humanity and God was settled once and for all through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Rom 6:10; Heb 10:10; 1 Pe 3:18). Christians have been restored to a relationship with God through Christ, and it is on this basis that we are made new creatures in Christ (2 Co 5:17). Love for all is demonstrated through God's reconciling action in Christ. The mechanism for love between all in Christ is less well understood.

[38] Augustine, *Called to Reconciliation*, 102-103, 105-106. The commands to love in 1 John articulate Christians' need to love other Christians. If John's church were actively doing a good job of loving, would there be the various injunctions to love and understand that God is synonymous with love (see 1 Jo 4:20-21)? The Revelation also looks forward to unity within diversity in future time when all is being summed into Christ. It is the lordship of Christ Jesus that is the unifying factor in Revelation. The unity of all the diverse members in Christ is the dream of God rather than the reality at the time of the writing of Revelation.

[39] "Conciliation," Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus, accessed November 3, 2023, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/conciliation.

To understand how this "love between all" could be made manifest, the nature of God must be considered. Christians commonly understand the Trinity as a community of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who live in a unity that Christians call God. The Bible presents God as one who constantly seeks humanity, from the first, "Adam, where are you?" to Revelation's final "Amen." This God who seeks humanity also saves through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Catherine LaCugna writes, "The doctrine of the Trinity is an effort to articulate basic Christian faith: In Jesus Christ, the ineffable and invisible God saves us from sin and death; by the power of the Holy Spirit, God continues to be altogether present to us, seeking everlasting communion with all creatures."[40]

Because God seeks communion with God's creatures, God is both in relation to all creatures, but God is also personal. This is important because God lives in a saving relationship with humanity that is mediated and empowered by the persons of the Trinity. God's inherent nature is personal and relational. "This means that every human being, and indeed every creature, has its origin in a person who by definition is not solitary but in relationship with another."[41] God does not exist in isolation but rather in community. Neither is humanity in isolation but persons in community with God and each other.

Within God, there is an utter absence of hierarchy. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not subordinate to each other, but all are fully personal and are persons who are equal. Since humanity is created in the image of God, there is no hierarchy of persons

[40] Catherine M. LaCugna, "The Practical Trinity," *The Christian Century* 109, no. 22 (November 1992): 680, accessed November 4, 2023, https://web-s-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=17798d76-8d33-4ea9-aeac-810ee71927e1%40redis.
[41] Ibid., 681.

within humanity. This is why Paul can say in Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."[42] All are equal because all bear God's image. As if to draw the point home, not only did God create humanity in God's image, but God created humanity from the humus. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return," proclaims the Ash Wednesday liturgy.[43] There is no hierarchy in humus and dust;[44] humanity is all the same. This means that for every human, no matter what race, ethnicity, gender identity, disability, or social or economic status one has, each human is utterly equal to another. Just as God is in relationship with all humanity, every human is in relationship with every other human. Those who are in Christ are positionally equal to others; it is not something a Christian must accomplish on their own. Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, has accomplished this.

The refusal to see the inherent relationship of equality that each human has to another is borne only in a refusal to see God as God is. This turning away from God is acedia, and all the "isms" that are borne of that turn, whether racism, sexism, or ageism, to name a few, are but some of the children of acedia. Once this refusal to desire God as God is takes place, the one suffering from acedia will, like the monks in the Egyptian desert, either become lazy and bored by the prospect of loving God and loving one's neighbor or will become restless, anxious, and, with frenetic activity, run from God and others. These outcomes can be either overt or covert, where people hide behind masks.

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[42] Likewise, Col 3:11 states, "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all." The categories are expanded to include even those outside of Paul's list in Gal 3:28.

[43] *The Book of Common Prayer: And Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 265.

[44] My thanks to the Rev. Anna Shine for her insight on human equality based on the stuff from which humanity it made. Our conversation was held on November 10, 2023, in Hendersonville, NC.

Acedia, though, is not simply an individual's sin. When Christian people hold like-minded racist ideas about others and come together as a community of people who dishonor others' inherent image of God, acedia can become the basis for a community's racism, a church's racism, and, over time, a society's racism. Of course, not all who are in a societal racial hierarchy are Christian. When believers turn from God, it is the sin of acedia; unbelievers are already turned away from God and thus have no compunction to see others as in God's image. Eventually, whole systems of racism develop and build upon each other, and societal racial supremacy is born.

