

Beyond Racial Sympathy: An Antiracist Imagination for Homiletics and Hermeneutics
for White Evangelical Congregations in San Diego, CA.

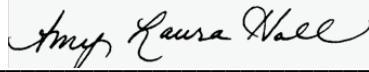
by

Matthew Ryan Wilson

Divinity School
Duke University

Date: April 24, 2024

Approved:



Dr. Amy Laura Hall, First Reader



Dr. Jonathan Tran, Second Reader



Dr. Will Willimon, D.Min. Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2024

ABSTRACT

Beyond Racial Sympathy: An Antiracist Imagination for Homiletics and Hermeneutics
for White Evangelical Congregations in San Diego.

by

Matthew Ryan Wilson

Divinity School
Duke University

Date: April 24, 2024

Approved:

Amy Laura Hall

Dr. Amy Laura Hall, First Reader

Jonathan Tran

Dr. Jonathan Tran

Will Willimon

Dr. Will Willimon, D.Min. Director

An abstract of a thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of
Duke University

2024

Copyright by
Matthew Ryan Wilson
2024

Abstract

A history of white supremacist ideology has long shaped white evangelical churches and their theology. This has never been more apparent since the election of Donald Trump and the response to the protests after the murder of George Floyd. Amid the racial reckoning in the summer of 2020, white evangelical preachers sought to address race, racism, and racial justice. This thesis aims to articulate theological resources and homiletical strategies for white evangelical churches as they address racial injustice from the pulpit. Specifically, two predominately white evangelical churches in San Diego, which have a stated belief in and pursuit of racial justice, are studied, and the six sermons after the death of George Floyd are analyzed. The study and analysis of Park Hill Church and All People's Church are placed in conversation with present antiracist scholarship. Examination of antiracist discussions will illuminate the homiletics of these two churches and lead to practical theological insights and biblical hermeneutics that pursue an antiracist imagination. This thesis concludes by suggesting three biblical passages, Amos 2, Matthew 15, and Acts 15, as biblical companions for imagining antiracist homiletics.

Dedication

To my family:

Lindsay Janelle

Rosie Colette

and Luke Rylan.

Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements.....	viii
Introduction.....	9
Chapter 2: Racism, Antiracism, and the Black Christ.....	31
Race, Racism, and Antiracism	31
Christ and Racism	44
The Doctrine of the Trinity and Racism.....	54
Conclusion.....	56
Chapter 3: Case Study #1: Park Hill Church.....	57
Ethnographic Profile of San Diego	57
Park Hill Church	61
5.31.20 God is Spirit	64
6.7.20 Sermon Title: Spirit and Race	68
6.14.20 Sunday Gathering	73
6.21.20 Sunday Gathering	79
6.28.20 Life in the Spirit	82
7.5.20 Life in the Spirit: Hearing God’s Voice	87
Chapter 4: Case Study #2: All People’s Church.....	93
5.30.20 Pastor Robert responds to crisis.....	96
5.31.20. Sermon Title: LOST AT SEA: Responding to God’s Call	97

6.7.20 A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God’s Heart w/ Pastor Archie Robinson.....	98
6.14.20 “We Are All Peoples, We Are Family”	103
6.21.20 A Message to Fathers from John Eldredge.....	108
6.28.20 When You Surrender, You Win	110
7.5.20 Surviving Your Calling – Jonah in Nineveh.....	111
Chapter 5: Homiletics, Theological Discourse, and Antiracist Preaching.....	113
Homiletics, Christ, and the Trinity	114
Holy Spirit and Race.....	115
Representation	120
Guest Speakers.....	123
Sin and Racism.....	126
Preaching and Non-violent Resistance	130
Preaching as Lament.....	137
Chapter 6: Biblical Resources for Evangelical Antiracism.....	144
“For Three Transgressions of Israel, and for Four”	145
“Yet, Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children’s Crumbs”	151
“He Has Made No Distinction Between Them and Us”	157
Conclusion	163
References	166
Biography.....	171

Acknowledgments

Many people along the way have made this possible. First, thank you, Dr. Amy Laura Hall, Dr. Johnathan Tran, and Dr. Will Willimon, for your insight, thoughtfulness, and sacrifice toward this project. I truly would have been rudderless without it.

I am grateful to the West Coast Writing Group, Drew Melton, Lauren Gully, and Chris Nye, for reading early samplings of this thesis and helping inform and sharpen my positions and writing. To Jessica Hong, who has graciously offered education and wisdom far beyond what I could offer in return. To Rev. Dee Kelly, who mentored me and allowed me so much room for theological exploration and pastoral experimentation as an associate pastor at San Diego First Church of the Nazarene.

To Rosie and Luke, you continually inspire me, and I am eternally thankful that you call me your Dad. You two remind me that God's kingdom is ever breaking into our world with your joy, curiosity, and love.

And to Lindsay, your unconditional love and support carried me through this project. You always remind me of my belonging and my capacity for inviting others into that same sense of belonging. Words cannot describe my gratitude for your sacrifice and confidence in me. I am forever yours.

Introduction

“I wish white people could do their own work.” My wife Lindsay and I sat together, faces masked, with our friend Jessica, who had exhaustedly come to the end of her patience. Weeks had passed since the murder of George Floyd, and Jessica had not found the type of change she and other BIPOC friends had hoped for. Instead, the racial reckoning that had taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the surface the lack of personal and public work many of her white friends and colleagues demonstrated. Jessica’s response reveals the double bind many BIPOC individuals and groups experience. On the one hand, Jessica maintains a constant vigilance of white supremacy and how it haunts interracial dialogue or action. On the other hand, she desires education for her white friends and colleagues so that further safety from white supremacy can be developed. In effect, she is caught in this bind, burdened by the weight of challenging systems of white supremacy while the threat of white supremacy remains. The responsibility of challenging and educating on issues of race and racism often falls on those who feel the most affected and least safe. And yet, despite the trauma or fear of trauma that may arise from such work, many BIPOC do so for their survival. Met with “a blankness that revealed little connection”¹, Jessica’s white friends and colleagues had done little with their own racism and white supremacy. She was experiencing the fatigue that many BIPOC have felt and expressed in the wake of the

¹ Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. (New York: Vintage Books 1991.) 58.

racial reckoning of 2020. Her lament challenged my previous presumptions, awareness, and education. How did I contribute to her exhaustion? Had I properly investigated my theological past and begun the work of uprooting white supremacist ideologies? What does it mean for me, as a white male, to act and speak in antiracist ways? Not only as a friend but as a minister, a person charged with preaching the good news that Christ had come to set captives free² and to heal the sicknesses of the people of Israel³, who are part of a body which, from its very inception, was formed into a multi-ethnic family⁴, how was I helping ‘do the work’ of antiracism?

The spring of 2020 was marked by two historic events in the United States: the nationwide quarantine in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the viral video of the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. The isolated nature of the COVID-19 lockdown enabled greater attention to Floyd’s murder, the murders of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, and the protests that followed. Between 2014 and 2020, attention focused on racialized police brutality while larger structures of racial injustice were being exposed. Conversations about Confederate monuments and diversity curriculum expanded in the broader American cultural milieu, and yet, a systematic racial reckoning only materialized on the margins of predominately white,

² Luke 4:18 (NRSV)

³ Matt 9:35 (NRSV)

⁴ Acts 2: 8-12, 37-41 (NRSV)

evangelical institutions⁵. All the while, white supremacist rhetoric poured out and was further disseminated by the campaign and administration of President Donald Trump. Whether it was dehumanizing Mexican immigrants, describing African countries in derogatory terms, or his continued persecution of the Central Park Five, Trump's rhetoric was and continues to be, saturated in white supremacist tropes. Trump's racist language only typified the systematic racial injustice and discrimination at work.

In the spring of 2020, with many of the extra activities of society suspended and our national attention growing more and more anxious over the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery sparked outrage. For one of the first times since the Rodney King beatings of 1992, racial injustice was spotlighted as Floyd's slow suffocation by a Minneapolis police officer was recorded and disseminated on social media. The graphic and heartbreaking tragedy snapped the US social conversation out of its pandemic malaise and into a racial reckoning. With protests occurring in every major city in the middle of a pandemic, racism and racial injustice were front and center in the cultural conversation. In the years following the murder of George Floyd, the work of antiracism and the fight against racial injustice continues. While the tragedy of George Floyd's murder sparked mass protests across the world, racially motivated violence continues. As attention moved away from racial

⁵ Pagitt, Doug. "George Floyd's anniversary is a chance for white evangelicals to stand up for Black lives. Religion News Service. May 25, 2021. <https://religionnews.com/2021/05/25/george-floyd-anniversary-is-a-chance-for-white-evangelicals-to-stand-up-for-black-lives/> (Accessed. October 24th 2022)

injustice and policing, violence towards racial minorities remained steady. According to the FBI, violence increased by 77% against Asian Americans in 2020⁶ and did not decrease until 2023.⁷ Even though the FBI reports a decrease in hate crimes towards Asian Americans, a NORC/AAPI survey reports that 1 in 3 Asian Americans have experienced racial abuse in 2023.⁸ While our recent attention has been on anti-black violence, anti-Asian American hate crimes rose without the same attention. Nearly a year to the date of the beginning of the COVID-19 quarantine, a lone gunman brutally attacked two spas and a massage parlor in metropolitan Atlanta, targeting Asian American women.⁹ Eight people were killed in that massacre, with six of the victims being women of Asian descent.

Amid the racial violence and the following protests, how did predominately white evangelical congregations respond? Specifically, how did evangelical ministers address race and racism in their preaching? As attention on race, racism, and racial justice has shifted away from police brutality and towards issues of immigration, antisemitism, and Islamophobia, how do predominately white evangelical ministers proclaim an antiracist homiletic and biblical hermeneutic in the pulpit?

⁶ <https://www.justice.gov/crs/highlights/2020-hate-crimes-statistics>. It cannot go without saying that speculation around the COVID-19's origin location fueled anti-Asian American hate, which was particularly propagated by the harmful rhetoric of former President Donald Trump.

⁷ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/anti-asian-hate-dropped-rcna121975>

⁸ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/1-in-3-u-s-asians-and-pacific-islanders-faced-racial-abuse-this-year-says-ap-norc-aapi-data-poll>

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/03/17/us/shooting-atlanta-acworth>

In his mystery novel *The Twist of a Knife*, Anthony Horowitz writes as his fictional protagonist and, within the fictional narrative, is falsely accused of the murder of a theater critic. As the story unfolds, he is confronted by one of the suspects, Jordan Williams, a distinguished, older, indigenous American actor. Williams confronts him about the possible book Horowitz may be writing about the murder of the theater critic. He tells Horowitz that he absolutely cannot include any descriptions of himself or stories he may have told him in the hypothetical book. Williams says he does not want to be included in his novel because he does not want to become some racialized stereotype used to sensationalize the book. Williams argues, "I am talking about a privileged white writer describing things he knows nothing about. Profiting from an experience he does not have because he has not lived it."¹⁰ For understandable reasons, Williams does not want his story to be commodified. Horowitz states that he is scared of the beast known as Twitter and, therefore, keeps away from sensitive political topics in his writing. He further engages Williams on the subject of race. Horowitz stumbles through a response and eventually lands on addressing race and racism through the lens of storytelling. He then explains why Williams, his experience, and his stories should be included in a book written by a white, middle-aged English writer. "We have already agreed I cannot write about Achmed or Pranav, so presumably, I can't write about

¹⁰ Anthony Horowitz. *A Twist of the Knife*. (New York: Harper Perennial. 2023) 217.

Maureen or Sky because they are both women or Lucky because he is a dog. At the end of the day, if I listened to you, I would only write about myself. A book full of middle-aged white writers describing middle-aged white writers being murdered by middle-aged white writers.”¹¹ Williams's underlying fear is not that he will be culturally appropriated and his story commodified. Still, his deeper concern is that he does not want to be included in a story that might expose a secret romantic relationship. At the same time, the racial tension between an indigenous American actor and a white English writer encapsulates the tension within many conversations concerning race. What can a white person say about race? Can a white male, and for the sake of this study, a preacher, say anything instructive about race, racism, or antiracism? Are white preachers bound to preach to white congregations about the concerns of a white church?

The feminist philosopher bell hooks considers why, generally speaking, men do not share equally in parenting. Hooks argues that, on a societal level, men do not feel as obligated to co-equal parenting because it is not given the same significance and meaning as motherhood.¹² Cultural narratives overemphasize the female physiological obligation of motherhood to the detriment of the importance of fatherhood. The biological necessity of parenting pedestals motherhood over and above fatherhood and,

¹¹ Anthony Horowitz. *A Twist of the Knife*. 217.

¹² bell hooks. *Feminist Theory; From Margin to Center*. 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014) 137

therefore, obligates mothers to the sole emotional and physical nurturing of children. What is initially a biological requirement of females becomes an emotional and psychological obligation, and societal narratives dissolve the male obligation to parenting. American cultural narratives then de-emphasize the role of fatherhood, which reinforces patriarchal social structures.¹³

Similarly, issues of racism and racial justice become the work of BIPOC individuals and communities because, generally and historically speaking, predominately white individuals, communities, and institutions have not or do not engage in issues of race.¹⁴ In fact, white evangelical churches have a long history of enabling and supporting white supremacist theology and racial injustice.¹⁵ Typically, if white individuals and communities are aware of racial injustices or racist language or policies, it is most likely a choice for them to engage in those issues, not an obligatory one. Just as an absentee father may not feel an intense obligation to nurture the material or psychological well-being of his children, white individuals and communities float in and out of racialized spaces, conversations, and policies because they have not been

¹³ bell hooks. *Feminist Theory*. 138. The overlapping, interlocking nature of patriarchy and white supremacy will be further explored below.

¹⁴ Robin DiAngelo. *White Fragility*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018). While DiAngelo might function well as an introduction to racial conversations for white readers, significant critique is leveled against her project. A thorough going critique of what Johnathan Tran calls “identarian antiracism” will be instrumental to emboldening antiracist homiletics and hermeneutics going forward. Johnathan Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 9-10.

¹⁵ Anthea Butler. *White Evangelical Racism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), Robert Jones, *White Too Long*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020) and Jamar Tisby. *The Color Of Compromise*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2019.)

socialized into the significance or importance. Dialogue and policy-making, which concern racial equity and diversity, have been dislodged from white spaces and places because it has been relegated to the domain of those who are a part of the racial minority. White people, generally speaking, don't say anything about race because they have not been obligated to do so. How can there be an embodiment of the multiracial biblical imagination if white individuals and communities are not bound to contribute to the dialogue concerning race and racial injustice? Just as fatherhood becomes de-emphasized within patriarchal societies to maintain male power, white supremacy is maintained when white people abstain from the work of racial justice. Therefore, if racial justice is to be embodied, white evangelical congregations must not refrain from racialized conversations, for it is incumbent upon all to listen to stories of racial injustice, lament how they have actively or passively contributed, and engage the work of antiracism.

How, then, do white evangelical preachers enter into the conversation? How do white evangelical preachers challenge racism and advocate for racial justice? White evangelical churches have a lot of ecclesial tools at their disposal, but none are as prominent or influential as the sermons they preach. Not only does the preached word proclaim the good news of Christ, but it can be a clear, public pronouncement of the shape and content of Christ's justice in the world. Evangelical theology firmly commits to the authority of Holy Scripture. It places a high value on the proclamation of the

‘Word of God’ from the pulpit by entangling theology, Scripture, and church together for public edification.

In response to conversations about race and racism, white evangelical congregations may be tempted to respond to individual racial injustices with a commitment to racial colorblindness. Denial of a person’s racial identity and the impact of systematic racism only furthers economic disparities and the marginalization of theological voices that critique white supremacist ideologies. Further, the denial of a person’s racial identity maintains a theological position that displaces bodies from God’s creation. Racial colorblindness “is a direct descendent of the theological power to deny and undermine geographically sustained identities.”¹⁶ This “post-racialism” ignores the inequity political economies have, for centuries, wrecked on racialized minority groups. It seeks to solve racism with ignorance.

In her book *Preaching Justice*, Christine Smith argues that all preachers should know their social location “but also articulate significant ways in which their social location influences their biblical hermeneutics, theological thinking, pastoral sensitivities, and homiletical methodologies.”¹⁷ In this spirit, it is necessary to offer my social location and how it shapes my theological thinking and hermeneutics.

¹⁶ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) 63 and Johnathan Tran *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 9-10.

¹⁷ Christine Smith, *Preaching Justice* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 2008) 2

I was born and raised in Northern California, was educated, and lived my adult life in Southern California. I grew up in the suburbs of Sacramento, CA, in a white, middle-class family. Both my parents are of English, Scottish, and Irish ethnic descent. The suburban neighborhood I grew up in was racially diverse. Sacramento was a landing place for Russian, Ukrainian, and South-Pacific immigrants. Many of these immigrant families were my neighbors in the cul-de-sac I grew up in.¹⁸ My parents intentionally moved into a racially diverse neighborhood so that my sister and I would experience a multitude of different people groups and cultures. My formative adolescent years were spent playing basketball with black, brown, and white kids, with our Chinese neighbors on one side and our Afghani neighbors on the other.

On the one hand, I had come to know a variety of with various racial identities and never thought twice about their status or worth. On the other hand, I never had to understand or explain my own racial identity or view racism in light of economic inequality. Despite living in a racially diverse, middle-class cul-de-sac, the dominant white culture was the assumed standard. I was raised with the ethic of racial colorblindness. Raised to respect the equality of others without empathy or awareness of the differences that make racial identity, economic inequality, and cultural differences

¹⁸ Unbeknownst to me until recently, this was a very intentional decision by my parents. In researching this project, I asked my parents about the neighborhood I grew up in and why they decided on Antelope (the suburb I grew up in outside of Sacramento). They told me that while there were more affluent, predominately white areas in which they could have purchased a home (Folsom in particular, which is where my Dad worked), they decided to buy a house in Antelope so that, as kids, we would be neighbors with people of various races and religions.

significant. Racism was disconnected from economics, from the narrow view of my middle-class suburban neighborhood.

I am the grandson of a Church of the Nazarene minister. The evangelical tradition, precisely that of the Wesleyan-Holiness variety, shaped my theological and biblical upbringing. Full-fledged fundamentalism was never espoused in my family of origin as the Church of the Nazarene had settled its article of faith on Holy Scripture using the trappings of evangelical fundamentalism while articling a subtle inclusive Wesleyan biblical hermeneutic.¹⁹ At the same time, white evangelical approaches to preaching, worship, small groups, and private school education shaped my adolescent theological imagination. James Dobson, the Promise Keepers, and the 'seeker-sensitive' model of evangelicalism predominantly influenced the white evangelical spaces I grew up in. I attended a private Christian high school where the quintessential white evangelical theology and biblical hermeneutics were espoused. It was the first time I encountered biblical inerrancy as a theological commitment. This was a Christian private school where the US history teacher taught that the Civil War was fought over the issue of states' rights, not slavery.²⁰ While my mother and father had helped

¹⁹ Lodahl, Michael. *All Things Necessary to Our Salvation* (San Diego: Point Loma Press, 2004)

²⁰ This narrative remains in white, evangelical histories. Such commitment to revising American history is demonstrated by necessity for many conservative evangelicals to publish such history in the form grade school textbooks. Kathleen Wellman. *Hijacking History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). Conversely Robert P. Jones' most recent book, *The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy and the Path to a Shared American Future* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2023) narrates the history and ideology that led to the lynching of Emmitt Till in Money, Mississippi in 1955, and Elmer Jackson, Isaac McGhie, and Elias Clayton in Duluth, Minnesota in 1920, and the Tulsa Race Massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921.

inoculate my biblical imagination against biblical inerrancy, I remained susceptible to white evangelicals' emphasis on a white supremacist's reading of US History. As much as my parents sought to expose me to a broad and diverse world of people, my story is deeply rooted in white, male evangelical privilege.

I attended Point Loma Nazarene University for undergraduate education and began to have my theological horizons expanded. I learned that Democrats could be Christians in Dean Nelson's Freshman Composition course. Heather Ross and Michael Lodahl challenged the assumptions and boundaries of my theological reflection. Brad Kelle showed me a vast array of hermeneutical tools for interpreting scripture and shaped my theology of scripture. PLNU profoundly formed my theological framework and revealed the chasm in Evangelism between critical theological reflection and biblical interpretation and the theology dwelling in white, evangelical churches. Lindsay Taitano, my then-girlfriend and now wife, encouraged me to help build bridges across that chasm.

During my time at PLNU, as formative as it was for my theological and biblical imagination, racism and racial justice were not topics of theological reflection or conversation. I confess that it wasn't until the killing of Trayvon Martin in February of 2012 that I began to investigate the white supremacist underpinnings of evangelical theology and its influence on my own theological, biblical, and ethical imagination. The racist reactions from several evangelical Christians in my community to Trayvon

Martin's death spun my attention on issues of race and racism. At the time, Lindsay and I attended Fuller Theological Seminary. She pursued her Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy, and I was working on my Master of Divinity. While the two of us would have conversations about racism and violence, I was struck by the lack of conversation taking place on campus. This particular academy was not addressing the racism taking place in the pews. So much attention was given to Trayvon Martin's killing by different media outlets, but it didn't come up in discussions in The Refectory or class lectures. How could such a racially motivated killing and the corresponding outrage receive such minimal theological engagement on the campus of the largest evangelical seminary? At that time, I was unaware of the history of white supremacy had consumed evangelicalism. That history had impacted Southern California.²¹ I was a child when the LA Riots of 1992 took place after the four police officers who were charged with excessive violence when arresting Rodney King were acquitted. As an adult, it wasn't until the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, that I witnessed evangelicals engage the issues of race and racism for the first time. One would imagine that decades after the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King's ministry, the LA Riots of 1992, and the killing of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, evangelical leaders would have suitable theological and hermeneutical responses to widely publicized racial injustices. And yet, The murder of George Floyd revealed, once again, the lack of

²¹ Kristin Kobes DuMez. *Jesus and John Wayne*. (New York: Liveright Press. 2020) 29.

thoroughgoing response by white evangelical preachers. The lack of my response. This study, then, is my confession. It is my lament for the intentional and unintentional ways in which I have participated in white supremacist ideology that is shaped by a white evangelical theology, my gratitude for God's grace as embodied in friendships and relationships that challenge my racist underpinnings, my hope for repentance from white evangelical leaders, and my effort to humbly participate in the Church's movement towards God's justice.

Considering my social positioning as a white middle-class man at the center of power and privilege, antiracist preaching within evangelical congregations is a necessary task to study and promulgate. Southern California, specifically San Diego, may not have the same apparent racist history as other parts of the United States. Yet, racist systems and languages remain operative in obvious and subtle ways. As late as 2019, then-president Donald Trump touted the work on the "unclimbable" border wall in Otay Mesa, a suburb of San Diego that borders the Mexican city of Tecate, in racist-soaked rhetoric.²² In April of the same year, a gunman entered Chabad Synagogue in Poway (a suburb in North County, San Diego) and killed one and injured three others in

²² <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-visit-border-wall-san-diego-ca/> The keystone of President Trump's 2016 campaign and focus of much of his domestic policy has been breached, as of April 2022, more than 3,000 times and many sections have been left in shambles. Not only was this a racist policy and project, but it remains entirely ineffective. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/29/trump-border-wall-injuries-deaths/>

an antisemitic-fueled attack.²³ These violent and racist actions are only the tip of more subtle racist programs and systems that remain in effect. From local border immigration policies and enforcement, a housing crisis, and public school management, racism's grip remains tightly wound around San Diego. Like every other major city in the United States, white supremacy needs to be challenged.

What exactly is meant by 'white evangelical congregations'? While evangelicalism and evangelical churches have received much attention, especially after the 2016 Presidential election, who is and is not 'evangelical' is just as widely discussed. Historian David Bebbington's four-part description of evangelicalism has been the go-to text for a broad, English-speaking modern thought.²⁴ While Bebbington's work concentrates specifically on evangelicalism in Great Britain, his insight has been adapted to examine the US evangelical church and its movements. The evangelical characteristics of conversionism, activism biblicism, and crucicentrism are the broad brush strokes of American evangelical theology and mission.²⁵ These four characteristics offer the broad theological frame in most evangelical churches. The broadness of these theological characteristics was maintained while evangelical identity narrowed with every cultural

²³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/04/27/california-synagogue-shooting-multiple-injuries/>

²⁴ David Bebbington. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989) 5-17

²⁵ Randall Balmer. *The Making of Evangelicalism*. (Waco: Baylor University Press. 2010.) and Mark Noll. *The Rise of Evangelicalism* (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2003)

event and ‘power player.’²⁶ Evangelical theology wrapped itself around evangelical identity, which had quickly become white, male, conservative, and straight.²⁷

New Testament scholar Esau McCaulley points out that American evangelical thought has at least two other characteristics that function in an ‘unspoken’ manner. First, American evangelicalism maintains a particular telling of American history, which “downplayed injustice.”²⁸ Likewise, Kelly Brown Douglas calls this ‘social-cultural epistemological privilege’ in which the public square is dominated by a mainly white historical gaze in which white racism and anti-blackness are left unchecked within the public historical narrative.²⁹

McCaulley gives attention to a sixth characteristic of American evangelicalism, which is an agreement amongst evangelical pastors and theologians to “remain largely silent on current issues of racism and systematic injustice.”³⁰ In the wake of the murder of George Floyd during the COVID-19 quarantine, white evangelical churches were compelled to address this unspoken sixth characteristic. As David Gushee argues, it is incumbent upon white evangelical leaders and congregations to listen to BIPOC observers and Christian theologians and repent of the racism spoken, embodied, and

²⁶ David Gushee. *After Evangelicalism*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020.) 23-27.

²⁷ David Gushee. *After Evangelicalism*. 23-27.

²⁸ Esau McCaulley. *Reading While Black*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2020.) 11.

²⁹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2021.) 67. For example, Brown highlights the controversy surrounding the New York Times’ *1619 Project* and the white, conservative backlash it has received.

³⁰ Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black*. 1.

acted against fellow humans.³¹ This project seeks to open up theological and biblical reflection on antiracism and begin to equip white evangelical preachers in the work of undoing the fifth and sixth, unspoken characteristics of evangelicalism.³²

Therefore, ‘white, evangelical congregation’ refers to congregations that loosely espouse Bebbington’s theological frame while maintaining McCaulley’s fifth and sixth characteristics. It is necessary at this point to divide white evangelical congregations along another line, which will help inform this study. While the fifth characteristic of evangelicalism may go unchallenged in white, evangelical congregations³³, the racial reckoning of 2020 has prompted many congregations to challenge or support the sixth characteristic. Some evangelical pastors and congregations lean hard into this sixth characteristic and embody what is now being discussed as ‘Christian nationalism.’ At the same time, there are some white evangelical pastors and congregations that earnestly seek racial justice. The evangelical churches in this study have publicly vocalized support for racial reconciliation, racial justice, or a multiracial vision of church life. The

³¹ David Gushee, *After Evangelicalism*. 156-158.

³² In his book *After Evangelicalism*, David Gushee notes that the failure to publicly confront white racism within white evangelical churches as one of the reasons Millennials and Gen Z-ers are leaving the evangelicalism. Gushee urges evangelical churches to repent for the history of rampant racism and listen to BIPOC voices for ways to rethink and reimagine evangelicalism. Gushee’s insights here will be helpful in approaching antiracist homiletics. David Gushee. *After Evangelicalism*. 2

³³ This ought be the case, but is beyond the scope of this project.

evangelical churches of the former are committed to a particular conservative extremist political agenda that threatens American democracy.³⁴

While the threat of Christian Nationalism is real, aggressive, and a fundamental corruption of Christian orthodoxy³⁵, it will fall outside this study's direct purview. In their book *The Flag and the Cross*, Samuel Perry and Philip Gorski show the correlation between white supremacy, evangelical congregations, and the Christian nationalist ideology.³⁶ White ecclesial hegemony has a direct correlation to the conspiratorial and nationalistic ideology currently flowing from some evangelical pulpits and congregations. Therefore, while Christian nationalism is not directly being studied in this project, a thorough understanding of Christian antiracism will indirectly address significant factors that contribute to and prop up Christian nationalist ideologies.

Instead, we shall study the former set of evangelicals, evangelical preachers, and congregations who publicly emphasize racial justice. Specifically, our scope will be two prominent churches in San Diego: Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church. These three churches are predominately white, evangelical congregations in San Diego, located in different areas, that have a Caucasian male senior pastor and have publicly stated, either

³⁴ Brad Onishi's *Preparing for War* and Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry's *Taking America Back for God* explicate the theopolitical commitments and biblical hermeneutics in Christian Nationalism. *The Flag and the Cross* by Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry looks particularly at the movement's historical development and present threat of violence. In such congregations, generally speaking, the pursuit of antiracism would be sidelined as a liberal distraction from pursuing the salvation of souls for Christ and the

³⁵ Samuel Perry and Philip Gorski. *The Flag and the Cross*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2022)

³⁶ Samuel Perry and Philip Gorski. *The Flag and the Cross*.

from the pulpit, church website, or public announcement, a commitment to racial reconciliation, racial justice, or the growth of a multicultural church community.³⁷ The question of this project is, how do these pastors, who are committed to some version of racial justice and antiracism, preach from evangelical pulpits? What are their approaches to race, racism, and antiracism? What theological tools do they employ? How do they preach a word of justice in a world fraught with racism?

Unsurprisingly, race and racism are not frequent topics being preached from the pulpit by white evangelical congregations. All churches face pressure to speak or not speak on ‘hot button’ issues. Contextuality is central to when and how preachers address third-rail issues. The events of the local community, national or global political events, denominational tradition, and the unending pace of ministry all contribute to how and when issues like racism and racial justice are addressed.³⁸ Due to the topical nature of most preaching within evangelical churches³⁹, race, racism, and antiracism can be easily avoided. How, then, might we examine and assess not only the level of

³⁷ None of the churches in this study explicitly use the term ‘antiracism.’ While the terms racial justice, racial reconciliation, and multicultural all have different meanings and subtexts, these communities employ each term to describe themselves as a community where race is acknowledged, and racism is named as an ongoing evil in need of a Christian pursuit of justice.

³⁸ One aspect of this study that will go unexamined is the role of denominational tradition. Evangelical churches hold a wide range of church polity and structure that informs and limits what can and cannot be preached and taught from the pulpit. In addition, evangelical denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, have historical traditions of white supremacy that influence polity and the pulpit (see Richard Hawkins, *For The Bible Told Them So* and Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*). While evangelical denominational affiliation is an essential aspect in the consideration of an antiracist homiletic, it will not be a part of this specific study. Park Hill Church is a nondenominational church, as well as All People’s Church. It was planted as a part of the Antioch Movement of church planting, formally separated from the Movement in 2022 to begin its church planting network.

³⁹ These two churches preach by series, not by the lectionary, which is common.

comfortability a preacher has with the topic of racism and racial justice but also the theological beliefs, hermeneutical tools, and homiletical skills of antiracist preaching? Therefore, while considering the broader view of the preaching at Park Hill Church and All People's Church, this study will precisely zero in on the sermons preached in the weeks following the murder of George Floyd. This study will specifically focus on this time frame due to the enraptured nature of the cultural moment. With the COVID-19 pandemic curbing 'non-essential' activity, the news of George Floyd's murder sparked mass demonstrations and protests. The pandemic lockdown focused everyone's attention, not only on George Floyd's murder, but on the recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, and recalled the long history of violence against racial minorities in the United States. Discussions on racism, policing, and racial justice dominated conversations and media coverage for a week. The church was not immune to these events, and all churches, in some form or fashion, addressed racism and racial justice. It is in this hyper-focused frame where preachers, because of the nature of the national conversations and mass demonstrations, were compelled to discuss race, racism, and racial justice from their pulpits.⁴⁰ With everyone's attention on the outrage and public demonstrations for racial justice at the forefront of everyone's mind, to some degree or extent, preachers addressed racism and racial justice. When all eyes witnessed

⁴⁰ The word pulpit, in this COVID-19 era is a flexible one. Many sermons were pre-recorded and many did not have physical pulpits because of the nature of preaching during a pandemic. COVID-19-era homiletics ought to have their own historical theological study.

the call for racial justice, church leaders responded. This study will seek to understand how, when everyone was engaged with issues of race and racism, Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church publicly reacted to the murder of George Floyd. What did these preachers proclaim in light of their public commitment to racial justice? What biblical sources or theological resources did they reach for? What were their strategies?

In this chapter, I have laid out the necessity for studying racism and antiracism as it is particularly manifested in white, evangelical pulpits, my socio-political positioning, and the overall methodology I will employ for this project. Chapter two will explain the various definitions and concepts of race, racism, and antiracism in contemporary theological dialogue. It will suggest a Christological lens to help white evangelical communities develop a theological frame for antiracism. As we move towards the particularity of this study, chapter three will offer an ethnographic survey of San Diego and a background for Park Hill Church. Most importantly, it will lay out the homiletical case study of the six sermons immediately after the murder of George Floyd. Chapter four will give a similar background and study of the sermons of All Peoples Church. Chapter five will investigate and analyze these sermons and offer theological resources for further developing and enriching a theological imagination for antiracist preaching. Lastly, chapter six will develop four biblical texts as anchor points for antiracist hermeneutics for preaching within white evangelical congregations within San Diego. In my summary and analysis of these two particular churches in the specific

context of George Floyd's murder, I seek to offer a practical application of antiracist theory in a context that has historically resisted such conversation and proclamation. This project strives to critique and engage that which can harm racial justice and engage with theological and biblical resources to proclaim God's justice to a world that remains in such inbreaking justice.

Chapter 2: Racism, Antiracism, and the Black Christ

I humbly submit that race, racism, and antiracism are not frequent topics of conversation and study for Anglo-Saxon males. If racial identitarians were to have it, such work would be left to BIPOC voices to articulate and educate.⁴¹ And yet, as mentioned above, it is essential for all racialized voices to speak concerning the issues of racism and develop an antiracist imagination. While I do not consider myself an expert in critical race theory or the sociological construction of race, I believe that it is necessary to theologically and pastorally engage matters of race, racism, and antiracism for the pursuit of God's justice. This is especially the case in white evangelical communities who are influenced by a history and ideology of white supremacy. Therefore, a discussion on race, racism, and antiracism from a theological lens is necessary to clarify terms and shape the content of Christian antiracism.

Race, Racism, and Antiracism

For many, there is a belief or understanding that race is anchored in biology; the difference between melanin levels determines race. And yet, a biological definition of race is not only scientifically incorrect; at the outset, it is steeped in racist ideology.

J. Craig Venter⁴², a biotechnologist and co-author alongside Frances Collins and the Human Genome Project of the first drafting of the human genome, writes in his memoir

⁴¹ Robin DiAngelo. *White Fragility*. 149.

⁴² Interestingly, Venter is a graduate of University of California, San Diego, resides in La Jolla (a coastal suburb of San Diego), and recently sold his research institute to UC San Diego.

A Life Decoded "that the concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis, and there is no way to tell one ethnicity from another in the five Celora genomes."⁴³ While race might be 'visible' from an outward display (or lack) of melanin, such biological determination recalls the construction of racial identity by the imperialist taxonomy of Spanish and Portuguese colonists.