Racism can grow in individual Christians' lives, where disavowment of certain neighbors exists in the vacuum caused by acedia; where love of neighbor once existed, racism flourishes. It is possible, though, to grow up in a Christian practice where racism is rampant. Racial hierarchy is seen as normal, and scriptural justifications like those offered before the Civil War are prevalent (e.g., the curse of Ham, the mark of the sin of Cain). One does not need to be a member of a Christian splinter group today;[45] one can simply think that a racial hierarchy is normal, and that people of color are "less" than white. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, hate crimes are not frequently caused by individuals in organized hate or splinter Christian groups, but rather "in each case, there is a victim of violence, intimidation or vandalism—targeted for no other reason than their race, religion, national origin, disability, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation."[46] That being said, not all racists are members of hate groups or even

[45] "Christian Identity," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed November 6, 2023, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/christian-identity.
[46] "New FBI Hate Crime Report Sparks Concern, Prompts Action," Southern Poverty Law Center, last modified October 24, 2023, https://www.splcenter.org/news/2023/10/24/new-fbi-hate-crime-report-sparks-concern-prompts-action.

splinter Christian groups. Racists may be nice people who say things or do things like reinforce racial stereotypes, go along with the societal barriers against people of color, or simply believe that racism is not a big issue anymore. Whether a garden-variety racist who "has a black friend," a Christian who is a white supremacist, or simply someone who has an aversion to people of color, it all begins with the turn away from God and the people that God created.

It does not need to end there, though. It is important to note that, like death, acedia and racism do not have the final word. The vision of the community offered by scripture is envisioned as a single community of God's people from every nation, color, and ethnicity embracing and embraced by God.[47] Humanity is given the choice to respond to God's redeeming grace in the resurrected Christ, where the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is open to all, reversing the power of acedia to destroy and enabling people to turn back to God. Turning back to God is a heart-level process, just as addressing racism is a heart-level process. While racism is a moral, ethical, and societal problem, at its heart and most significantly, it is a spiritual problem both for the racist and for the one affected by racism.

[47] See, for example, Isa 60:1-4, Act 2:5, 9-11; 10:28, 34-44; 15:7-9,11-12; Rev 7:9.

PART FIVE

Ignoring the Spiritual Nature of Racism Treats Racism at a Superficial Level

Systemic racism affects everyone, from the individual to institutionalized communities like the church. While white systemic racism is embedded in power structures that grew from colonial times to the present, the sin of racism affects white hearts as well as black, indigenous, Asian, or Latino/a hearts. Sin affects both those who sin against others and those who are sinned against. It is important to understand that the racist is spiritually broken by acedia, just as systemic racism afflicted on others breaks not only lives but hearts and spirits also. To address the problem of acedia and its offspring, racism, one must look to the heart of the matter and address each facet as a spiritual problem first. Dealing only with racist words and actions, without dealing with the underlying sin, will put bandages on wounds that will not heal over time but will become worse. Yes, racist words, attitudes, and actions must be addressed directly; however, if the underlying problem of sin is not addressed, racism will continue.

Kendi offers three American practices for racial reform that have not dealt with the problem of racism: self-sacrifice, uplift suasion, and educational persuasion.[1] The first, self-sacrifice, calls on whites to give up their privileges to improve conditions for discriminated communities. Kendi contends, though, that this idea is built on a myth that whites would lose out materially and not gain if the elimination of racism restructured society. The restructuring of society would lift minorities, as well as poor whites who are also discriminated against. Racism, in Kendi's estimation, should not be connected to

[1] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 503.

selfishness any more than anti-racism to selflessness because what is needed is not altruism but intelligent self-interest.[2] Intelligent self-interest means racist ideas are no longer consumed, and there is an awareness of how interconnected discrimination is on account of race, gender, gender identity, and ethnic group. For example, if women want to be seen as equal to men, it is in women's self-interest to understand that they will be treated as equals when minorities are also treated as equal. Likewise, if all poor whites want to be treated equally, it is in their self-interest to see that improvement in the lot of minorities will also improve their lot.

The second practice that Kendi articulates that has not dealt with the problem of racism is that of uplift suasion, where free blacks were encouraged by abolitionists to be the most upstanding persons in the hopes of persuading whites to give up their racial prejudice against the enslaved.[3] The problem became worse as blacks broke down racial barriers. Kendi argues that uplift suasion brought about more racism in the form of new racist ideas and policies. He cites the presidency of Barack Obama and the increased racism in his presidency's wake as a contemporary example.[4]

The final practice that should be abandoned because of its ineffectiveness is educational persuasion. Quoting W. E. B. DuBois, Kendi argues that educational persuasion means to educate white Americans about the reality of what blacks are like and about the racism they face. This has largely failed to accomplish any improvement. People know the facts, and white Americans remain unmoved and unwilling to change.[5]

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[2] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning,* 504.
[3] Ibid., 505.
[4] Ibid. 505.
[5] Ibid., 507. See also Carolyn B. Helsel, *Preaching about Racism: A Guide for Faith Leaders* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2018), 36.

Kendi's critique is that societal progress has not been made because there has not been legislative action reforming the judicial system, any process for creating better jobs, better policies on policing and prison reform, or creating an agency that, after the investigation of disparities, punishes those who consciously and unconsciously discriminate.[6] Racist ideas will end when racial discrimination is ended.[7] It can be argued, though, that many in our culture, because of their own ignorance and blinders, do not know what racial minorities face, so education will need to be part of any plan to address racism in its many forms. Yet, Kendi remains correct that education alone will not fix the problem of racism.