While tools for such theological resistance existed⁴⁴, Christian theological reflection became subservient to imperial political-economic power, and race emerged as a technological for oppression. William James Jennings's book, *The Christian Imagination*, seeks to outline the theological justification that accompanied Portuguese and Spanish colonialism and slave trading and develops a theology that imagines how racial and political identity create cross-cultural belonging through the redemptive work of Christ and his church.⁴⁵ As black bodies were being taken from their indigenous lands, Portuguese and Spanish slave traders rearranged the theological constellation from an identity rooted first in God's creation of the land and cohabitation in specific locales with identities shaped by political-economic commodification and subservient to

⁴³ J. Craig Venter, *Life Decoded: My Genome, My Life* (New York: Viking, 2001) 317

⁴⁴ Not only are there biblical texts that resist such racial taxonomy (Gen 1-2, Gal 3, and Rev. 7 as a start), J. Kameron Carter demonstrates how Ireanus' response to the Gnostic Valentianism, specifically Christ's recapitulation of Israel, not only resists the antisemitism present in Gnostic theological hermeneutics, it disrupts modern discourse on racial identity. J. Kameron Carter, *Race; A Theological Account*(Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008) 14.

⁴⁵ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2010)

imperial power by way of violence.⁴⁶ To be clear, through Jennings' exploration of the historical record, which, as Jennings mentions⁴⁷, was a theological record for its time, he indicates that racial hierarchy and identity were reorganized around power, not creation. "Racial being is an act of communal conference in which mutual interdependence is not suspended but placed on a trajectory toward an endless becoming organized around white bodies."⁴⁸ This centralization around European, white bodies functioned in service to the political economies of the time. Racializing taxonomies justify the extraction of wealth by overcoming the humanity of Africans and indigenous Americans by slavers through a 'science' anchored in presumed supremacy. Therefore, race emerges as a sociocultural phenomenon with a façade of biological framing. As Karen Fields and Barbara Fields put it, "Race is the principal unit and core concept of racism."⁴⁹

Race and racism are further complicated by Christian theology and language. Through Jennings' analysis, at the genesis of Portugal's enslavement of Africans, Portuguese slave traders were empowered by religious (i.e., Christian) commitment. "African captivity leads to African salvation and to black bodies that show the disciplining power of the faith."⁵⁰ Africans were baptized into a "Christian" faith so that

⁴⁶ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. 63.

⁴⁷ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. 20

⁴⁸ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. 61

⁴⁹ Karen Fields and Barbara Fields, *Racecraft*. (London: Verso. 2012) 17.

⁵⁰ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. 20.

their suffering may have the opportunity to exemplify that of Christ. Such enslaved baptism was done with the consent and oversight of the Portuguese crown. It was in 1444 when Prince Henry of Portugal oversaw the baptism and auction of imported enslaved Africans at the port of Lagos. Prince Henry's commodification of black African bodies and the displacement thereof intertwined racial identity with theology. "It is precisely the joining of these commercial and theological concerns that enables the translation of soteriological radicalism into a racial radicalism."⁵¹ The commodification and displacement of black bodies are presented as a benefit to the enslaved—eternal salvation in exchange for suffering the horrors of imperial slavery.

Violence enabled white Europeans to create and maintain the socially constructed double standard. The desire for expanding political economies, baptized in a twisted theological epistemology, enabled white Europeans to inflict all kinds of violence on black and brown bodies. White, European culture and body politic become the norm to which all other races are compared. The racist narrative is that perfection has been achieved in the white European race and, therefore, all other races are limited, have not and cannot reach perfection, and will eventually annihilate themselves.⁵² Therefore, as the white supremacist logic would assert, it is essential for a superior, white race to order and inculcate other races, by all means necessary, into its particular

⁵¹ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. 27.

⁵² This narrative sequence is demonstrated in J. Kameron Carter's examination of the modernization of race and theopolitics in the thought of Immanuel Kant. J. Kameron Carter, *Race; A Theological Account*. 89-94.

cultural body politic. In this way, white European power has legitimized its institutions to sustain itself.

It should go without saying that physical displacement and forced baptism of black bodies is an act of violence. Jennings' concern with the displacement of indigenous bodies from their lands is not, first, a concern for racial identity but rather out of theological conviction. "Theorists and theories of race will not touch the ground until they reckon deeply with the foundations of racial imaginings in the deployment of an altered theological vision of creation."⁵³ Here, Jennings argues that one's identity is first embedded in God's good creation. A secularized theory of race, racism, and racial identity, without an anchor in a creational imagination, will continue to organize itself around commodifying market forces.

If race is not a genetically or biologically differentiated category, what is it then? Karen and Barbera Fields argue that there ought to be clear definitions of race and racism detached from biological or genetic foundations. Rather than having biological definitions, race is socio-culturally defined.⁵⁴ With no biological foundation, race, and racial identity, as outlined below, are first described by observable differences in melanin and those different melanin found in different geographical locations. As mentioned above, taxonomies of melanin undergirded economic, political, and cultural

⁵³ J. Kameron Carter, *Race; A Theological Account*. 63.

⁵⁴ Karen Fields and Barbara Fields, *Racecraft*. 16-17.

structures of commodification and wealth extraction. 'Racial' hierarchies were anchored in taxonomy pseudo-science bent on sustaining imperial supremacy. Racism is the "theory and practice of applying social, civic, or legal double standard based on ancestry." It is "first and foremost a social practice, which means that it is an action and rationale for action, or both at once."⁵⁵ Racial supremacy, in any regard, is a human construct built out for the perseverance and promulgation of power. As J. Kameron Carter states, "white's (race) signifies not merely pigmentation but a regime of political and economic power for arranging the world."⁵⁶ Therefore, as outlined below, race and racism are inextricably intertwined with political economics in which violence, epistemology, and Christian theology are employed to prop up and maintain political and cultural power. As Will Willimon summarizes, "Race is a fiction, a human construction, racism is a fact."⁵⁷ To pursue an antiracist imagination, one must subject accounts of biological racism to correction of history and a hermeneutic of suspicion towards ideological commitments while centering the lived experiences of millions of dominated, oppressed, marginalized individuals and communities.

Suppose, then, that race is a human construct to serve systematic, oppressive ends for a privileged minority. What, then, does it mean to be an antiracist or subscribe to an antiracist vision of humanity? The popular anti-racist author Ibram X. Kendi

⁵⁵ Karen Fields and Barbara Fields, *Racecraft*. 17.

⁵⁶ J. Kameron Carter, *Race; A Theological Account*. 35.

⁵⁷ Will Willimon, *Who Lynched Willie Earle?*(Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2017) 55.

explores in *How to Be an Antiracist* that broad anti-racist perspective, intertwining his own experience of racism and racial identity from early adolescence to the present with the historical, sociological, and philosophical discourse. Kendi defines race as “a power construct of collected or merged differences that lives socially.”⁵⁸ Therefore, an antiracist is “one who is expressing the idea that racial groups are equals and none needs developing and is supporting policy that reduces racial inequity.”⁵⁹ For Kendi, these antiracist views were first formed and shaped by his parent’s experience at Urbana ’70, a major conference for Christian students. Although the imagination of antiracism germinated in the black liberation theology of his parents, Kendi’s journey moves him quickly away from Christian theology towards a secular pursuit of antiracism, detached from his parent’s theological roots. As his narrative unfolds, antiracism incorporates what might be considered logical extensions of antiracist thinking into adjacent areas of study such as biology, ethnicity, physiology, culture, behavior, and color. Using his narrative, Kendi intertwines his exploration of racial identity and maturity alongside historical and cultural developments. Not only does he move through these adjacent areas of race studies, Kendi extends antiracism to include gender, sexuality, and queer

⁵⁸ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World Books. 2019) 35.

⁵⁹ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*. 24.

studies. Mixed with these other areas related to the pursuit of antiracism would be power and class.⁶⁰

Ibram X. Kendi's secular exploration maintains racism's wide-ranging connection across disciplinary lines while arguing racism's assumed natural genesis. Racism is baked into our humanity's desire for power and preservation. And yet, Kendi's account avoids grounding his antiracism in a clear, theological frame. Although he anchors his parent's antiracism in black liberation theology, Kendi makes no such confession. Admittedly, Kendi finds little hope in humanity's slow arc toward racial justice. Although racism is a cancer that was initiated in the fifteenth century and has been amassing ever since, Kendi writes, "There is nothing I see in our world today, in our history, giving me hope that one day antiracists will win the fight...what gives me hope is a simple truism. Once we lose hope, we are guaranteed to lose."⁶¹ Kendi's only hedge against nihilism is a stubbornness to lose. He admits that the significantly low odds of that happening must be articulated so that those who pursue antiracist ideals and perspectives might genuinely know the odds stacked against them. It is a humanist appeal to the antiracist underdog.

⁶⁰ Kendi's third chapter traces the particular history of Portuguese racist human labor trafficking of the 15th century. Further, chapter twelve specifically links western political economies with racism; "To love capitalism is to end up loving racism"(163). Capitalism is always tied to its racist traditions and practices and so will never be antiracist. And yet, according to Kendi's argument, as it has unfolded over the course of the book, race-ranking and inequality exist before economic systems. European racism and the power therein exist before the slave trade Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 162.

⁶¹ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*. 238

In many ways, Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*⁶² acts as a popular antiracist companion to that of Ibram X. Kendi. DiAngelo works to shed light on the ways 'white' people act defensively in conversations around race and racism. Not only does she spell out the defensive mechanisms of white men and women, specifically those people who identify as 'progressive,' but she also illuminates the systematic oppression inherent within white American cultural institutions. While less critique and challenge is given to systematic change, DiAngelo individualizes antiracism to one's ability to be 'less white.'⁶³ To become 'less white' means to apologize for racist comments or actions, lower one's defensive, and offer space for challenge from those individuals who have felt that one's actions or words were racist. Although DiAngelo provides therapeutic techniques for challenging one's unintended yet racist comments or actions, she does not suggest systematic or institutional remedies or challenges. Her hope seems to lie in a white person's individual courage to apologize for racist comments or actions.

Kendi and DiAngelo represent the typical, popular understanding of antiracism. Both offer initial guidance and definitions for understanding antiracist work and remain distinctly secular. Absent from both Kendi and DiAngelo are theological frames in which to understand race, racism, and antiracism, and neither provides avenues in which hope can be imagined. Intentional Christian antiracism will not only take a

⁶² Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.

⁶³ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*. 149-150.

theological account of race and racism, but it will also offer an understanding of hope through a theological lens, one reflective of Christ's death and resurrection.

From a Christian, theological perspective, Johnathan Tran's *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism* addresses racism and racial identity taken up and framed through political economy. Tran argues that the present orthodox identarian antiracism within American culture and academy, epitomized by Kendi and DiAngelo, marginalizes those who have already been marginalized, specifically Asian Americans.⁶⁴ "The way we talk about race and racism, where so much is given to racial identity, is problematic, that there is something off about the idea that who I am reduces to what I am racially."⁶⁵ Tran narrates an alternative to post-racialism, i.e., racial colorblindness and antiracist identarianism, by unpacking the history of the postbellum Delta Chinese and the present Redeemer Community Church in a suburban area of San Francisco. By unpacking these communities and their histories, Tran reveals the racial economy that undergirds not only the racism encountered by Asian Americans but also exposes the shortcomings of antiracist identarianism. "The identarian mode of analysis is that it encourages one to look for the presence of certain racial personalities possessed of certain racist attitudes when one should be looking at structures and systems that often

⁶⁴ Johnathan Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2020) XV.

⁶⁵ Johnathan Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. XV.

remain faceless and are no less deadly for it.”⁶⁶ Specifically, racial indentarianism maintains a black/white racial binary that simultaneously limits and, therefore, determines Asian Americans’ racial existence, as well as trades in the ‘unwieldy’ concept of ‘Asian-American.’⁶⁷ Further, because each individual is racialized as a part of the antiracist indentarianism, each person, therefore, is commodified.⁶⁸ It is this economic commodification that precedes, even in antiracist indentarianism, racial identity. Tran argues that the Delta Chinese exploit a chattel slavery “aftermarket” not because they are inherently anti-black, but rather, for them to participate in the economic aftermarket provided, anti-blackness must be espoused.⁶⁹ Economic exploitation demands individualized racism so that the political-economic structures may be maintained.

Johnathan Tran demonstrates that the model minority myth encapsulates the political economy underpinning racial identity. The model minority myth came into prominence with the political and economic exclusion of Chinese immigrants, enfranchising African Americans while maintaining ‘affordable’ Southern agricultural labor costs. This tactic was not limited to the South. Wider American society adopted African Americans as the model minority up against Chinese immigrants.⁷⁰ It is not until much later that the model minority myth gets recast in favor of Asian Americans, an

⁶⁶ Johnathan Tran. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. 7.

⁶⁷ Johnathan Tran. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. 11-12.

⁶⁸ Johnathan Tran. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. 13.

⁶⁹ Johnathan Tran. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. 80-84.

⁷⁰ Johnathan Tran. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. 49.

unwieldy and complicated category, to the detriment of African Americans. Tran writes, “By recasting the myth in these other terms, they make the story about racial identity without recognizing that racial identities are instruments of political economies.”⁷¹ This type of race ranking, as also portrayed in Valignano’s colonialist writings, presents as a feature of racial capitalism. Therefore, any race-ranking, even the antiracist inclination to “cut whites down to size and uplift those minoritized by whiteness”⁷², participates in racial capitalism, which commodifies racial identity for its ends and does not curb racism.⁷³

At this point, one may be tempted to respond to such racial organization with a commitment to racial colorblindness. Denial of racial identity only furthers these economic and theological positions. The denial of racial identity continues the narrative of bodies displaced from God’s creation. Racial colorblindness “is a direct descendent of the theological power to deny and undermine geographically sustained identities.”⁷⁴ This post-racialism only ignores the inequity political economies have, for centuries,

⁷¹ Johnathan Tran. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. 56.

⁷² Johnathan Tran. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. 59.

⁷³ “Whiteness,” in our popular culture, has become synonymous with the subversive enforcement of systematic racism and the cultural politic of the majority, which oppressively hovers over all things. And yet, whiteness itself is a commodified good. Nancy Leong argues that the property of whiteness includes a “suite of legal rights” and the “right to exclude.” Further, whiteness as property is commodified as the “property of status.” Nancy Leong. *Racial Capitalism*. (Cambridge: Harvard Law Review (Jun2013) v.126 n8.) 2158-2160. Jemar Tisby summarizes the definition by arguing, “whiteness’ isn’t a matter of melanin, but it is a matter of power.” Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism*. 17.

⁷⁴ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. 63, and Johnathan Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. 9-10.

wrecked on racialized minority groups. It seeks to solve racism with ignorance. Not only is this supported by philosophical arguments, but it is also witnessed as inept in church and youth ministry.⁷⁵

While Tran illustrates the multi-faceted domination of racism through political economies, it is clear that a black-white racial identarian binary is not sufficient for addressing the complexity of racism. Instead, as Vincent Lloyd argues, an antiracist pursuit of justice lies in the performance of dignity by resisting and uprooting patterns, systems, and language of domination for all racialized people groups.⁷⁶ Race ranking and racial segregation are tools for implementing anthropological systems of domination. Race, then, is a means to entrench further the imperial program of commodification, extraction of wealth, and violence.⁷⁷ As Lloyd argues, dignity is not an intrinsic quality but a performative act enacted through struggle against systematic oppression and domination.⁷⁸ Not that domination is a singular act but a restriction on one's capacity to act.⁷⁹ Violence or the fear of violence restricts individuals and communities and the systems, language, and patterns of white supremacy necessary to name, confront, and proclaim an alternative to such oppression.

⁷⁵ Williams, Montague. *Church in Color* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020)

⁷⁶ Vincent Lloyd, *Black Dignity*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022)

⁷⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *God, Neighbor, and Empire*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016) 3-5.

⁷⁸ Vincent Lloyd, *Black Dignity*. 4.

⁷⁹ Vincent Lloyd, *Black Dignity*. 4.

Christ and Racism

The radical center of Christian theology is a belief that God, existing as a Trinity, becomes incarnate and dwells amongst humanity. The revelation of the second person of the Trinity incarnating the human body of a first-century Jewish rabbi is a scandal of epic proportions. The bold claim is not only about the paradoxical nature of Jesus Christ's full divinity and full humanity but also that such an incarnation reveals the whole character of God.⁸⁰ Such a radical claim centers Christ as the epistemological nexus.⁸¹ What instructive approaches to Christology could inform conversations on race, racism, and antiracism?

Kelly Brown Douglas outlines the historical emergence of slaveholding Christianity and the Christology of the 'white Christ.' "Slavery in the American colonies was part of a wider ideological structure, which presupposed that hierarchical relationships between human beings were divinely ordered."⁸² The imperial colonial political economy historically shaped and impinged its will upon Christology, and what emerged was a 'white Christ' of slaveholding Christianity. Douglas characterizes the 'white Christ' as emphasizing the incarnation without an earthly ministry, individualizing salvation, not liberation from oppression and death, justifying slavery, allowing for extreme cruelty, and engaging in hierarchical social order rather than an

⁸⁰ John 1:18, 5:19 (NRSV)

⁸¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row Collins, 1960.)

⁸² Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2019) 3.

egalitarian society.⁸³ Drawing upon historian Albert Raboteau, Douglas juxtaposes the 'white Christ' with the 'black Christ' of the slave Christianity of the antebellum South. The 'black Christ' has an intimate relationship with suffering, emphasizes the resurrection, radicalizes slaves in the fight for freedom, and illuminates the differences between Christianity and the dehumanizing practices of slavery.⁸⁴ In short, the 'black Christ' "nurtured a rebellion against and resistance to dehumanizing slavery."⁸⁵ An investigation into the Christological developments of the 'black' Christ offers not only a pathway to understanding the broader theological commitments of one's beliefs on race and racism but also offers theological tools for an antiracist imagination.