Kendi argues for broad, sweeping change across America that will force racial conversation and racialized actions to change. In his book *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi uses an extended metaphor of stage four cancer to describe the state of the world as it pertains to racism, and he argues that racism should be as aggressively treated as cancer with the goal of totally eradicating it.[8] While the treatment Kendi prescribes is aggressive, it is encapsulated in a process that will take time, energy, and persistence. He proposed an eleven-step process to eradicate racism in an educational institution.[9] The first step in the process is to "admit racial inequality is a problem of bad policy, not bad people."[10] Given all the evil that has been accomplished through racism, it seems that a significant amount of work would need to be done first to arrive at the starting point, as many think of racists as perpetrators of evil. Each step in his plan is a massive undertaking. There is, though, a

[6] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning,* 507.
[7] Ibid., 509.
[8] Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 235-238.
[9] Ibid., 231-232.
[10] Ibid., 231.

hole in Kendi's process because there is no room to explore and address the spiritual nature and implications of racism, and there is no mention of racial reconciliation.

For the Christian, racism is viewed as a sin, whether that racism is systemic, held corporately through policy or in its actions, or the sin is in an individual. When a community or an individual sins, there is a rupture in the relationship with God. When one sins against another, as in the case of racism, that human relationship is ruptured, as well as the relationship with God. As was previously argued, racism is born of acedia, where one turns from God and the creatures of God. Given the pervasiveness of racism in the church and the world and the depth of pain that is both historical and contemporary, it will take more than an apology[11] to begin the process toward reconciliation.

Interestingly enough, as a search on Amazon will demonstrate, many authors write about reconciliation between races. In American culture today, it will be difficult to address racial reconciliation because there are few truly shared values or cultural touchstones that are held in common; even the U.S. Constitution is not valued by all Americans. There are even fewer spiritual principles or practices. This dearth of agreed-upon spiritual disciplines and practices gives the church, the followers of Jesus, an open door to explore and discover together a way toward racial reconciliation based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. But first, the church must address its part in racism, taking the

[11] In 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) apologized for the racism in its history and practices, and the apology was accepted at that national meeting by a black pastor, Reverend Gary Frost of Ohio, who on behalf of the blacks in the denomination, offered a word of forgiveness. Yet in 2021, Critical Race Theory was opposed by the SBC. See Katherine Burgess, Duane W. Gang, and Holly Meyer, "Southern Baptists Take on Critical Race Theory but Not by Name. Here's Why," *The Tennessean* (June 15, 2021): xx, accessed November 20, 2023, https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2021/06/15/southern-baptist-convention-2021-critical-race-theory-tackled-but-not-name/7693326002/. See also: David Crary, Travis Loller, and Peter Smith, "Racial Tensions Simmer As Southern Baptists Hold Key Meeting," AP News, last modified July 5, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/racial-injustice-baptist-race-and-ethnicity-religion-900a3edd93c6ab0e7836a48751048c91.

log of racism out of its own eye and dealing with its collaboration and its participation in racist attitudes, words, and actions throughout its history.

Facing and Healing the Church's Complicity in Racism

From the earliest colonial governments and the churches that informed governments' establishment to the present, racism has been inherently part of the church. The complicity of the church in the racial sin that plagues our nation comes as a result of the church's own struggles with racial sin and division. The church must confront its own racism and be part of the reconciling love of God, bringing healing to the church and then to the people outside its walls. An example is that of the Jamestown Colony in Virginia. At its core, colonial Jamestown was Anglican.[12] Jamestown was colonized to expand England's holdings in the world and with a secondary purpose of the evangelization of the indigenous in the area. Even with Jamestown's mandatory church attendance,[13] it was the first to purchase Angolan slaves from the *White Lion* in 1619.[14] The history of English colonization of the Western Hemisphere demonstrates the centrality of Christianity in its mission to settle, govern, and establish Christianity for all.

Given the history of enslavement, forced conversions, and the genocide of indigenous peoples, many question whether reconciliation is possible. If there have always been relationships colored by enslavement, genocide, racism, and racial discrimination, how does one reconcile and return to a previously good relationship

[12] Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, VA, "Religion at Jamestown," accessed November 20, 2023, https://www.jyfmuseums.org/learn/research-and-collections/essays/religion-at-jamestown.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Hannah-Jones and *The New York Times Magazine*, *The 1619 Project*, xix.

(conciliation) if none existed?[15] This is certainly true from the world's perspective, given the history of American colonies and, later, the United States. For Christians, though, there was a time of conciliation in the Garden of Eden, before sin, when God and the creatures of God shared a relationship of love. Looking back to Eden does not offer a rose-colored picture for Christians but rather confirms the reality of how badly people have marred their relationships with each other and God.