In the 1960s, as the fight for Civil Rights intensified, black theologians sought to develop the connection between the black consciousness, the Gospels, and black Christology.⁸⁶ Douglas examines the theological development of the 'black Christ' through the work of Albert Cleage, James Cone, and J. Deotis Roberts and how each of their contributions is viewed in the present context. Cleage argues that Christ's blackness is attributed to him through the genealogical heritage of his mother, Mary.⁸⁷ Cleage's biological arguments for Christ's blackness are representative of his theological commitments to black nationalism, and as Douglas puts it, "a (biologically) non-black

⁸³ Kelly Brown Douglas. *The Black Christ*. 5-10.

⁸⁴ Kelly Brown Douglas. *The Black Christ*. 15-20.

⁸⁵ Kelly Brown Douglas. *The Black Christ*. 24.

⁸⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas. *The Black Christ*. 57.

⁸⁷ Kelly Brown Douglas. *The Black Christ*. 59.

Jesus would have forced him to choose between nationalism and Christianity, his blackness and his religion.”⁸⁸ Cleage believes Christ is the racial/ethnic link between the chosen people of God as Israel and the contemporary black nation. Liberation, then, is black national independence.⁸⁹ For James Cone, Christ’s blackness does not refer to his biological inheritance but to his identification with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized of his time. “For Cone, Christ’s blackness was informed by Jesus’s historical identification with the oppressed and by the fact that in a white racist society, black people were the oppressed ones.”⁹⁰ Cone claims that ‘black’ refers to a physiological trait, a trait that embodies the brutality white supremacy has inflicted on black bodies. Therefore, Christ is black insofar as he is the ontological symbolic lens with which American and, consequently, white supremacist theology comes to terms.⁹¹ Christ’s ministry presents the narrative of God as in solidarity with the oppressed⁹², his crucifixion as God’s salvation available to all through the solidarity with crucified ones in our contemporary contexts⁹³, and his resurrection presents the reality of God’s sovereignty over all oppressive forces, revealing the universality of God’s liberating work outside of the first-century Jewish context.⁹⁴ J. Deotis Roberts argues that Christ

⁸⁸ Kelly Brown Douglas. *The Black Christ*. 62.

⁸⁹ Kelly Brown Douglas. *The Black Christ*. 73.

⁹⁰ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 63.

⁹¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 66.

⁹² James Cone, *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017) 154.

⁹³ James Cone, *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*. 160.

⁹⁴ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 76.

universally identifies with humanity; therefore, all people have a right to understand Christ by their own experience and likeness. While Christ is universal, he is also particular; Christ identifies with all human knowledge.⁹⁵ Douglas explains that Roberts “wanted to develop an image of Christ that was not potentially exclusive or oppressive of others.”⁹⁶ Roberts’s Christology, therefore, places the ethical impetus on followers of Christ to pursue justice through redemptive suffering.⁹⁷ The cross reveals God’s concern for liberation and reconciliation of all people to God and one another.⁹⁸

Kelly Brown Douglas assesses these approaches to blackness and Christ and finds promising work in need of further development. First, Douglas acknowledges that while Cleage’s claim that Christ was black in a biological/genealogical sense was ahead of the historical and biblical evidence at the time, it permitted black Christians to reject the worship of a white Christ, freeing the black church from the confines of an American, white supremacist theology. Douglas’s admiration of Cleage’s invalidation of a ‘white Christ’ is a necessary termination of a white supremacist theological frame. At the same time, Cleage’s Christological lens maintains a biological anchoring of race in what would now be considered a fallacy. If race is a human construct, as argued above, then Cleage’s ‘black Christ’ suffers from the same racial supremacy that antiracism would seek to deconstruct. Yes, Jesus of Nazareth biologically would most likely have

⁹⁵ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 66.

⁹⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 68.

⁹⁷ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 78.

⁹⁸ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 79.

more melanin than your average individual from an Anglo-Saxon or European genealogical heritage. And yet, such biological claims of race would exclude Latinos/as Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders from identifying with a Christ that embraces and includes their experience.

For Douglas, Roberts's suggestion that Christ is both universal in his identification and, therefore, may be interpreted in particular alongside all human experience is "inconsistent with Jesus' unequivocal identification with the oppressed and nullifies Christ's blackness."⁹⁹ Roberts is too universal in his Christological understanding of Christ's race. Roberts offers an ontotheology ripe for employment by white supremacists. If Christ is not identified in his context but rather in the interpreter's context, anyone can eisegete Jesus wherever it might be convenient.

Lastly, Douglas deals favorably with Cone's development of the Christology of the black Christ. While she argues Cone's development has little to do with the detail of Jesus' ministry and more with the overall nature, she concludes that Cone's Christ "could not be a color of humanity that signified oppressors, but only a color which signified the oppressed. In white racist America, Christ could not be white."¹⁰⁰ Thus, the existential symbolic interpretation of Christ's racial ethnicity had more to do with his mission than his DNA.

⁹⁹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 91. Such is the logic of responding to the contemporary emphasis on racial justice with the phrase "all lives matter." All lives do matter, but countering racial protest with such a mantra nullifies the particularity of racial discrimination and violence.

¹⁰⁰ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 94.

All three of these men are instrumental in freeing Christ from the imagination of slaveholding and white supremacist Christianity, and yet, Douglas argues that these developments are inadequate. First, Douglas argues that the 'black Christ' as developed by Cleage, Cone, and Roberts, lacks an internal critique; the black Christ exclusively 'disavows' white supremacy and is unable to address all of the other ways black people oppress each other or confront those black people who have succeeded in a white supremacist political economy.¹⁰¹ This includes Douglas's critique that the development of the black Christ only confronts racial discrimination and is unequipped or underdeveloped in its ability to confront other forms of social oppression, such as sexism, classism, or ableism.¹⁰² Douglas will go on to further critique the lack of inclusion of the black female experience of gender exploitation into the development of the theology of the black Christ. Additionally, Douglas notes that the black Christ's theological development has seemingly limited impact on the black church.¹⁰³

Therefore, Douglas proposes that a womanist approach to the black Christ would enact a social-political analysis of wholeness and offer a religio-cultural analysis. First, through a womanist approach, the black Christ reveals the interlocking and multidimensional aspects of oppression (race, class, gender, and sexual orientation). She challenges the exterior socio-political forces wielding violence against oppressed

¹⁰¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 96-97.

¹⁰² Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 98.

¹⁰³ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 100.

communities and provides crucial interior critique and accountability within complex matrices of communities. The black Christ enables individual and communal wholeness¹⁰⁴. Secondly, a womanist development of the black Christ “lifts up” those aspects of the black community that nurture liberation and wholeness while disavowing those aspects of black culture and community that degrade and dehumanize women and other people groups. Those parts of community and culture that promote resilience, creativity, liberation, and a thriving heritage are platformed. Those who maintain a language of degradation and oppression are critiqued and removed from the cultural tradition.¹⁰⁵ In summary, for Douglas to suggest that the black Christ seeks the ‘wholeness’ of the black community means that the black Christ is present wherever people are engaged in the struggle against oppression and in favor of communal wholeness, challenges black people to participate in the ongoing work of collective unity and freedom, and, finally, portrayal of Christ in the face ‘heroines’ of the black community signals that what makes Christ is not his maleness, but the embodied performance of liberation through death and resurrection.¹⁰⁶

Kelly Brown Douglas provides a crucial Christological development for black liberation theology. At the same time, the womanist black Christ, as articulated by Douglas, goes on to challenge the white, supremacist slaveholding Christology most

¹⁰⁴ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 115-16, 121.

¹⁰⁵ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 122-23.

¹⁰⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*. 127-28.

white evangelicals have chosen to allow to go unchallenged. First, Douglas provides a broader understanding of black oppression beyond race. In this way, racism is not only caught up in a black-white binary, but it also is caught up with classism and sexism. Christ's blackness is not biologically anchored but centered on his mission and ministry of communal and individual liberation and restoration, a restoration between God and humanity and restoration amongst and between human communities. The philosopher bell hooks agrees that "the affirmation of binding between black women and men is part of anti-racist struggle."¹⁰⁷ Christ is found in the faces of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks. The black Christ does not allow racial injustice to be disentangled from economic injustice or gender/sexual discrimination.

Secondly, Douglas' Christological developments challenge the heritage of white evangelical theology and offer a Christological epistemology that may enable white evangelical communities' theological language to confront racism in their midst and develop an antiracist imagination. By contrasting the differences between white slaveholding Christianity and black slave Christianity, Douglas offers a window through which white evangelical theology, as it presently exists, may see its white supremacist heritage. Not only are the roots of white supremacy in plain view, but so too are the roots of the sexist restrictions of complementarianism and the endorsement of violence to nationalistic ends. Domestic abuse and cover-up within church

¹⁰⁷ hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory*. 70.

congregations and violent Christian nationalism are not some recent occurrences; they are historical-theological outgrowths of white slave-owning Christianity. To dismantle white supremacist theology, evangelical preachers must publicly confess their racist history, introduce an enriched theological language for Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the sin that integrates a womanist theological framework and articulates the interwoven nature of racism, sexism, and classism.

Uprooting the white supremacists' theological commitments means there is a necessary challenge to the whole epistemological system. Willie James Jennings argues that whiteness represents a poisoned social imagination that has drastically altered the Christian theological imagination. And yet, as Douglas points out, such a heritage of poisoning does not explain the silence of white evangelicals against white supremacist values or theological distortion.¹⁰⁸ This silence is due to a privileged epistemology which Douglas calls, 'the white gaze.' Anglo-American postmodern philosopher Nancy Murphy argues that epistemological "holism means that each belief is supported by its ties to its neighboring beliefs, and, ultimately, the whole. Justification shows that problematic beliefs are closely tied to beliefs that we have no good reason to call into question."¹⁰⁹ Epistemological holism of the 'white gaze' has tied the witness of Christ to a justifiable mode of understanding and operating within God's creation, the thriving of

¹⁰⁸ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope*. 117.

¹⁰⁹ Murphy, Nancy. *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*. 94.

whiteness, an unjustifiable socio-political system of oppression. To explain further, “the white gaze views the world and reality through an either/or oppositional lens in which whiteness is the standard for truth and justice, which non-white is seen as fallacious and unjust.”¹¹⁰ This social-cultural epistemological privilege, which has evolved and adapted, narrows the collective public knowledge and discourse.¹¹¹ The ‘white gaze’ seeks to limit the boundaries of historical narrative and public discourse to maintain the supremacy of the dominant social/cultural group.¹¹² The social-cultural epistemological privilege of whiteness props up economic and political systems of injustice and reciprocally benefits from such systemic injustices. Whiteness enfoldes the theological imagination into its racialized system and further propagates itself. White supremacy is the centuries-long evolution of domination and epistemology. Specifically, the white evangelical church has innovated and propagated such systems of domination.

Therefore, a womanist interpretation of the black Christ offers a Christological epistemological pruning hook to the white, evangelical theological holism. Suppose Christ is the true epistemological center of evangelical theology. In that case, with the introduction of a womanist Christology to the epistemological nexus of evangelical theology, Christ reveals humanity’s participation in violent, oppressive systems, seeks to

¹¹⁰ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope*. 117.

¹¹¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope*. 67.

¹¹² As Kelly Brown Douglas indicates, such epistemological power and resistance to alternative social-cultural narratives can be witnessed in the present resistance to using the New York Times *1619 Project* in public education. As of this writing, there continues to be, in many parts of the USA, a concerted effort to eliminate works of literature which expose an American history of racism and white supremacy.

chasten such death-dealing systems, celebrates the diversity of life-giving cultural-communal features, and pursues liberating justice for all. And yet, it is clear from historical and contemporary research that such an epistemological centering of Christ is deactivated in white evangelical theology or congregations.¹¹³ The contextualized, socio-political content of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are decentered in favor of an individualized biblical inerrancy.¹¹⁴ Stanley Hauerwas makes it exceedingly clear that scripture is epistemological subservient to the resurrected Christ and the practices of a community constituted by the resurrected Christ.¹¹⁵

The Doctrine of the Trinity and Racism

While Christ remains at the center of the revelation of God's nature, Christology's superstructure is trinitarian. Robust theological reflection on the nature of the doctrine of the Trinity and racism is presently lacking.¹¹⁶ In addressing postcolonialism and preaching, Sarah Travis challenges colonialism by further developing Jurgen

¹¹³ Nancy Murphy argues that such conservative (read evangelical) epistemological models function as biblical foundationalists with an outweighed emphasis on biblical inerrancy. Murphy, Nancy. *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*.

¹¹⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1993) 25-26.

¹¹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scriptures*. 49.

¹¹⁶ My research found very little in the way of sustained, robust accounts of the doctrine of the Trinity and racism. There exists a handful of articles on popular theological blogs, written after the murder of George Floyd which specifically address violence and the Trinity. Jin-Kyung Park published an article titled, *A Study of Anti-racism Christian Education Model Based on Leonardo Boff's Social Doctrine of the Trinity*, but it is published in a Korean language journal. As explored below, Sarah Travis will tease our Jurgen Moltmann's social trinitarianism as a way of deconstructing colonialism. How might Leonardo Boff's social trinitarianism counter or compliments Travis's use of Moltmann? Would Boff's or Catherine Mowry LaCugna's work on the doctrine of the Trinity further enrich an antiracist imagination? Such research questions go beyond this project's scope but remain as avenues for further exploration. Otherwise, there is not much in the way of peer-reviewed books or articles studying the doctrine of the Trinity and racism.

Moltmann's social trinitarianism for homiletics.¹¹⁷ By distilling Moltmann's social trinity, Travis offers a non-hierarchical trinitarian perspective in which the Creator makes space within the "divine community in which the creation itself could dwell."¹¹⁸ For Travis, Moltmann's use of the ancient concept of *perichoresis* explores the divine communal nature as one of space-making love and also one which centralizes Jesus Christ's cross as evidence of God's divine embrace.¹¹⁹ The divine community crosses the boundary between the divine and creation and is differentiated into personas. While God is unified, God is also self-differentiated.¹²⁰ Unity in diversity as social trinitarianism. While humanity is invited into such a life in the divine community, it can only do so in part.¹²¹ And yet, "The social doctrine of the Trinity deconstructs colonialism/imperialism by 'overturning and displacing' the preferred terminologies of colonizing discourse such as hierarchy, separation, contempt for otherness, and fixedness with other terms consistent with God's life in Trinity: freedom, mutual self-giving, self-differentiation, and openness."¹²² In social trinitarianism, Christian communities, specifically white evangelical churches, have access to theological tools to name a constructive, archetypal cultural-linguistic doctrine in contrast to the white supremacist theological heritage.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*. (Eugene: Cascade Books. 2014)

¹¹⁸ Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*. 58.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*. 60.

¹²⁰ Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*. 61.

¹²¹ Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*. 64.

¹²² Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*. 68.

¹²³ To preempt the findings contained in the case studies of Park Hill Church and All People's Church just a little bit, neither church employs or develops a sophisticated Christology or social trinitarianism. The

Conclusion

To summarize, racist white supremacy is an interlocking, dynamic, multi-layered narrative of oppressive systems that developed ad hoc taxonomies of melanin, gender, and class so that power might be maintained for a privileged minority. It has impinged on epistemological frames and infected theological language and identity in order for patriarchal systems of dominating political economy to be perpetuated. Fear and violence then become tools by which white supremacy maintains these oppressive systems. Therefore, antiracism seeks to tease out the histories and narratives of domination, economic commodification, and epistemological hegemony that oppress and violate racial minorities and offer alternative epistemology, political economy, and structures of power. For Christians, such critique and hope are found in the Trinity and Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection.

doctrine of the Trinity is fully absent from the preaching in the wake of George Floyd's murder, and Christological study is developed in only one of the 12 sermons under analysis (a guest preacher gave that sermon). This is clearly problematic.

Chapter 3: Case Study #1: Park Hill Church

Ethnographic Profile of San Diego

To properly understand the context in which these three churches reside, it is essential to take a serious ethnographic look at the county and city of San Diego. San Diego County is a unique mix of all things California. Traveling south from Los Angeles¹²⁴ through the suburban sprawl of Orange County, you are first met by Camp Pendleton, the furthest north military installation. The US military has a heavy and visible presence across the county and San Diego city proper. The US Marine Corps operates Camp Pendleton and the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (known locally as MCRD). The US Navy operates North Island Air Station, Naval Consolidated Brig Miramar¹²⁵, and eight other bases across the county.¹²⁶ Not only is there a significant number of military personnel in the county and city, but the US Navy also employs civilian engineers and systems managers on their bases. Due to the revolving nature of military deployment, San Diego city and county have a high resident transplant population.

¹²⁴ Even though it is the second largest city in California, San Diego is dwarfed by Los Angeles. San Diego's relationship to Los Angeles is complex and deserves its ethnographic study, which, to my knowledge, does not exist.

¹²⁵ North Island and Miramar Naval bases were made famous by the 1986 movie, *Top Gun*. Significant portions of *Top Gun* and the 2022 sequel *Top Gun: Maverick*, were filmed in Point Loma, Miramar, and Coronado.

¹²⁶ This does not include two large hospitals at Camp Pendleton and the Naval Medical Center, San Diego.

As you drive south down the (interstate) 5¹²⁷, you will inevitably encounter a second strong cultural influence: the beach. There is a strong surf and sand culture. While it does not have the prestige of Hawaii's North Shore, surf and surfing culture significantly influence the laid-back approach to life in San Diego. The beaches, surf, temperate summer climate, and attractions like SeaWorld, ComicCon, and Legoland attract tourists to the city from March until October.

Not only do the beach and temperate weather provide plenty of tourism to the city, but they also drive rising housing costs and homeless populations. In October of 2023, US News and World Report declared the city of San Diego the most expensive place to live.¹²⁸ While the unemployment rate is 10.3%, according to this study, the average annual salary is \$67,000, and average rent prices hover between \$1800 and \$2000. Between 33-40% of an average San Diego renter's annual salary goes towards affording rent. In addition, the average home price in San Diego is nearly \$920,000, which is triple the national average. In 2018, the city of San Diego recognized, as a part of its planning and development, that it had entered into a housing crisis and had not kept pace with population growth.¹²⁹ And yet, Mayor Todd Gloria and the San Diego City Council remain at a stalemate on plans to increase housing inventory at all

¹²⁷ The quickest way a tourist or out-of-towner can be identified is by how they identify the major freeways in the county. The SNL sketch "The Californians" accurately describes how directions are verbally offered in throughout California.