To gain perspective on racial reconciliation, recall that God reconciles humanity through Christ; humanity does not accomplish this; God does.[16] Awareness of the magnitude of this God-given reconciliation comes when one understands one's own distance from God and what it means to be a new creation.[17] Each must be in Christ as a new creation, equipped with the ministry of reconciliation; only then can we minister the good word of God's reconciliation to others.

It is from this position that Christians can respond with gratitude for the reconciling work that God has done. It is no coincidence that one of the two primary sacraments of the church is the Holy Eucharist, a meal of thanksgiving to God for the reconciling work God has done through Christ Jesus. Within the Orthodox, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran churches, this meal of thanksgiving and praise is a central part of each week's worship; giving thanks is a primary means of worship. One may, however, go through the motions of giving thanks when participating in a Eucharist

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[15] Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 88-89.

[16] "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

[17] "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

without gratitude but rather participate out of a sense of entitlement. Carolyn Helsel, in her book *Preaching about Racism*, argues that working on racism, particularly preaching about racism, is to be done from a position of gratitude. In approaching racism with a motivation of gratitude, people are called to share the ways that others "can know more fully the breadth of community God is calling us to experience, and to point to the work of God already in our midst, redeeming the brokenness of the world."[18] Understanding the redemption of humanity produces gratitude in the Christian, and the good news to be proclaimed is that God is calling humanity away from the sin of racism. This is not to say that Christians are to be thankful for slavery or genocide; rather, they are to be thankful that the oppressed have been heard and are being delivered by God and that Christians have an opportunity to repent of their racism.

Gratitude is also a process in which Christians are invited to participate. It is possible to be grateful for truth-telling that communicates the depth of sin in white individuals and communities. It is possible to be grateful amid painful conversations. To be grateful is a process of humility as one empties oneself of entitlement and position because of race, becoming thankful for hearing the truth, for being offered by God the opportunity to repent, and for being able to participate in the healing grace of God that is open to all who are affected by racism. Operating from a perspective of gratitude helps one to receive the truth about racism and one's own participation in systemic racism. Gratitude does not make it an easy process; rather, it is a much more complex process because one abandons the ways of defensiveness and anger that come quickly and easily,

[18] Helsel, *Preaching about Racism*, 9.

and lets oneself off the hook. Gratitude keeps God in perspective and helps to dethrone one from being the center of one's life.

As one begins to listen to and read pain-filled stories of racism in others' lives, the grace of God will hold up a mirror to the listener or reader so that they can recognize their own part in racism. Howard Thurman writes that Christianity has too often been on the side of the powerful and strong rather than on the side of the weak and oppressed, even though the gospel of Christ is counter to this idea.[19] Pearl Buck observes that "Race prejudice . . . is a shadow over all of us, and the shadow is darkest over those who feel it least and allow its evil effects to go on."[20] For whites, the truth of their own racism may dawn on them slowly, while at other times, it comes in a shocking jolt. Whites often walk through life with internal blinders on, not seeing racism in their own hearts and practices, and it is through the grace of God that the light begins to pierce through those blinders, enabling one to see more and more the reality of what it means to be racist.[21]

Lament over white sin and the suffering of all the other races is a godly response to all the damage done through racism. Lament will be different for whites, who will be lamenting their sin and the suffering their sin has caused, than it will be for blacks, indigenous and Asians, who will lament and mourn the catastrophic consequences of being sinned against, generation after generation. Work toward reconciliation cannot be affectively accomplished until there is a reckoning for sin and its consequences. One must get to the bottom of the damage that has been done before one can understand the magnitude of what must be forgiven before reconciliation can be completed.

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[19] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 20.
[20] As quoted in Teesha Hadra and John Hambrick, *Black and White: Disrupting Racism One Friendship at a Time* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), 45.
[21] Helsel, *Preaching about Racism*, 19.

The importance of honest relationships between people of different races cannot be underestimated. Oftentimes, it takes the story of someone deeply cared about to break down the defenses one has in one's heart. It is humbling to invite another to reflect on what they hear in the conversation, and even more humbling when they reflect back the hurt conveyed in one's words and actions. To willingly hear a rebuke of a racist attitude, comment, or action, however softly or harshly made, is an important part of one's own process of coming to terms with one's own racism. This can be an important step toward not only a deeper relationship but toward changing one's perspective. When new insight is gratefully gained through a growing relationship with another, it is important to act on that new insight and allow it to enlighten one's perspective.

When one encounters one's own racism, there is a tendency to ignore the fault and the damage. For Christians, though, there is an obligation that when one finds racism within one's self, one takes that sin to God in confession, amends their life, and makes restitution for the wrong that has been done. In the Episcopal Church, there are liturgies called "Reconciliation of a Penitent."[22] This liturgy is between a penitent, a priest, and God. Part of that liturgy is the confession of the penitent's sin. There are similar liturgies in both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. James 5:16[23] is one biblical reference that encourages confessing one's sin to other believers and God. It is important to note, however, that many practices of Christianity believe that confession is only to God. The trouble with an individual's private confession to God is that there is little accountability, and motivation to change is often fleeting. Especially when dealing with

[22] *The Book of Common Prayer*, 446-452.
[23] "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).

sin against another, like racist thoughts, comments, or actions, that confession of sin to a clergyperson, spiritual director, or spiritual counselor can make a significant difference in one's accountability. As James promises, confession of sin brings healing.

Corporate prayers of confession are also offered in the context of regular worship in many differing practices of Christianity. The following example of corporate prayer is found in *Enriching Our Worship*:[24]

> God of all mercy, we confess that we have sinned against you, opposing your will in our lives. We have denied your goodness in each other, in ourselves, and in the world you have created. We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf. Forgive, restore, and strengthen us through our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may abide in your love and serve only your will. Amen.

Even though this prayer is used in corporate worship, it outlines things to consider and confess. This prayer is particularly helpful when one is wrestling with the differing aspects of racism as one is led to confess "the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf."

Repentance requires not only honestly confessing one's sin but restitution for sin and the demonstration of amendment of life. Christian repentance is more than apologizing to God and asking for forgiveness. Repentance means confession as an accounting for the things we have done and the things we have omitted doing, and like the prayer cited above, the evil done on one's behalf and the ways one benefits from that sin. A second aspect of repentance is restitution. It is the ownership that one's sin has injured another and that one is responsible for repairing the breach caused by the sin. If one steals from another, one must return what was stolen and any damages that occurred

[24] Episcopal Church, *Enriching Our Worship 1: Morning and Evening Prayer, The Great Litany, and The Holy Eucharist*, Standing Liturgical Commission (New York: Church Publishing, 1998), 19.

because of the theft. Another word for restitution, and one to which people often object strenuously, is reparations. Restitution means more than prayers. It is a necessary step to demonstrate one's love for those who have been affected by one's sin and a way to show sincere amendment of life.

The third aspect of repentance is an amendment of life. It means simply that one works not to commit that sin again. Like with making a confession, having a spiritual counselor, spiritual director, or clergyperson to whom one is accountable is a considerable aid in making an amendment of life. The follow-up inherent in a confessional relationship makes it possible to work honestly through an issue of sin and make necessary changes.

Finally, one is to acknowledge and offer an apology to the one hurt by the racist words or actions. The sincerity of the apology opens the door to further relationship. Apologizing is something the offender gives the offended. An apology is different than asking for forgiveness. Forgiveness is something the offended would give freely; it cannot be forced. To ask for forgiveness forces the offended into a corner as they may be ready to forgive, or they may still be working through the hurt and unable to forgive. While the offender may want the closure that forgiveness gives, they cannot require it of the offended.

Coping with Acedia as the Root of Racism

For a process of racial reconciliation to work, there is always a two-pronged approach one must take. This two-pronged confession deals both with racial discrimination and the underlying sin of acedia. Whenever one engages in a process of

repentance, one must deal not with the sin against another alone but the sin against God. When one commits a sin of discrimination against another, that is the top layer of corruption. Underneath racial discrimination is both a turning from God with accompanying resistance to doing the things God wants and the rejection of the value of God's image in the other. This underlying layer of sin is acedia. In reality, acedia, with its subtle turn away from God and the creatures of God, is a part of all sin and requires a two-pronged approach to repentance. For the purposes of this thesis, acedia has been discussed in relation to racial sin.

The ancient theologian John Cassian is vehement that the only possible and successful response to acedia is for the one struggling with acedia to stand and fight.[25] Josef Pieper observes, "Not only can acedia and ordinary diligence exist very well together; it is even true the senselessly exaggerated workaholism of our age is directly traceable to acedia, which is a basic characteristic of the spiritual countenance of precisely this age in which we live."[26] Indeed, we live in a time where people avoid actual intimacy with God and do not wait on God but spend their days filling them alternately with frenetic activity and inactivity. When one considers racism, it comes out of that refusal to be intimate with God and, by extension, the creatures in God's own image. To stand and fight acedia will bring one's love into alignment with God and the creatures of God, and racism will no longer have a foothold until the next time one turns from God. Ultimately, acedia is a failure of love, and racism, acedia's child, is an outgrowth of that failure to love. Standing and fighting acedia is waiting on God and loving.

[25] Vogel, "The Speed of Sloth," 61.
[26] Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 118.

To confess acedia, one must take a moral inventory of how one has offended God and others. With that moral inventory completed, one must explore each sin from the perspective of how and why one turned from God. This step requires prayer and contemplation of scripture to gain the wisdom to understand one's turn from God. The reason for the turn away is usually a manifestation of the different attributes of acedia: a weariness in waiting for God, boredom with God, laziness to come to God, a longing for a different time or place, frenetic activity so one can ignore God, a perspective that leads one to believe they know better than God, and a rejection of what God has revealed. Once one has turned away and tuned out God, acedia leads one to reject the other creatures of God. Once one has taken such a moral inventory and discerned the why and the how of one's choice not to love God or others, then an exploration of the presenting sin of racism or discrimination can occur. One must address the acedia before addressing the overt sin.