¹²⁸ <https://realestate.usnews.com/places/rankings/most-expensive-places-to-live>

¹²⁹ <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/pds/advance/HousingAffordability.html>

affordability levels.¹³⁰ With such an expensive housing market and an equally expensive rental market, the San Diego homeless crisis has only expanded. The city continues to develop creative responses to homelessness in the city, but there remains a punitive system dealing with the unhoused residents of the city.¹³¹

Twenty-five miles from downtown San Diego is the San Ysidro-Tijuana border crossing. Not only does San Diego County border Mexico, the San Ysidro-Tijuana border crossing is the busiest land border crossing in the world.¹³² While security remains a high priority at the border, no matter which presidential administration is in charge, there is continual concern over the interconnected relationship between San Diego and Tijuana. A border wall might separate them, but the environmental impact cannot be as easily separated. The Tijuana River travels the northernmost part of Mexico through the city of Tijuana and floods the Tijuana River Estuary on the most southwestern 5-mile stretch of San Diego. The raw sewage picked up with the intermittent flooding of the river valley on the Mexico side of the border is treated on the US side. The Tijuana River Treatment Plant, when it is running, is run on overdrive.¹³³ When the treatment plant is down for repair or large rainstorms sweep through the river valley, raw sewage is dumped into the Pacific Ocean, which causes beaches to close from Imperial Beach and

¹³⁰ <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/san-diego-city-council-torpedoes-mayor-todd-glorias-housing-plan/3354667/>

¹³¹ <https://voiceofsandiego.org/2023/12/28/san-diegos-homeless-response-took-a-punitive-turn-in-2023/>

¹³² <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-38017733>

¹³³ <https://voiceofsandiego.org/2023/06/22/the-sewage-plant-treating-tijuana-poo-is-busted/>

Coronado Island up to La Jolla. The environment demonstrates what has always been true: the economic lives of either side of the border cannot be disentangled.

Spanish-speaking peoples and cultures have a distinct influence on San Diego.¹³⁴ Mexican culture and concern influence every level of civic life in San Diego. This is particularly true in communities further south and east in the county. Hispanic population and influence tapers further north and northwest.¹³⁵ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, San Diego city has a racial demographic breakdown as such: White – 42%, Hispanic/Latino – 30%, Asian – 17%, Two or more races – 10%, Black – 6%, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander - .5%.¹³⁶ The historical tie between Latino/a groups and the Roman Catholic church remains persistent in religious affiliation demographics in the city of San Diego. According to the Pew Research Center, 68% percent of San Diego residents claim Christianity as their religious affiliation, and nearly half are Roman

¹³⁴ While Mexicans are the dominate Spanish speaking people group in San Diego, they are by no means the only Spanish speaking people group in San Diego.

¹³⁵ The clear answer to these patterns is generational wealth and housing prices. The closer to beach communities, the more expensive the real estate and fewer affordable housing options. The California Coastal Commission strictly regulates the 30 feet maximum height of new housing developments. Such strict regulation impedes the development of affordable housing in coastal communities. For instance, there has been intense opposition to the 2023 Measure C ballot initiative and the Midway Rising redevelopment project from the wealthy, predominately white Point Loma and Ocean Beach communities. <https://www.kpbs.org/news/economy/2023/12/18/judges-ruling-clears-way-for-midway-rising-redevelopment-project>

¹³⁶ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/sandiegocalifornia>

Catholic.¹³⁷ Evangelical Protestants, our specific population of study, make up 14% of the 3.8 million residents of San Diego.

Park Hill Church

All San Diego communities have unique topography, demographics, and character. The Point Loma suburb is no different. Point Loma, the neighborhood surrounding Park Hill Church, is a wealthy, white neighborhood on a peninsula. Point Loma is home to two of the three largest military installations in San Diego (Fort Rosecrans {Navy} and the Marine Corp Recruit Depot). Every Sunday, the length of Rosecrans Boulevard, the central road in Point Loma that connects the primary freeway system with the navy base at the end of the peninsula, is lined with American flags. Park Hill Church meets in a renovated building, formerly the Naval Training Center, in the middle of Rosecrans Blvd.

The Point Loma Community is home not only to several military installations, but is also one of the wealthiest homes, properties, and neighbors in San Diego. In a recent survey of income, housing, and wealth in San Diego, Point Loma was the fourth most affluent community in San Diego County, just behind nationally known communities like La Jolla and Del Mar. There is an extraordinary amount of wealth in the Point Loma community.

¹³⁷ Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/metro-area/san-diego-metro-area/#beliefs-and-practices>. (Accessed July 13th 2023)

In addition, Point Loma is home to Point Loma Nazarene University. PLNU took up residence at its present location on the west side of the Point Loma peninsula in 1973 from Pasadena, CA, after California Western University sold the property. It is an institution of higher education of the Church of the Nazarene and home to 2,300 undergraduate students. While PLNU is an institution of the Church of the Nazarene, a Wesleyan-Holiness denomination, the students have diverse religious affiliations. Most students would identify as non-denominational Christians, with a significant population of undergraduates identifying as Roman Catholic. Undergraduate students affiliated with the Church of the Nazarene comprise about 16% of the student population.¹³⁸ The overlap between PLNU, its current students, alums, faculty/staff, and Park Hill is significant. Not only do students and young alums of PLNU make up the majority of the population of the congregation on any given Sunday, Mathieu Rouffet, a PLNU chemistry professor, is one of the listed elders on the Park Hill website¹³⁹, and the PLNU provost, Kerry Fulcher, attends the church. Further, the lead pastor of Park Hill, Evan Wickham, has preached in the PLNU chapel on three separate occasions from December 2019 to January 2023.¹⁴⁰ Of the roughly 600 people that attend Park Hill Church over the

¹³⁸ These demographics are approximations from internal PLNU conversations with administration officials.

¹³⁹ <https://www.parkhillsd.church/leadership>

¹⁴⁰ This is significant as PLNU chapel with interrupted and made drastic shifts in due to the COVID-19 pandemic. No other non-PLNU community has preached in chapel as many times in this period of time as Wickham.

three Sunday services, 60-80% of the church would be classified as white and in the 18-30 age demographic.

Park Hill Church¹⁴¹ was founded by Evan and Sandy Wickham in 2017. Evan Wickham, older brother of CCM artist Phil Wickham, was born and raised in San Diego, ministered at Calvary Church in Vista (a suburb of San Diego's East County) as a Youth Pastor and Horizon Christian Fellowship as a Worship Pastor, and has recorded three CCM albums and a Christmas album. Sandy and Evan attended and completed programs at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. Evan completed his MDiv degree, and Sandy completed a Bible and Theology cohort. Upon observation and information provided by their website, Sandy leads prayer and community ministries, and Evan oversees worship, preaching, and discipleship ministries, with both leaders giving vision and direction for Park Hill Church. Evan and Sandy supervise a staff of eight pastors, ranging from traditional areas of ministry, such as 'Pastor of Kids and 'Pastor of Community Formation' and non-traditional roles, such as 'Pastor of Teams' and 'Race and Belonging Coordinator,' one audio/visual technician, and one executive assistant. Seemingly, many of these pastoral roles are taken up bi-vocationally. In addition to the pastoral staff, Sandy and Evan are joined by five church elders.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ <https://www.parkhillsd.church>

¹⁴² <https://www.parkhillsd.church/leadership>

Park Hill Church's theological beliefs are rooted in Christian orthodoxy and anchored in a global, evangelical ethos. The Park Hill Church website cites four theological documents: The Apostle's Creed, The Nicene Creed, The 1974 Lausanne Covenant, and the 2010 Cape Town Commitment. Park Hill Church anchors its theological commitment in a historically defined Christian orthodoxy while maintaining its evangelical bone fides. From the pulpit, Evan Wickham is quick to make inclusive theological statements while keeping an evangelical eye on 'seeking the peace of San Diego.'¹⁴³ The theological ethos of Park Hill Church seeks to take an ancient-future faith model of preaching and discipleship within a broader missional-evangelical framework. Some white evangelicals may see this missional, ancient-future faith model as 'progressive.' While Park Hill does not claim the 'progressive' moniker, it does emphasize the broadness of the Christian community, a weekly practice of communion, and small group participation while maintaining a high emphasis on biblical authority and care for the overall well-being of the city of San Diego.

5.31.20 | *God is Spirit*¹⁴⁴

The Sunday after the murder of George Floyd was Pentecost Sunday, and it is on this Sunday that Pastor Evan Wickham begins a preaching series entitled "Life in the Spirit." Appropriate for the day and the beginning of the series, Wickham uses Acts 2 as

¹⁴³ This is a clear contextualization of Jeremiah 29:10 and a common heuristic Wickham employs in preaching and teaching.

¹⁴⁴ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. Pastor Evan Wickham. 5/31/20.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrZoK_Be3U4

his jumping-off point. In his intro to the message, Wickham mentions present uncertainty and the “evil and the tensions around racism and division in our country.”¹⁴⁵ While George Floyd is not mentioned, Wickham points toward the beginning of the 2020 racial reckoning.

Wickham continues his introduction to the series by describing the essential theological framework for Park Hill. He states, “We have been praying that our church would be a word and spirit church. We long to be a church both of theological depth, like committed to biblical authority searching the scriptures and drenched in the power of the Spirit.”¹⁴⁶ For Wickham and Park Hill to be a ‘theologically deep’ church is to elevate the Bible as supremely authoritative. Theological depth is biblical saturation. Not only is this type of biblicism a hallmark of evangelicalism, but such doctrinal commitment demands that “Christian theological talk of revelation migrate to the beginning of the dogmatic corpus and has to take on the job of furnishing the epistemological warrants for Christian claims.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, conservative biblical foundationalism squeezes out “reason, the buttress supporting a theology founded on scriptural revelation,” as well as the other, particularly Wesleyan quadrilateral staples of experience and tradition.¹⁴⁸ If biblical authority becomes the measure of theological

¹⁴⁵ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 1:57

¹⁴⁶ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 2:49

¹⁴⁷ Webster, John. *Holy Scripture; a Dogmatic Sketch*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003) 12

¹⁴⁸ Murphy, Nancy. *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism..* 22.

depth, ideological corruption quickly sneaks through the back door of fallible interpretation.¹⁴⁹

Pastor Wickham explains that, according to a Barna Group study, most Christians do not believe that the Holy Spirit is not a living entity of the Trinity but a symbol of God's power and presence.¹⁵⁰ He believes that such a misunderstanding robs Christians of the power of God's presence and, therefore, sets up to enlighten Park Hill so that they might know the life given through the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Wickham moves on to exegeting Genesis 1:1-2, where he points out that the Holy Spirit hovers over the deep, pre-creational chaos. Here, he mentions that "America is burning, protests over evil, righteous indignation over racism."¹⁵¹ Wickham responds to the present protests over racial injustice by connecting them with the pre-creational chaos to make the theological point that the "Spirit of God hovers over brokenness and chaos and darkness, longing to bring healing, order, and light."¹⁵² The implicit message is that the Holy Spirit is present over the protesting and destruction, beckoning order and healing.

What follows this brief excursion into Genesis 1:1-2 is example after example of instances in which the Holy Spirit in the Torah inspires and invites creativity and

¹⁴⁹ Brueggemann, Walter, et al. *Struggling With Scripture*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2002) 20-23

¹⁵⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrZoK_Be3U4 , 4:47

¹⁵¹ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 7:41

¹⁵² Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 8:02

prophecy.¹⁵³ This is the particular vision Wickham has for the church's task. In quoting Moses' comment about the receiving of the spirit by the leaders in Israel in Numbers 11:29, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them," Wickham explains that not only is this the hope for Park Hill Church, but that this ought to be the hope for all churches.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, in the "age of the Spirit," there is power to operate as Jesus operated, speak boldly against evil, and "watch strongholds like racism come down."¹⁵⁵

Therefore, the Spirit of God, which existed in the Torah, is accessible through faith in Christ. Wickham formulates it as such: for those forgiven and rescued by Jesus, when they come to Jesus, admit their need, repent, and leave their sin behind, the Spirit dwells in their lives.¹⁵⁶ The Holy Spirit is immediately accessible upon confession, repentance, and faith in Christ. Not only is the Spirit accessible, but the gifts of the Spirit can be exercised. Using Numbers 11:29 as the framing, the gifts of the Spirit are no longer for leaders but for all those who confess faith in Jesus. In this vein, Wickham understands that the chaos that is witnessed in the protests immediately following the

¹⁵³ Wickham cites Joseph in Genesis, Bezalel in Exodus, and Moses in Numbers as examples of those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and invokes

¹⁵⁴ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 13:54

¹⁵⁵ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 15:11

¹⁵⁶ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 16:16

murder of George Floyd can find order when Spirit-indwelled followers of Christ enter the scene.¹⁵⁷

Pastor Wickham shifts towards an invitation to the rest of the sermon series by affirming the equitability of the Holy Spirit dwelling in all believers and inviting the listener to fully invest in the relationship with the Holy Spirit. Just as the initial attraction between a couple does not constitute the whole relationship, true intimacy incurs further time, vulnerability, and investment. Life in the Spirit beckons a deeper connection and further development.

In concluding his sermon, Wickham says that when we talk of the Holy Spirit, we talk about God. He then affirms the orthodox theological belief in the Triune God and that such a belief is at the heart of Christianity. He then leads the congregation in reciting the Athanasian Creed.

6.7.20 | Sermon Title: *Spirit and Race*¹⁵⁸

A clear pivot occurred during the planning of Park Hill's service due to the ongoing protests concerning the murder of George Floyd. Previously, Pastor Wickham announced that a guest preacher, David Lomas, who will preach the following week, would preach on the virtues and characteristics of life in the Spirit. Not only has that moved to the next week, but it is also clear that Pastor Lomas' sermon has been

¹⁵⁷ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 18:03

¹⁵⁸ Park Hill Church, *Spirit and Race*. (Pastor Evan Wickham. 6/7/20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAGJZGx45w0&t=1914s>.)

rerecorded as a sermon concerning the Holy Spirit and Social Justice. Rather than continue with the pre-recorded sermon from a guest preacher, Wickham organizes a panel discussion on race with six congregation members, three of whom are on staff as pastors at Park Hill.

To set it up, Pastor Wickham is seated next to the Pastor for Children, Arielle Dortch.¹⁵⁹ Seated to their right are Jason and Tinika Wyatt, the Marriage and Family Pastors at Park Hill Church. They joined Park Hill even though both of their experiences were in Black Pentecostal churches, and it has been a difficult journey to find community at the predominately white Park Hill Church. To the left of Wickham and Dortch sit three congregants: Rebecca and her mother, Maria, and Wesley. Rebecca grew up in the inner city of San Diego after her mother immigrated from Tijuana. Wesley identified as Asian American and attended PLNU at his parents' objection. For Wesley, attending PLNU was his first experience of what he calls "white America."

Before Pastor Wickham interviews the panelists, he sets some things to consider/ground rules for engaging in the conversation. He shares that this is a panel of diverse voices and a moment to "vent, lament, and listen." First, Wickham encourages his congregation to commit to coming into the conversation with utmost humility, especially if the listener considers themselves a part of the dominant white culture. Secondly, when one enters into a conversation such as the one they are about to have,

¹⁵⁹ Park Hill Church, *Spirit and Race*.

they agree to a mutually shared goal such as learning, growing, or coming to mutual respect and understanding. Thirdly, this is a family conversation; therefore, there is room for messiness, and Christ binds participants together. Fourthly, all lived experiences are valid and, particularly for those who identify as white, resist mentally jumping in with facts and attempts to fix it. And lastly, be okay with feeling uncomfortable and know it is a privilege to back away from being overwhelmed.

After setting these ground rules, Wickham introduces each of the panelists, asking them to explain a little bit about their background and how they came to be a part of the Park Hill community. After the brief introductions take place, Wickham asks Jason, Tinika, and Arielle to speak about how they are doing with the unfolding of the protests around the murder of George Floyd and how they are processing all of what is taking place. Jason begins by explaining the vast spectrum of emotions he has experienced in the last several days. Not only stricken with sadness, anger, and disappointment, he speaks of the feeling of hope because of the outpouring of attention to the injustices that take place and that such an outcry against racial injustice is coming from all different races, including white brothers and sisters. Tinika speaks to the sense of hopelessness she had when she heard about Ahmaud Arbury and Breonna Taylor's murders and that when she heard about George Floyd's murder, the immediate sense of grief and lament. Her driving question to God has been, "Will this ever change in America?" And yet, it feels as if the protests coming from all places and races give her

hope that her pain is no longer just her pain but is shared with others. “It isn’t just black pain; it is human pain and human pain.”¹⁶⁰ Arielle joins in with Tinika’s sentiment. She is holding both the frustration and sadness of the injustices that have occurred, and she is excited by the fact that white and Latinx friends are reaching out to her. She explains that white friends from her past are apologizing for the racist comments and jokes they made. She admits that while it is exciting that so much awareness and education has taken place, there is so much more work to do. Arielle’s plea is that those passionate about justice in the present moment would commit to the long-haul work.

Before Wickham moves on to asking Jason and Tinika about the racism they have experienced, he reminds the listener that it takes Christ like-grace for these brothers and sisters in Christ to vulnerably open their experiences up and open up space for white brothers and sisters to wake up to the injustices that have been experienced.