Upon realizing that we have sinned, it is important to recognize that God is the one who calls us to repent. God is perpetually seeking humanity and calling humanity to repentance and to amendment of life. Unrealized acedia makes it impossible to effectively repent from racism because the reason for it is never understood clearly. When God opens our eyes to the magnitude of acedia's grasp, it is out of love that God seeks our repentant turn back to God. With that confession of and repentance from acedia, we can begin to work on the myriad of issues that lead to racial discrimination.

A first response to God is prayer. When we pray, we enter the conversation within the Trinity, participating in a conversation that has always been. Listening to God conveys God's wisdom about acedia's grasp in our life and our need for repentance. Listening to God is the process of quieting the heart and mind to focus on God, and it will

often bring insight to the one praying. When we center ourselves in prayer, we focus our intention on God,[27] which quiets the words and thoughts that drown out silence. It is a "gathered waiting within."[28] When thoughts come tumbling back, having a short prayer like, "Lord, save me," or "I give you my heart," or simply the name "Jesus," will refocus the mind and heart back on God. Prayer, both spoken and unspoken, carries our response back to God. Prayer can be our thoughts and deeds, with or without words.[29] The Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," is an ancient contemplative prayer that focuses one's mind and breathing on God, calming one and keeping one in continued prayer. It also can often help focus the heart and mind to use prayer beads or a rosary, but they are not necessarily needed.

Another form of prayer is when one listens deeply to scripture. This form of prayer is known as Lectio Divina[30] or divine reading, where one plunges into the depths of scripture. An excellent place to begin is in the gospels. One reads a passage of scripture, often out loud and without rushing. It is often read two or more times. As a person reads, they may be drawn to specific words or phrases. It is important not to study the word or phrase but to repeat it, asking why the Holy Spirit brought that phrase to mind. One is to focus on that word or phrase in meditation until it has been given meaning—reflection on that meaning and thanking God for the insight one has received. One might be urged to reread the scripture, one might be encouraged to pray about the experience, to journal about the incident, or to write out one's prayer.

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[27] Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus*, 143.
[28] Ibid., 144.
[29] *The Book of Common Prayer*, 856.
[30] Smith, *The Word Is Very Near You*, 119-121.

After reading the passage of scripture intentionally, it is particularly fruitful to enter the passage, rather than as a reader but as a participant. To become a participant, one enters the story as one of the people in the story, asking God to be a guide into the meaning God wants to impart. If one is reading Mark 2:1-12, for example, one might be the paralyzed man, one might be someone getting dirt in their hair as the hole is dug through the roof, one might be a friend or an observer, one might be a Pharisee or even Jesus. The reader is prayerfully drawn to new insights by meditating on a character and their experience of what is happening in the story. It is often through Lectio Divina that a person is led to examine sin in their life or their relationship with God. If one asks, the Holy Spirit will guide one to see the breach between self and God. When this occurs, prayer will take the form of confession and repentance, and the acedia at the heart of the breach can be forgiven.

Similarly, one can take an experience to God in prayer, much like in Lectio Divina. One tells God or writes out the story of the experience, looking honestly at each part, each interaction (much like a verbatim in Clinical Pastoral Education), asking the Holy Spirit to guide one to what one needs to see and change. These meditative forms of prayer will often render great insight into what is happening in the prayerful person's life.

Another aid is the memorization of scripture. Psalm 119:11 says, "I treasure (have hid—KJV) your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you." Memorization of the scriptures that tell of God's great love for all humanity, all Christ has done for humanity, and the inherent equality of humanity, because all are in God's image is especially helpful when struggling with acedia and racism.[31] When one regularly

[31] While this list is not exhaustive, it offers a place to begin with memorization of scripture: Mar 12:29-31; Joh 3:16; Jon 14:15-17; 2 Cor 5:17-19; Gal 2:19-20; Gal 3:27-29; Gal 5:22-26; Col 3:14-17; 1 Jo 1:8-9; 1

meditates on scriptures by hiding them in one's heart, a ready source of help is brought to mind by the Holy Spirit, and sin can often be averted. Meditation on memorized scripture disciplines one's heart and mind to dwell on God and the things of God, which is exactly what is needed to address acedia in one's life.

Finally, memorizing and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs[32] is an ancient practice that aids one in the amendment of life. Through them, one gains wisdom and strengthens one's theological understanding. Because of the use of scripture in hymn lyrics, one thinks about scripture through song. When one sings of the greatness and love of God, the immensity of all that Christ has done, and one's relationship with others, one cannot help but be encouraged to right thinking and behavior.

The focus of these differing spiritual practices of prayer and contemplation brings us to the place where we are attending to our relationship with God, turning back toward God, thus reversing the outward thrust away from God that is inherent in acedia. In repenting from acedia, we actively turn toward God. The subsequent amendment of life that is part of the process of repentance is made in earnest when we embark on spiritual practices that keep our focus on God and the story of God's interaction with humanity found in scripture.

Inventories Helping Us to Further Understand Racism at Work in Our Lives

One cannot jump directly from repentance over acedia to racial reconciliation. After engaging in returning to God, the first step in reconciliation is to do another set of

Jo 4:7-8; Psalm 23; Psalm 51; Psalm 139.

[32] "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Colossians 3:16).

moral inventories. The first is a personal inventory of one's relationship with one's racial self. What does being white mean? How does one think about one's color? What advantages has being white[33] given one? How do people excuse their thinking, rationalizing what they discover about themselves? It is most helpful if this inventory is done in a concrete way, such as journaling, where one can reflect on what is said and what is not said, gleaning truth from the different dynamics of that process. Journaling is one way to do the personal homework one must do before one can begin processing these and similar questions within a group. Sometimes, it is possible to do this work with a confessor or spiritual director, but we must be careful that they are astute about their own racial biases and blind spots.

A second moral inventory is done with respect to our thoughts and attitudes about persons from other ethnic-racial groups, such as blacks, indigenous, Asians and Latinos, for example. This may reveal differing beliefs and attitudes respective to the different groups. We must look at each from our own racialized perspective about the differing groups. Telling oneself the truth is most important. The temptation here is to put on rose-colored glasses and be color-blind, attributing beliefs and attitudes to other issues and denying the racism one has. How do experiences affect thoughts and attitudes, tempting us to attribute ill feelings about race to other difficulties (for example, justifying ourselves for having a racist perspective)? What has one actually done to another that is based on racist thinking? What has believed about another? What has one said? Journaling, again, puts the experience on paper, and we can begin to see our own

[33] This is written to aid whites in being able to address the racism within themselves and in their lives and practices. While acknowledging that racism has infected and impacted humanity in virtually every form, the racism this thesis addresses is white racism against persons of color, about which the onus is on whites to change.

personal patterns of racism. What are our blind spots? What are the implicit biases we have?

A third moral inventory is about what one has done to another, hurting and damaging another on account of race. The truth told in the first two inventories will help one to identify ways that one has acted as a racist, whether in words or in actions. What are the ongoing ways that one's thinking endangers others by leading one to behave as a racist?

With each of these three inventories, we must address how we have turned away from God and from the people created in God's image. Confession to God is a first step toward righting these wrongs, but it is only a first step and not the whole solution. After confession comes the amendment of life. We must not only desire to change, but we must affect change. This is best done in a relationship of accountability. Like confession to another Christian helps one to be accountable over sin, so does accountability help to make and keep an amendment of life. Amendment of life means that we turn toward all those in God's image, particularly those of color whom we have previously looked down upon and denigrated in any way, and we love them in thoughts, words, and actions as Christ Jesus commands (Mar 12:28-31; Joh 15:9-12).

When we have hurt another on account of their race, we must confess that offense to the one offended and make restitution for the damage we have caused. Again, admitting a wrong and the hurt the hurt that has been caused, and apologizing to another is difficult. People often want to jump to asking for forgiveness, but forgiveness is something that the offended is free to give or not give. Acknowledging a hurt does not

guarantee forgiveness. Second, restitution means we make "it" right, whether we compensate one with our words, actions, money, or time.

Like the Holy Spirit is the down payment[34] of our redemption and salvation, a pledge or surety given by God that indwells us, so is restitution the down payment on amendment of life. It is one thing to say, "I will amend my life"; it is another to say, "I will amend my life, and here is the restitution I owe you that proves my seriousness." When understood this way, restitution becomes sacramental. A sacrament is the "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace."[35] More than baptism and Eucharist are sacramental, though. For example, when two or three are gathered in Christ's name, Christ is in their midst (Mat 18:20), the outward sign is the people gathered in Christ's name, and the inward grace is that Christ is present among them. When we make restitution or reparation for our racist sin against another or a group, it can be the outward sign that God has indeed worked an amendment of life in one's life. It is God who first draws the heart back to God; repentance is the response to being drawn back to God. Amendment of life is a change wrought in one's heart and life by God. Restitution and repair (reparation) of the relationship is our response that there has indeed been an amendment of life. Indeed, the process of racial reconciliation between persons is a sacramental process.

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[34] National Churches, *NRSV Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, upd. ed.(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024). "But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, who has put his seal on us and given[a] us his Spirit in our hearts as a down payment" (2 Co 1:21-22). See also 2 Co 5:4-5, "For while we are in this tent, we groan under our burden because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. The one who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a down payment"; also, Eph 1:13-14, "In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this[1]is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory."