Pastor Wickham then pivots to Jason and Tinika and asks them to share their experience of racism and how they responded to and processed those events. Tinika shares a story of a time when a few white colleagues believed that racism had ended after the election of Barack Obama and that these white colleagues stated that they had not witnessed any racism since his election but did not think to ask Tinika if she had experienced anything. Jason shares that while people are in the process of learning about race and racism, there remains a necessity to confront racism, specifically, confront the

¹⁶⁰ Park Hill Church, *Spirit and Race*. 57:56

ignorance of racism. Jason argues this should be especially true for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. “Charity begins in the house of faith.”¹⁶¹ Ultimately, his prayer is that God would overshadow cynicism with love and that Christians might continue to join the marathon toward racial justice.

Wickham moves the conversation to Rebecca and Maria, asking, “How do you see the Latinx community responding to this moment?” Rebecca responds by articulating the responsibility as a white-passing Latinx woman to advocate for her black and brown brothers and sisters in her white space and relationships. She relays a conversation on the practical ways she, and the listener, can act as an ally, such as having uncomfortable conversations, talking with local politicians, voting, a reorientation about how we view our neighbor, and serving black brothers and sisters by offering resources for them to progress.¹⁶² She then responds to white congregants with an encouragement to move from guilt to action, especially since God is a God of justice. Maria then speaks about the feeling of immigrating and not feeling free and that her experience as an immigrant empathizes with the experience of black Americans. She then reads Galatians 5:17 and how faith in Christ gives Christians freedom.

Pastor Wickham then moves the conversation along to Wesley and asks, “How does he see, from his Vietnamese-American heritage, the Asian American community

¹⁶¹ Park Hill Church, *Spirit and Race*. 1:16:08

¹⁶² Park Hill Church, *Spirit and Race*. 1:17:34

processing this moment?" Wes goes on to articulate the bind that while many Asian Americans feel the impact of racism, they also feel a sense of privilege and tend to defend white privilege because of the privilege they receive from it. At the same time, as a first-generation American son of Vietnamese immigrants, he idolized black people because he felt like they embodied his own experience of struggle. With such a complex mix of factors, Wes states there is a distinct feeling of not fitting in.¹⁶³

Wickham concludes the panel by stating that his central concern is for the emotional health and well-being of the body of Christ so that they might have constructive conversations such as the one they had. He then asks Wesley to lead the church in communion, which is concluded with this virtual communion service.

6.14.20 /Sunday Gathering¹⁶⁴

On the Sunday following the panel, Wickham invites Dave Lomas to guest preach for their recorded sermon. This is the first of two weeks in which Pastor Wickham will defer to guest speakers. Lomas is the Teaching and Vision Pastor at Reality San Francisco. While introducing Lomas, Wickham points out this will be on 'social justice' and the 'kingdom' way of understanding social justice. "We want to rise

¹⁶³ Park Hill Church, *Spirit and Race*. 1:25:34

¹⁶⁴ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. Pastor Dave Lomas. 6/14/20.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RSO8MhBgis>.

above the cultural baggage that might get our eyes from the prize of the kingdom...in other words, what is social justice in the way of Jesus?"¹⁶⁵

Dave Lomas begins the sermon by expressing his desire to be with the Park Hill community in person and then turns to the cultural moment, which he describes as the 'rekindling of racial outrage.'¹⁶⁶ With some humor, he says that he might say some controversial things and that you are free to email him at evan@parkhillchurch.com. Lomas presents Mark 3:1-6 as the passage he will preach from to help the congregation understand social justice in the way of Jesus.

After reading the passage in which Jesus heals the man with the shriveled hand on the sabbath and praying for 'restorative justice,' Lomas begins by addressing the political divide that has occurred during this time of reckoning, but that we ought to drop the American partisanship as we gather as God's people who desire what God desires. Instead, his initial encouragement is to be open to "see justice the way Jesus does."¹⁶⁷

Lomas goes on to exegete Mark 3:1-6 saying that there are three main characters in the text: the Pharisees, the man who is healed, and the Sabbath. The Sabbath is at the center of this controversy as the religious leaders, i.e., Pharisees, are observing the ministry of Christ so that they might find some disobedience. Lomas points out that the

¹⁶⁵ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 24:03

¹⁶⁶ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 25:48

¹⁶⁷ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 30:04

hawkish observance of the Sabbath was not as it was intended, for the Sabbath was rooted in creation (Exodus 20:8) and redemption (Deut. 15:5). The religious leaders put in all of these rules so that the people of Israel, at the time of Jesus, would not break this commandment. Lomas argues that our created rules enforce a creational good and gift of redemption. Sabbath keeping became “a system the religious authorities used to keep people in or out.”¹⁶⁸ He explains that, as in the story of the man with a withered hand, “when Jesus does the work of restorative social justice, he always subverts and goes after systems of injustice....Sabbath had become a system of injustice, and Jesus subverts and goes after systems of injustice.”¹⁶⁹

Lomas then turns to the phrase ‘social justice’ and seeks to unpack it for an audience who might be allergic to it. In doing so, Lomas gives the parable of campers saving babies going downriver. Campers start saving babies and begin to take care of them. One camper then leaves to go upriver and figure out who or what is putting babies in the river. Lomas uses this metaphor to explain the difference between charity (i.e., saving, healing, and clothing for those in need) and social justice. He defines social justice as ‘going up the river and changing the reasons that create homelessness, hunger, and racism. Social justice tries to look at the system we live in to bring about Shalom to the whole system of economic, social, cultural, and religious.’¹⁷⁰ Included in his

¹⁶⁸ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 33:24

¹⁶⁹ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 34:45

¹⁷⁰ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 37:32

differentiation between charity and social justice, Lomas states, “charity is about treating your neighbors with respect and without prejudice, social justice is about becoming anti-racist.”¹⁷¹ This is Lomas's first rhetorical move to include racism and antiracism in his sermon. While the racial reckoning connected to the murder of George Floyd is beginning to unfold in the more significant cultural moment, this is the first mention of social justice as an antiracist endeavor from Park Hill (or its guest speakers).

At this moment, Lomas moves from speaking about social justice in general terms to explicitly addressing race and racism. “I have been, as a brown man, socialized in that system,” which “views black and brown bodies as threatening and systematically red lines and destroys them.”¹⁷² Abruptly, Lomas parallels systematized racism with systematized access to abortion. While it is abrupt, it should be unsurprising that Lomas parallels abortion with racism as the evangelical emphasis on the pro-life movement has been a political calling card.

Lomas turns to Roman Catholic theologian Ronald Rolheiser to articulate the direct and indirect ways systematic injustices shape and form human behavior and perpetuate social practices counter to the holistic flourishing Jesus taught, specifically in Mark 3. This launches Lomas into the final third of the sermon. In this last third, with all

¹⁷¹ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 37:57

¹⁷² Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 39:21

that he has stated about social justice, what is a 'distinctly Christian version of social justice? What is social justice in the way of Jesus?'

To summarize, Lomas argues that social justice ought to be motivated by the truth of Genesis 1-2 and shaped by Jesus's death and resurrection. While Lomas calls it 'truth and motivation,' Genesis 1-2 is the social mandate for justice in his theological frame. The creation narrative reveals the equality of all humans, and this theological anthropology becomes the impetus to resist all systems that do not act or believe in the full equality of each human.

Lomas moves to challenge the lackadaisical response some followers of Christ might have towards injustice, those who may take a wait-and-see approach to the present racial reckoning. Lomas interprets Mark 3 as Jesus challenging not only the systematic injustice towards the man with a shriveled hand but also those Pharisees who would have Jesus wait to heal him on a day other than the Sabbath. "Action strikes a blow for life or wills one for death."¹⁷³ As Christ makes this healing about a choice between life and death, so ought those who enact justice. Lomas points out that it is the Pharisee's silence that enrages Christ. "Silence, withholding doing good, makes one complicit in systematic racism... the enemy of divine love and justice is not opposition, it's not even malice, but it's the hardness of heart and indifference"¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 45:57

¹⁷⁴ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 49:30

According to Mark 3, Christ's challenge of systematic injustice plants the seeds for his death and resurrection. Lomas argues that this foreshadowing spells out the content of a Christ-like social justice. Not only is it motivated out of a resistance to dehumanizing systematic practices, it compels the follower of Christ to act in a life-giving manner by loving in a self-sacrificing manner, in humility, and by laying down one's rights out of love. Just as Christ's crucifixion was an act of sacrificial love, so will Christ's disciples have cultural, economic, and emotional costs tied to the pursuit of love and justice. And yet, as Lomas explains, that love, that activism for social justice, is sustained by the hope of the resurrection. The resurrection provides the endpoint for social justice; even though the needle might move slightly in our lifetime, God is making all things new.

One interesting aspect of Lomas' sermon is that, on several occasions, he mentions offending the listener. At one point, he states, "Now that I probably offended everyone"¹⁷⁵, as if his intention is, at some level, to intentionally offend the listener. All of Lomas' 'offensive' statements are regarding stereotypical conservative evangelical political beliefs. Lomas demonstrates courage, possibly because he is a guest preacher, to intentionally offend and offer a different perspective on justice outside of politically charged rhetoric. Importantly, Lomas demonstrates a willingness to offend as a sermonic tool.

¹⁷⁵ Park Hill Church, *Sunday Gathering* | 6-14-20. 40:37

6.21.20 | Sunday Gathering¹⁷⁶

Wickham broadcasted a sermon by Andrew Wilson of King’s Church in London the following Sunday. This sermon was recorded specifically for Park Hill Church. It was chosen by Wickham, who is friends with Wilson, because of the congruency of the overall series entitled: ‘Life in the Spirit’ and racial injustice. Wickham’s preface to Wilson’s sermon argues that this cornerstone teaching of “walking in the Spirit” is crucially important because of the cultural context of the outcry for racial justice. Wickham argues that since the “last few weeks have activated us” and that there is a desire to “step in and be the healing presence” and “stand with the oppressed and weep with those who are grieving,” there is a necessity to listen to the call “to do all of this from a place of intimacy with the Father, not abstracted and not just because we are angry.”¹⁷⁷ The church can be rightly angry insofar as the church is intimate with God and emotes anger as is appropriate to the wrath of God, which would include anger towards racial injustice. He declares that the church desires to love our neighbors and by loving God. It is out of loving God that we can appropriately love our neighbor in this time of racial reckoning.

At this point, Wickham turns the sermon over to Wilson, who immediately admits he has never visited the church but visited San Diego once, for a week, in 2014.

¹⁷⁶ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 6-21-20. Pastor Andrew Wilson. 6/21/20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K39ekwpyb5c>.

¹⁷⁷ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 6-21-20. 23:59-24:40.

After reminiscing about his time in San Diego, Wilson then turns to the text for the sermon: Galatians 5:16-26 and Ephesians 5:18-21. Wilson argues that Paul gives four images for understanding life in the spirit: three of them are on how one lives “in the Spirit,” and the fourth, the most famous of which is the ‘fruit of the Spirit,’ is a description of what virtues are produced when one lives “in the Spirit.”¹⁷⁸ Wilson states “There’s a lot of environmental and identity-related factors that make the tree produce fruit, but trying to produce fruit is not what it does.”¹⁷⁹ He argues that you can’t actuate the fruit of the Spirit; instead, it is by “walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, and being filled with the Spirit” that fruit is produced. Wilson wants to explain the ‘how to’ of life in the Holy Spirit through the lens of the other three metaphors. Most of the sermon is spent unpacking these ‘how to’ word pictures and their relevance to this living in the Spirit.

First, Wilson states that “walking” in the Spirit is akin to marching in military formation. The Spirit dictates the tempo and stride of those who are following. Drawing from his experience in the military, Wilson points out that to march in sync, one has to look at the feet of the one they are following and adapt their stride accordingly. Therefore, he suggests that we audit our own pace and stride. Are we going where the

¹⁷⁸ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 6-21-20. 31:31

¹⁷⁹ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 6-21-20. 32:20

Spirit is leading? Wilson means auditing our use of time and the priorities that dictate its allocation.

Secondly, to be 'led' by the Spirit is analogous to onboarding a harbor pilot while a ship's captain navigates an unknown harbor. The harbor pilot knows the unforeseen terrain of the harbor and boards the ship to help the captain navigate the waters. At the same time, the harbor pilot cannot take control of the ship because if something were to go wrong, the pilot would be liable for the damage to the ship. Instead, the harbor pilot stands beside and aids the captain as he navigates the ship. For Wilson, the Holy Spirit acts as an individual's harbor pilot. He mentions that the Holy Spirit guiding a Christian looks like that person getting up early to read their bible, not watching TV programs that do not edify, and joining the cashier's line to talk to them specifically.

Lastly, living in the Spirit also entails being 'filled' with the Spirit like a sail is filled with wind. Wilson connects the Hebrew and Greek synonyms for spirit and breath and applies them to how we can be filled with the Spirit. It is the infilling of the Spirit in which we feel the experience of God's power, and it is our responsibility to "attentively respond to this external power." Therefore, Wilson encourages his listeners to sing, give thanks, and submit to one another in reverence to Christ to experience the filling of the Holy Spirit.

As Wilson closes his sermon, he reminds the listener that living in the Spirit guides the way of fulfilling the goal of being like Christ. At the same time, according to

Wilson, that goal is a ways off. Wilson closes his sermon with this line, “When we finally see him (Christ), we will be like him because we will see him as he is.” This is the only link Wilson makes between Christ and the Holy Spirit.

6.28.20 | Life in the Spirit¹⁸⁰

In the fifth week after George Floyd’s murder, Evan Wickham continues the series on the Holy Spirit. After Acts 2:1-4 is read ¹⁸¹, he asks, “What does it look like to be a community of the spirit in a time like this?”¹⁸² Wickham summarizes the 30-minute sermon and the answer to his question with two words: commitment and hope. Specifically, a commitment to God and each other fuels hope in God and displays hope for a world in pain. Wickham proclaims, “In a time of division and uncertainty, God is calling us to be His Spirit-filled community of counter-cultural commitment and unshakeable hope.”¹⁸³ Wickham’s claims do not immediately include the conversation around racism and racial justice but seem to address all the instability of the cultural moment, including that of the COVID-19 pandemic. He does engage the present racial reckoning by repeating the feedback from small groups that they need more instruction

¹⁸⁰ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. Pastor Evan Wickham. 6/28/20.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKjY0puodY>.

¹⁸¹ While Acts 2:1-4 was the selected reading for the message, Wickham doesn’t mention it. Such a passage would have given a straightforward way into specifically preaching on race, racism, and the racial diversity of the early church, but Wickham will preach on Acts 2:42-28 and center the sermon on commitment to community.

¹⁸² Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. 21:19

¹⁸³ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. 22:12

on how to talk about racial justice with family members.¹⁸⁴ In light of the division and intensity of the cultural moment, how might the church respond?

Pastor Wickham moves then to exegete Acts 2:1-4. Wickham argues that the first verb that describes the church after Pentecost is ‘devotion.’ These first followers of Christ were devoted and committed to Christ and each other. He then prompts the congregation to consider their faith journey with Christ by asking, “If I were to use one phrase to describe my whole-life response to Jesus, what would it be?”¹⁸⁵ Reading Acts 2:42-48, Wickham interprets the church’s first response to the Holy Spirit as a “radical commitment to community.” Noting the historical context of division Paul is addressing, Wickham then incorporates Romans 15:4-6 to emphasize the connection between the radical commitment of the early church to each other and how that fuels the hope on display for the whole world to see. The community of commitment is the venue in which God is bringing about unity, peace, and justice in the world. According to Pastor Wickham, this specifically looks like at this moment:

- To rise above the American political divide
- We should prioritize the preferences of others over our own (whether in gatherings, wearing a mask, or whatever else!).
- To submit to governing authorities unless they are asking us to sin
- To seek justice for the oppressed
- To pursue church unity

¹⁸⁴ Certainly, this could be a cry from the people about resources about racial justice and tools for having difficult conversations, but, as noted about, this must include Wickham’s deferment on preaching about race, racism, and racial justice for the past two weeks.

¹⁸⁵ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. 28:17

- To hold to the authority of Scripture¹⁸⁶

Life in the Spirit is hope-filled because of the commitment to community and the authority of Scripture.¹⁸⁷ Wickham paints a picture of a time when COVID has faded, and his children will live in a more racially just society in which “every ethnicity will be fully seen and fully honored, and King Jesus will vindicate the oppressed children of God. This is the shape of our hope.”¹⁸⁸ This hope is disseminated into the world through a radical commitment to the community in an age of detachment and division. Wickham then moves to describe hope. In quoting Augustine¹⁸⁹, he talks about the present anger towards “the way Satan, the world, and the flesh have all torn the fabric of God’s creation and so we work through the Spirit to see justice done and the to see the kingdom of Jesus come.”¹⁹⁰

Wickham admits that he and other leaders believe the church is in transition. While the scaffolding of the church (i.e., tradition) does not change, the true beauty of the community of Christ is the people. With this transition taking place, Wickham concludes with three practical takeaways. First, a committed community means growing beyond consumer culture. A church’s ‘committed culture’ believes everyone is essential

¹⁸⁶ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. 32:24

¹⁸⁷ Wickham mentions community in submission to the authority of Scripture twice towards the end of this section of his sermon. Christ receives no mention.

¹⁸⁸ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. 33:25

¹⁸⁹ “Hope has two beautiful twin daughters: Anger and Courage. Anger at how things are and courage to see that they do not remain as they are.” Although, this is likely an apocryphal statement since it has yet to be found. Francis X. Maier, *Hope and Her Daughters*. First Things. March 2021.

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/03/hope-and-her-daughters>

¹⁹⁰ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. 36:14

to the community's success, whereas 'consumer culture' is critical. Moving toward a practical application, Wickham asks if the listener has signed up to serve in an area of need. He then prompts the congregation to consider how God may speak to how each individual may be more present in their faith, family, and community. Further, he asks each to consider who is not present "at their table" and invite those absent to the table.

Pastor Wickham's second practical takeaway is that 'committed community' is the context where the Spirit transforms us. Not only do people become like those around them, but living in 'intentional relationships around Christ' exposes one's 'dark and sinful' tendencies.¹⁹¹ Such a community reveals the growing edges of oneself so that one can be encouraged and reminded of one's identity as loved by God.

Lastly, according to Pastor Wickham, the community is the by-product of commitment. He argues that true community is frustrated when living in a "keep your options open culture' and only committing as a last resort.¹⁹² Longing for community is only satisfied when commitment is enacted. This is particularly the case since the community is not always ideal. Wickham then challenges the congregation to commit to Park Hill Church for double the length of time that the listener believes they have been called to the church. His challenge is to the ecclesial transience (i.e., "church shopping") in San Diego.¹⁹³ Wickham concludes by reciting a Benedictine vow of stability and

¹⁹¹ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. 39:24

¹⁹² Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering 6-28-20*. 43:12

¹⁹³ 'Church shopping' is particularly true in the PLNU student culture.

commitment as a way of ending the sermon, highlighting the idea that commitment to community develops a richer life in the Spirit, specifically in this time of lackadaisical church commitment during the COVID pandemic as well as enacting some of the orthodox ancient-future faith commitment held by the Pastor Wickham.

In Pastor Evan Wickham's first Sunday preaching since the panel discussion on race in Park Hill, he wants to speak to the division that is taking place, mentioning the ongoing protests and racial reckoning but embedding the more extensive discussion in a sermon on community and commitment. Seemingly, the more significant theological issue is the disunity displayed in the larger cultural milieu, not explicitly addressing the racial reckoning from the pulpit. Wickham views the discussion on race and racism as a part of the more considerable disunity that is present. The racial reckoning is part of a more significant lack of commitment to community. If only the community would commit more to each other, then the more critical issues of racism and racial injustice might come to some resolution. Wickham outlines several ways the individual within a community may embody an ethic of justice (i.e., the abovementioned list). Still, those items are listed and left mostly without a more extensive description or unpacking. Justice is an aspect of this community life, but little is done to understand or exemplify what that means.

Instead, the sermon represents a liberal, moralistic therapeutic approach to pursuing justice in the community. Very little is reflective or instructive on the second or

third persons of the Trinity. It is a commitment for the sake of the community. Only a little is distinctive of what is preached in a Christian community. Little is motivated by the theological reflection of Christ in understanding the commitment to the community.

Further, even though the sermon series is on the Holy Spirit, more is needed to develop a pneumatological understanding of community. Instead, reasoning for community engagement boils down to moralistic and therapeutic outcomes. Further, these outcomes are individualistic in their vision. While this sermon is on community, no collective action is fully envisioned and only shows up in stray, passing comments.

7.5.20 | *Life in the Spirit: Hearing God's Voice*¹⁹⁴

In the sermon following July 4th, Pastor Evan Wickham begins by announcing the postponement of their in-person regathering because of the spike in COVID-19 cases in California. While Wickham wants to reassure them that they want to gather more than anything, his desire to lead this church is that the most vulnerable might be cared for and looked after.

Wickham then pivots to the chosen topic for the sermon, which is hearing God's voice. In this sermon, Wickham does not exegete a particular passage of scripture but begins with a hermeneutic of scripture. He mentions, "If we want to be the kind of church that leads the way in racial reconciliation...if we want unity, then we must learn

¹⁹⁴ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. Pastor Evan Wickham. 7/5/20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMWeMtsZLqY>.

how to hear God's voice and obey."¹⁹⁵ Not only does Wickham anchor God's voice in what he calls the generic voice of God, but also that "the primary ways God speaks is to our hearts and our minds, the Spirit has direct access to our minds."¹⁹⁶ Similarly to the sermon given by Andrew Wilson, Wickham describes the work of the Holy Spirit through individualistic, therapeutic means. Instead of speaking in an audible voice from God or an angel, Wickham seeks to debunk the necessity of hearing an audible voice to listen to the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁷ "God's just not always easy to understand sometimes. He is, but his voice is often unclear, ambiguous, and fuzzy, and humans are left confused....God doesn't just jump on a Zoom call."¹⁹⁸ For Wickham, communication with God is dialogical, like a marriage relationship. For this thread of thinking, not only does God speak conversationally, but such conversations are enabled when God is desired and pursued. Not only does God speak in this relational model, but Wickham says explicitly that God speaks through Jesus and the scriptures. Wickham shifts his attention to the authority of scripture. "If you want to hear God's voice, you start, step one, you wake up and read the scriptures."¹⁹⁹ Wickham adds that creation and prophecy

¹⁹⁵Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. 31:26

¹⁹⁶ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. 32:36

¹⁹⁷ Wickham cites John 12:27-30, 34 as evidence that hearing the audible voice of God is not the best way to listen to the voice of the LORD.

¹⁹⁸ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. 38:24

¹⁹⁹ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. 43:14

are additional ways God speaks.²⁰⁰ Though it might be a “scary word,” Wickham summarizes prophecy as “when God speaks to you through another person.”²⁰¹ He limits this claim by encouraging prophecy testing and engaging it with a Christian community.

Pastor Wickham then moves to unpack the direct ways God speaks to the indirect ways God speaks. Wickham argues that God uses the closing and opening of different opportunities as ways of communicating. Here, Wickham points out that some closed doors are meant to be opened. Specifically, the “spirit-led peaceful protest against worldly systems of racial injustice, pushing open, literally, millions of closed doors into open opportunities for people of color.”²⁰² At the same time, those voices through circumstances must be tested and discerned alongside scripture and community.

Pastor Wickham then moves towards discerning the different voices that are heard. Wickham asks, “How do we know who is speaking if God and other voices are speaking?” His first step of discernment asks, “Does it align with Scripture?” “God

²⁰⁰ While presented as myriad of options for encountering the voice of God, there clearly remains a hierarchy with scripture being “step one.” Wickham’s argument that God is revealed through creation comes with the biblical reference of Romans 1.

²⁰¹ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. 44:12. It should go without saying that this is a radical oversimplification of biblical prophecy. Either Pastor Wickham wants to oversimplify the definition of prophecy to offer greater access to understanding it or desires to easily shoehorn prophecy into the theme of hearing God’s voice. Wickham adds that prophecy is “for strengthening, encouraging, and comforting.” This is biblically inaccurate as the prophecies of Amos, 1st Isaiah, Lamentations, and Micah, amongst others, rely on prophecies of judgment and lament. See Ellen Davis, *Biblical Prophecy*, Walter Brueggemann, *Reality, Grief, Hope*, and Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. Interestingly, Wickham cites Paul in defining prophecy in 1 Cor 14:32-33.

²⁰² Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. 47:59. Wickham often uses the metaphor “closed doors that need to be opened” to speak about racism. See Park Hill Church. *Shema/ Hearing God’s Voice*. 6/25/23. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpVxyDQpgJA>.

won't tell you to sleep with your girlfriend or boyfriend; God won't tell you to cheat on your taxes; God won't tell you to stop being generous because these things are in direct conflict with the story of scripture and the teachings of Jesus. This is why we emphasize biblical literacy."²⁰³ The bible becomes the 'litmus test' for all discernment. Wickham's second step for discernment is asking, "Does it sound like Jesus?"²⁰⁴ The words of Christ in the scripture are instructive to discerning God's voice. Once again, the words of Christ are secondary to the larger biblical canon.

Wickham then closes his sermon by giving and unpacking 'four reasons we don't hear God's voice.' He argues that we don't hear God's voice because we (a.) get God's character wrong (i.e., understanding God as angry or disappointed in you rather than God loving, compassionate, and delighting in you), (b.) we fill our day with noise (c.) we don't ask for God to speak and (d.) we don't repent of sin. He follows those up with four ways that the followers of God can open themselves up to the voice of God. The four ways to open oneself up to the voice of God are to (a.) meditate on the scriptures, (b.) pray and listen, (c.) ask God to speak, and (d.) obey. By obedience, Wickham means the possible risk and sacrifice necessary to follow God's voice. He concludes with a personal anecdote about his discernment and asks himself to discern his action, "Will they see

²⁰³ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. 51:59

²⁰⁴ Park Hill Church. *Sunday Gathering* | 7-5-20. 52:32

(God's) way in me?" For Wickham, God is speaking, whether or not the congregation can discern and obey God's voice.

On the fifth Sunday after the death of George Floyd and one day after the patriotic celebration of July 4th, Pastor Wickham delivers a message that seeks to understand how a follower of Christ can hear the voice of God by, essentially proclaiming the individual reading of scripture the "first step," the "litmus test," and the first way to "open oneself" up to the voice of God. The voice spoken through scripture is then checked by life in the community. By the time this Sunday rolled around, ongoing protests over racial injustice made only a cameo appearance. Instead, Wickham spends most of the sermon detailing the importance of biblical literacy. At the same time, biblical citation and frequency are not literacy. While a further study of Pastor Wickham and Park Hill's biblical hermeneutics would be necessary to understand what he means by 'biblical literacy,' it is clear that a theological belief in the inherency and authority of scripture is the central doctrinal tenant of the church. While Park Hill Church does not have a published doctrinal statement beyond the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Lausanne Covenant, Park Hill's parent church, "A Jesus Church" in Portland, Oregon, which is a sister church to Park Hill Church, states, "We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness, and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the

only infallible rule of faith and practice."²⁰⁵ Such doctrinal belief in the inherency and authority of scripture does not recognize the contextuality of the Bible and also refuses to value the contextuality of the reader. While the protest of racial injustice remains on the radar for Wickham, his commitment to an evangelical biblicism and the individualistic approach to pneumatology holds Wickham back from preaching a word that could inspire a congregation to collective antiracist action.

²⁰⁵ <https://www.ajesuschurch.org/about#doctrine-section>

Chapter 4: Case Study #2: All Peoples Church

All Peoples Church is a predominately white, evangelical congregation in the center of the sub/urban core of San Diego. Sandwiched between Interstate 8 and Highway 94, All Peoples Church is in the middle of some of San Diego's most diverse communities. To the north of APC is the largest university in the city, San Diego State University. SDSU has a current enrollment of nearly 37,000 undergraduate and graduate students.²⁰⁶ To the west and south of APC, the City Heights and Oak Park neighborhoods are home to Sudanese, Haitian, and Latino immigrant communities.

To the east of APC is the incorporated neighborhood of La Mesa. The proximity of APC to La Mesa is vital to note. On May 30th, 2020, in response to the murder of George Floyd and the other protests that were breaking out across the world, a group of 1000 protesters began peacefully protesting outside the La Mesa Police Station in the city center.²⁰⁷ Violence began escalating as some protestors graffitied the La Mesa Police Station. Many protestors stayed in front of the La Mesa Police Department station while others slowly moved north to block the Interstate 8 freeway. CHP officers initially impeded protestors, but this breakaway group entered Interstate 8, blocking lanes in both directions. Around 4 pm, protestors began returning to the La Mesa city center. At 6 pm, police officers began firing pepper balls and tear gas into the growing crowd to

²⁰⁶ <https://datausa.io/profile/university/san-diego-state-university>

²⁰⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-05-31/la-mesa-police-protest-george-floyd>

disperse the protestors. Protestors threw rocks and other debris back at the police. Between 6 pm and 8 pm, police reinforcements arrived and bulked up the already formidable police presence. Shortly before 8 pm, a fire was ignited in the La Mesa City Hall. At that time, police began advancing on the protestors, firing rubber bullets and tear gas. The crowd then began breaking into nearby businesses. A Chase Bank was engulfed in flames and would burn to the ground. Many protestors were injured, and millions of dollars in damages occurred. On June 3rd, a small number of National Guard detachments were stationed in La Mesa and throughout the rest of the county.²⁰⁸ The La Mesa protest events occurred 3.5 miles down the street from All People's Church.

While their present location has them in the core of these neighborhoods, All Peoples Church is seeking a permanent place to worship. Previously, APC had purchased six acres of land and planned to build a 900-seat auditorium, parking structure, and gymnasium for church services in Del Cerro, a suburban community across Interstate 8 from SDSU. Residents of Del Cerro protested the building project because it would too dramatically increase the traffic in Del Cerro, specifically around the freeway on-ramps. Recently, the San Diego City Council voted 6-2 to reject APC's development plans, siding with the residents of Del Cerro.²⁰⁹ While the future

²⁰⁸ <https://fox5sandiego.com/news/local-news/san-diego-county-requests-national-guard/>

²⁰⁹ <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/san-diego-city-council-says-no-to-del-cerro-mega-church-project/3400292/>

permanent location for APC remains unknown, the church continues to cast a vision of local and global evangelism and discipleship.

The evangelical mission of APC is not unique to the evangelical churches in San Diego or this study. And yet, their particular methodology is distinct. All People's Church emerged out of the Antioch Church movement. In 2019, APC left the Antioch Church movement to form its church planting network. Their purpose statement explicitly states that they have a vision for planting churches across Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia in an effort "to transform nations."²¹⁰ According to the All Peoples Global website, APC has planted churches in Tijuana, Oaxaca, South Africa, Peru, Moldova, two unnamed churches in the Middle East, Cambridge, South Bay (CA), and Paris, France.²¹¹ APC organized the School of Transformation, Leadership, and Deployment in assist and support this global, evangelistic mission. The School of Transformation, the first stage of a three-stage school of leadership development, is a 10-month immersive discipleship program that enrolls students into the ministries of APC and concludes with an overseas mission trip in support of one of the APC global church plants.²¹² The teachers who are a part of the School of Transformation are the APC pastoral staff. APC's commitment to being a multi-ethnic church that pursues racial justice is critical to the church's identity and our

²¹⁰ <https://allpeopleschurch.org/about/>

²¹¹ <https://allpeoples.global/churches/>

²¹² <https://transformedpeople.org/#about>

study. This identity is particularly emphasized within the broadly diverse neighborhood in which it ministers.

Pastor Robert Herber leads All Peoples Church. Pastor Herber founded APC in 2007 after spending ten years in college ministry and directing the church planting effort at Antioch Community Church in Waco, TX. Herber is not only the lead pastor but also the leader of All Peoples Global. As the lead pastor, he shares the pulpit with many of the pastors on staff, both male and female preachers. Roughly speaking, Pastor Herber preaches 60% of the sermons. At the time of George Floyd's murder, the pastoral team was transitioning into a new series on God's calling by way of examining the prophet Jonah.

5.30.20 | *Pastor Robert responds to crisis*²¹³

Pastor Robert Herber is moved by all that has happened with George Floyd's murder and the ongoing protests. Specifically, Pastor Herber is responding to the violence that occurred the day he posted this video. "All I can say is I am so sorry, and I am praying for you and love you so much." In this short video, Pastor Herber states that he wants to have a biblical response to the ongoing racial unrest, that "racism comes from the Fall," and that the ultimate answer is Jesus. He argues that justice is the "foundation of God's throne," that anger is appropriate in this situation, and that the

²¹³ All Peoples Church, *Pastor Robert responds to crisis*. Pastor Robert Herber. 5/30/20. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfU_doSk8dQ.

congregation should pray for justice. He states that the Holy Spirit does not lead to violence or oppression. He believes that intercessory prayer is the greatest asset they have to give. He encourages the APC church to seek after uncomfortable conversations, to listen well, and to build friendships across racial groups.

While this short video is not a sermon, it directly responds to the protests across the United States before the Sunday sermon. In addition, based on the time of its publication, this video announcement would have been recorded the morning/afternoon before the La Mesa protest.

5.31.20. | *LOST AT SEA: Responding to God's Call*²¹⁴

This sermon was recorded before George Floyd was murdered on May 25th, 2020, and the mass protests had begun. No mention of Floyd's death nor the protests are made. This point is further proven by Pastor Herber's recorded response on Saturday, May 30th and the following Sunday is a conversation on racism and racial injustice. Therefore, this study will not go into this particular sermon as it does not know what occurred in Minneapolis or throughout the rest of the country and city.

²¹⁴ All Peoples Church, *Lost at Sea: Responding to God's Call*. Pastor Kendall Laughlin. 5/31/20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HnkPakl3cw&t=24s>.

6.7.20 | A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God's Heart w/ Pastor Archie Robinson²¹⁵

Pastor Herber begins the sermon in the service by introducing his conversation partner, Pastor Archie Robinson. Pastor Robinson is the founding pastor of New Birth Kingdom Covenant Fellowship in the City Heights suburb, a suburb west of the location of APC. Pastor Robinson is not only a minister with a church planted in 1997 and also leads a prison minister, is the vice president of a consortium of pastors who seek to address the social and economic needs of San Diego communities, and is the District 4 Representative on the San Diego City Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention.²¹⁶ A distinct part of Pastor Robinson's ministry is working alongside community members, law enforcement, and those who have suffered violence. Before engaging Robinson, Herber underscores the importance of this conversation on racism and racial pain, not only because of the national conversation that is taking place but also because of the violent protest that took place just down University Avenue in La Mesa.

Pastor Herber explained that he had known Pastor Robinson for over ten years and had collaborated as a part of a pastor's group. He begins shifting the conversation to Pastor Robinson by expressing gratitude for his friendship and the wisdom he shared throughout the ongoing protests. Herber then reiterates that the mission of APC has

²¹⁵ All Peoples Church, *A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God's Heart*. Pastor Robert Herber and Pastor Archie Robinson. 6/7/20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2faRiFqccPM&t=28s>.

²¹⁶ <https://www.sandiego.gov/gangcommission/about/robinson>

always been informed by Luke 4:18-19, explaining that “wherever someone is poor or feels poor, that is where Jesus is...and whenever someone feels oppressed, whenever someone feels like they’re a prisoner, that is where Jesus is.”²¹⁷ Herber then invites Pastor Robinson to share his story with APC.

Pastor Robinson explains that he knew from a very young age that death does not wait for the elderly after he witnessed the tragic drowning of a friend. While the future is not guaranteed, he firmly believes that God is “shaking” the church to wake up and act in the world, even despite the violence and chaos that is being witnessed.²¹⁸ He goes on to remind the listener that the violence that is breaking out over police brutality didn’t just happen all at once but has occurred because of the anger that is built up over time. He argues that if the church had rallied around the Civil Rights movement in a concrete way, the violence witnessed at this present time would not have occurred.