[35] *The Book of Common Prayer*, 857.

So, too, is the process of reconciliation between groups. Christian groups must engage in the same processes as individuals seeking reconciliation: moral inventories must be made and talked about, with the end goal being an understanding of the disparity between the group's intentions or ignorance and the damage the group's racist words, attitudes, and actions have caused. This process of a group's introspection, listening to those who have been hurt, and conversation about what repentance means must not be short-circuited. Listening deeply as a group to the damage and hurt of offended people, particularly when the offenses are racist in nature, is complex and challenging and will require more than one session of conversation and listening. Often, factions in groups will have differing opinions, and there must be enough honest conversation to reach a consensus about the direction to go. It is essential not to use labels and accusations but rather to be honest about the sin and lack of care (acedia) the group inflicted on others or others' groups.

Once the offending group accomplishes the moral inventories and reaches its honest conclusions, it is time to pursue repentance as a group. What does repentance look like? What will the confession say? What will the apology say and not say? What is the expectation about how the apology will be received? What restitution or reparation will be offered to the offended group? Is it freely given? Restitution and reparation are the same thing. It is compensation (not necessarily monetary) presented to the offended group. What is the commitment to changed behavior that the restitution represents? How sincere is this commitment?

In his book *Reparations: A Plan for Churches*, Jarrett-Schell offers a compelling argument for a six-stage process[36] toward reconciliation. For example, a church may have an awareness that it is built on land that once belonged to indigenous people. First, the church must work to *develop a relationship* with the affected band of indigenous people. With that growing relationship, the church will embark on a *truth-finding* mission to learn about the true history of the church's relationship with the indigenous. The next stage is *truth-telling,* where the church begins a conversation with its parishioners and others related to the church, taking off the racial blinders that have kept the truth under wraps. *Repentance* is the next stage when sins are confessed both to God and to the offended parties, in this case, the indigenous who lost their land because of white settlement. *Reparations* are then made. In this example, the church decides to commit a percentage of its budget to the tribe in compensation for the church's use of the land. Reparations, however, may involve actions and support like joining the tribe in a project. The final stage is the *evaluation* of the process. This is an ongoing process as the relationship deepens. Was the truth adequately understood? Has reconciliation been achieved, or is there more work to do? Have the conversations deepened to where more truth-telling may occur? What is the path for continuing reconciliation to follow?

Throughout the ongoing process of racial reconciliation, one must be vigilant about the ways one turns from God and from those who bear the image of God. Acedia, the "most oppressive"[37] of all temptations, will stalk each step of the way to reconciliation. It is too easy to turn from God and others when one's defenses are raised or when the way has many stumbling blocks strewn on one's path. Racism, like acedia, is

[36] Jarrett-Schell, *Reparations,* 26.
[37] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth,* 5.

first and foremost a spiritual problem. The racist, as well as the racist's victim, need to address the effect of sin in their lives, including all of the ways that the standards of white supremacy have been internalized.

Like Evagrius before him, St. John Chrysostom counseled that Christians must struggle against acedia. Equally valid is that Christians must stand firm against racism. By engaging a two-pronged approach to struggle with racism and the underlying sin of acedia, Christians have a way forward into a future where true reconciliation with God and with all those in God's image can be a reality. This way ahead is filled with diligent work and extraordinary grace. God is calling for racism to end and for people to return toward God and toward all others in love, true love. The journey ahead will be complicated; however, God will be with those who endeavor on the path to racial reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

In 1997, while participating in a six-week internship at St. Cyprian's Anglican Church in Sharpeville, South Africa, I lived with the black priest from St. Cyprian's and his family in the township. Once, I was asked to pick something up at a local grocery store outside the township. When I was standing in the checkout line, the Afrikaan man ahead of me said something so awful to the black woman checking him out that she winced. Then he turned to me and winked. He clearly thought I agreed. I knew that I could not rescue the young woman, but I wanted to be kind. I stepped up to check out and greeted her in Sesotho. The man was angry and waited for me but then thought better of it. I went on my way.

Just a year after Mandela signed the Constitution in Sharpeville, racism in South Africa was blatant and toxic. I learned to recognize subtly as well, and the times that I was given privilege I did not deserve. When I returned home to the U.S., I experienced the racial landscape differently, noticing racial discrimination, white privilege, and internalized white supremacy around me and within me.

I began intentionally studying racism and its effects. I wondered why the church is not better able to love our neighbors as God has commanded us. As I examined many different solutions posited about eliminating racism and fostering racial reconciliation, none seemed to deal with the spiritual issues at the heart of racism: failure to love God and failure to love each other.

Acedia is the church's besetting sin when it comes to our failure to reconcile with each other racially. As an individual, I need to deal with the acedia in my life by loving God and by loving my neighbor as myself. As the church, we need to deal with our

corporate acedia by turning back to God in love and by loving all those created in God's image.

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