At this time, Pastor Herber points out that there is racism all around, specifically in San Diego, across many racial identities; he wants to focus primarily on the racial pain of his black brothers and sisters. He admits that as a white male, he tends to have a short memory, and his central concerns are his own hopes and dreams. He then invites Robinson to describe the black experience in San Diego. Pastor Robinson responds by pointing out that no one can change the racial pain embodied within the black

²¹⁷ All Peoples Church, *A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God’s Heart*. 5:53

²¹⁸ All Peoples Church, *A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God’s Heart*. 8:15

community. He believes that in looking back on previous experiences of racism, he believes that things have progressed. Yet, there is more work to do between police officers and community members who desire continued change. Robinson argues, “We as believers, we’ve got to help people with this pain walk with this pain. We can’t take the pain either; we’ve got to introduce them to Jesus.”²¹⁹ Robinson is convinced that an intentionally deep relationship with Jesus, one that gives attention to the parts of one’s life that need work, is the way to confront racism and heal racial pain.

It is that racial pain that Pastor Herber turns towards when he asks what Pastor Robinson felt when he learned of George Floyd’s death. Pastor Robinson recounts that he did not watch the video of Floyd’s death but, as it was described to him, was moved to lament upon hearing that Floyd called out for his mother in his last moments of life. At this moment in the interview, Pastor Robinson cannot fully express the turmoil and sadness as the feeling of grief was too great for such expression. What comes to the surface is not only the injustice of Floyd’s death but anger towards the injustice of having this be the event that brings attention to racial injustice when there has been so much injustice occurring throughout the past.

Pastor Herber asks Pastor Robinson about practical actions that younger white Christians could do in this moment of injustice. Robinson argues that those who are feeling pressure or anxiety to act need to sit under the pressure. Humans tend to seek

²¹⁹ All Peoples Church, *A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God’s Heart*. 18:12

control, and our response to injustice is to try and relieve that sense of power and make ourselves feel better. “We haven’t learned how to love God because, in hard situations, we want to quit; we want to stop the pain.”²²⁰ For Robinson, it is the example of Christ on the cross, feeling the forsakenness of God, who encourages Christians to remain in pain and anxiety to prepare themselves for the work ahead. “It becomes practical when we give it all to him (God).”²²¹ Remaining in the lack of comfort of racial injustice and pain prepares us for the longer work of faith in Christ.

Pastor Robinson then turns the conversation back to Pastor Herber and invites him to talk about the founding of APC. Hesitantly, Pastor Herber explains that even though APC comprises approximately 40% non-white congregants, the original hope of planting the church in City Heights would be that the church would be 80% non-white. Further, Pastor Herber explains that while he won’t ever know what it feels like to be a black man or woman, he does know how it feels to be the only one who looks like you in the occupied space. He then tells the story of a time when he entered a black community to begin church planting.

At this point, Pastor Herber acknowledges that he still has so much more to learn and would like to know what Pastor Robinson would call APC into through

²²⁰ All Peoples Church, *A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God’s Heart*. 28:59. While Herber wants to move on to the practical, Robinson remains in the theological; he remains near the cross. Robinson highlights the importance of keeping vigil at the cross as an act of racial justice. The place in front of the cross is the beginning of racial justice.

²²¹ All Peoples Church, *A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God’s Heart*. 31:56

conversations on racism and racial pain. Robinson preaches that nothing should drive Christians apart. Not politics. Not denominations. That love compels believers into unity. Pastor Herber then laments how the diversity of APC is being pulled apart by the political, economic, and racial divide that is taking place. Robinson turns towards Pentecost Sunday and Acts 2 as inspiration for imagining unity, but he doubts that such economic equitability could occur because of inherent greed. At the same time, he argues that it is only in God through the Holy Spirit that change can come.

Pastor Herber and Pastor Robinson discuss the importance of prayer, specifically civic engagement. Here, in arguing that prayer is not only necessary but one of the best practices in participating in the ongoing protest and conversation around racism, Herber states that “prayer is how we connect to the Living God, the one who created us...the one who is the author of race.”²²² Herber highlights the importance of individual prayer and suggests an acronym for what APC and the larger Antioch movement have dedicated themselves to. APC and the Antioch movement are introducing E.R.A. in their theology of race.²²³ The three tenets of this theological project are to Educate on race(on the past, on present experiences, etc.), Relate (authentic conversation and becoming

²²² All Peoples Church, *A Conversation on Racism, Racial Pain, and God's Heart*. 43:58. This is an important (mis)understanding of race and racism. Such a disclosure shapes the leader and their congregation's narrative about race and racism. Such a statement is a serious misstep. It will go against the theological paper Herber will reference later in the interview.

²²³ Antioch Waco Church, *Race and the Glory of God*. <https://antiochwaco.com/position-paper-race-and-the-glory-of-god/>. In this paper, which Pastor Herber references, the church argues that churches are called to speak to the contemporary issues of race and racism, that race is a human construct, the impact of the sin of racism, encourage pastors to preach concerning race and racism, pursue unity through diversity, and create intentional transformation in the cities Antioch churches are planted in.

family), and Advocate (as God compels people to advocate). To conclude this sermonic interview, Herber encourages the church to pray, listen, and remain in the pain and suffering that is being witnessed. He then asks Pastor Robinson to pray for the healing balm of God's presence.

6.14.20 | "We Are All Peoples, We Are Family" ²²⁴

In this third Sunday after the murder of George Floyd, Pastor Robert preaches on the biblical foundation of racial equality and will then apply this to the ongoing ministry and work at APC. He states that racial equality is at the foundation of creation and that APC will stand against the evil of racism and continue to build a multi-ethnic church.

First, Pastor Herber begins his sermon in Revelation 7 and the multi-racial multitude at the end of time. "No wonder there is such an attack against the multi-ethnic Church because it displays the reality of heaven."²²⁵ If we are to pray for God's will on earth as it is in heaven, then that looks like a multi-ethnic gathering of followers of the lamb. Pastor Herber relies on a particular version of evangelical cosmology in which Satan is actively opposing the multi-ethnic church and driving racial division amongst God's people. Secondly, Pastor Herber preaches that "the only hope for the unity of ethnicities is Jesus."²²⁶ Not only is it a Christological emphasis on the power of what Jesus does through the Holy Spirit, but it is also Christ's death and resurrection that puts

²²⁴ All Peoples Church, *We Are All Peoples, We Are Family*. Pastor Robert Herber. 6/14/21.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQLWNHZVEkg>.

²²⁵ All Peoples Church, *We Are All Peoples, We Are Family*. 2:27.

²²⁶ All Peoples Church, *We Are All Peoples, We Are Family*. 4:24

to death hatred. Thirdly, Pastor Herber argues that “the church is God’s chosen instrument to heal the pain of racism, division, oppression, and hatred.”²²⁷ While the church has failed in the past, that does not mean God has left the church.

At this point, Pastor Herber introduces his wife and a couple, Nick and Ashley Osborn, who have been friends with Herbers for ten years, to join him for a ‘family discussion.’ He invites Nick and Ashley to share their story by introducing them to the congregation. Nick and Ashley are both from the Bay Area. Nick grew up in a predominately white community and always felt like an outsider until he went to college at SDSU, where he found more black students his age and felt like he became more of himself. Ashley grew up in a diverse neighborhood and school. At an early age, Ashley was told that such diversity was not expected and that predominately white space, like the high school she attended, would be hostile towards her. This was particularly the case when applying to colleges. Pastor Herber then asked Nick and Ashley about their story of joining APC. After a season of ‘church shopping,’ they began attending APC. When they first walked into APC, they felt welcomed and at home in the presence of God.

Pastor Stephanie Herber then jumped in to ask how they had felt after the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd. Ashley jumps in first, describing the heartache she felt as well as the confusion as to the reason all of her white friends were texting her.

²²⁷ All Peoples Church, *We Are All Peoples, We Are Family*. 6:04

She states that her confusion comes from the reality that the level of brutality is so common in her experience. She wondered what it was about the deaths of these men that triggered such awareness and protest when this had been the experience of their entire lives. Nick brings up the 2009 killing of Oscar Grant at the Fruitvale Station by a Bay Area Rapid Transit officer in Oakland, CA, as a similar killing that went viral, sparked local protests, and resulted in little awareness or change. Nick goes on to say that the high school football players he coaches and follows on social media post about incidents of racially motivated violence by police officers every day.

Pastor Herber remarks on the ‘stickiness’ of the topics of race, racism, and police violence and turns it back to Ashley and asks her to explain her connection to law enforcement. Ashley explains that her father is a retired police officer, and her brother is currently employed as a police officer. She explains that while the murder of George Floyd is a heartbreakingly tragic event, it has also strained her family’s life and put her father and brother in danger. She remarks that friends of her mother have told her that her son is a “sellout” for being a black police officer.²²⁸

Ashley and Nick go on to explain that parenting, especially in regard to authority figures like police officers, is significantly different from that of white parents because of the inherent danger that is embedded in society. Such different parenting is different because of the experience of policing by the black community. At this point, Pastor

²²⁸ All Peoples Church, *We Are All Peoples, We Are Family*. 21:19

Herber confesses that it is in these instances that he recognizes the privilege in which he has been raised. He affirms the existence of white privilege and that it has taken too long for him to come to such a realization and confession.

Pastor Herber then asks Nick to speak about the dynamic of being a head coach at a school where white students make up 1% of the school's population. Nick describes how the high school kids he coaches demonstrate a different level of trust when the coaching staff accurately represents the student body's demographics. Representation matters for building confidence in the organization of his football team.

Along those same lines, Pastor Herber then asks Nick and Ashley to repeat a conversation they had when he asked them how they felt knowing that the staff of APC is predominately white. Nick and Ashley share that the underrepresentation of diversity among APC staff is the most challenging thing they have experienced at the church. "The church is called All Peoples, but not seeing all people represented on a leadership standpoint is the most difficult thing."²²⁹ They admit that it is clear that the initial effort to be a diverse, multi-ethnic church was a big draw for them and that there is an intense desire for diverse representation, but before COVID, they looked around and realized that the embodiment of that multi-ethnic church was no longer a reality.

Immediately, Pastor Herber confesses that the vigor for maintaining multi-ethnic leadership was lessened as staff members were called elsewhere and a "lot of pain and

²²⁹ All Peoples Church, *We Are All Peoples, We Are Family* 29:33

spiritual warfare” entered the building of a multi-ethnic staff and congregation. He further admits that the pain and spiritual warfare tamped down his intention of fostering a multi-ethnic staff because he witnessed the further development of a multi-ethnic congregation without a representative church staff. He admits that the church leadership failed to press into what God desired for their church and stopped fighting for what was needed.²³⁰ Pastor Stefanie Herber and Pastor Robert Herber both apologize for not continuing to fight for that representation that was core to the initial vision for the church.²³¹

Nick will go on to admit that just hiring a ‘token’ black pastor does not solve issues of diversity and inclusion, but that leadership and trust take time, and they don’t want to hire someone out of a perceived necessity for diversity and then create more heartache and division. Pastor Stephanie and Ashley then recall working through misunderstandings that Ashley had perceived as restrictive in her leadership of a children’s ministry because of her race. Pastor Stephanie was oblivious to Ashley’s desire to expand her leadership role.

Pastor Robert moves to close their time together by asking Nick and Ashley how they would want their white brothers and sisters to respond or act. Nick responds by stating that he desires his white brothers and sisters to seek a listening ear and empathy

²³⁰ All Peoples Church, *We Are All Peoples, We Are Family* 31:31.

²³¹ A quick scan of the All Peoples Church staff webpage reveals that such lack of representation remains an issue. <https://allpeopleschurch.org/about/staff/>.

for those of a different color. Ashley encourages her white brothers and sisters to be willing to jump into people's lives and engage in curiosity and equality in relationships with those of other races. Don't be afraid to mess up, and be gracious when one does mess up. Their time together ends with the four of them holding hands and praying together

6.21.20 | A Message to Fathers from John Eldredge²³²

At this point, APC has returned to its scheduled sermon series, and on Sunday, the 21st, Pastor Robert Herber invited author John Eldredge to speak on Father's Day. In his sermon, Eldredge does not explicitly name All Peoples Church. This indicates that this message might have been provided to numerous churches. While this is one of the sermons that is given in the wake of the murder of George Floyd at All Peoples Church, it is entirely disconnected from the context of the church. This message is a generic, evangelical message on fathering and fatherhood. It is essential to note the choice to invite this speaker into the virtual pulpit and a bit about his background.

John Eldredge was a pastor for five years in Sierra Madre, CA (a wealthy, overwhelmingly white suburb just outside Pasadena, CA) before joining Focus on the Family in 1988. Eldredge earned his MA in biblical counseling from Colorado Christian University. After leaving Focus on the Family in 2000, Eldredge published *Wild At Heart*,

²³² All Peoples Church, *A Message to Fathers from John Eldredge*. John Eldredge. 6/21/20<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSdLUDwX7cs>

which was widely read in evangelical circles. *Wild at Heart* argues for a “biblical” understanding of masculinity by expressing the masculine desires created, ordained, and demonstrated by God without becoming an exaggerated “macho” man. “Eldredge’s God was a warrior God, and men were made in his image. Aggression, not tenderness, was part of the masculine design. For Eldredge, masculinity was thoroughly militaristic.”²³³ This book rallied evangelical men to reinstate an aggressive masculine vision for their faith practice and households. And yet, *Wild at Heart* would become essential reading for the La Familia Mexican drug cartel and would prompt Eldredge to denounce the use of his book by such a crime organization.²³⁴ John Eldredge has clear militaristic, patriarchal, and complementarian views of masculinity and gender roles. Philosopher bell hooks reminds us that such agro-patriarchal ideologies maintain racist political economies.²³⁵

John Eldredge begins his message by pointing out the extraordinary times, first talking about the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and then speaking to the “protests, violence, and social upheaval” of the present time. Eldredge then quickly turns the sermon towards fathering and being fathered. The core of Eldredge’s message is that good fathering comes through Christ’s lens and a ‘revelation of love.’²³⁶ Such love is demonstrated by fathers taking joy in playing with their children,

²³³ Kristin Kobes. DuMez *Jesus and John Wayne*. 173

²³⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2010/june/eldredge-denounces-drug-cartel.html>

²³⁵ hooks. bell. *Feminist Theory*. 71.

²³⁶ All Peoples Church, *A Message to Fathers from John Eldredge*. 22:33

continually engaging them, and imitating God's love through their relationship with Christ. At the end of his message, Eldredge will return to discuss the ongoing hatred on display. Eldredge will attribute the protests concerning George Floyd's murder to the "Enemy throwing hatred into the world and human relationships and communities."²³⁷ The preached word from Eldredge spiritualizes the protests and ongoing anguish over racism and racial inequality. The words race, racism, injustice, or George Floyd never cross Eldredge's lips.

6.28.20 / *When You Surrender, You Win*²³⁸

Jeff Bianchi, Families Pastor at All People Church, gives the sermon on June 28th, the fifth Sunday after the murder of George Floyd. As of the writing of this study, Pastor Bianchi continues on staff in the same position. Even though Pastor Bianchi mentions the ongoing racial reckoning taking place, the message continues the original series "Lost at Sea," which was planned before George Floyd's murder. Specifically, the sermon is on the spiritual surrender necessary for God to work in one's life. Pastor Bianchi outlines five prayers of surrender, which he learned through the narrative of Jonah in light of his own story of leaving a lead pastor position. The five prayers of surrender are surrendering the right to be correct, surrendering the right to get one's way, surrendering the right to place, position, and possessions, surrendering the right to

²³⁷ All Peoples Church, *A Message to Fathers from John Eldredge*. 22:52

²³⁸ All Peoples Church, *When You Surrender, You Win*, Pastor Jeff Bianchi. 6/28/20.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czfVYAj54G4>

have my story told in my favor, and surrendering the right to my rewards in this life. The sermon is given with minimal reference to Jonah or any biblical text and is full of quotes from Billy Graham and Jim Elliot.

7.5.20 | *Surviving Your Calling – Jonah in Nineveh*²³⁹

Pastor Kendall Laughlin preached the sermon on the Sunday after July 4th.

Pastor Laughlin was an associate pastor at the time of this sermon's preaching.

Presently, he is the Equipping Pastor, Global Leadership. According to Pastor Laughlin, this is the concluding sermon in the series Lost at Sea. As interpreted through Jonah 3 and 4, Pastor Laughlin preaches the necessary virtues for surviving God's call on one's life. He breaks the survival into four stages: the 'go' stage, the 'growth' stage, the 'grief' stage, and the 'grace' stage. In the 'go' stage of God's call, the individual follows God's leading. Faithfulness to God's call bears fruit in the 'growth' stage. The 'grief' stage is where there is a sense of loss and disappointment and where God meets those who grieve. Processing anger toward injustices is necessary to surrender fully to God's expectations and mission. The last stage of surviving God's calling is the 'grace' stage, a total reliance on Christ and his grace. This sermon has all of the hallmarks of an evangelical sermon on calling: broad biblical interpretation, thematic homiletics, and an individualistic message of self-development. Pertinent to this study is the lack of

²³⁹All Peoples Church, Surviving Your Call. Pastor Kendall Laughlin, 7/5/2020.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnuNAEDtD60>.

reference to race, racism, or the church's mission to be a multi-ethnic church. Pastor Laughlin mentions racial inequity and the anger around the events in Minneapolis only once in passing.

Chapter 5: Homiletics, Theological Discourse, and Antiracist Preaching

The practice of preaching is deeply tied to theological reflection and biblical interpretation. This chapter will discuss the content of the 12 sermons preached between Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church as they pertain to their overall mission of addressing racism and racial justice in their congregation. This chapter is interested in the homiletical strategies used by these churches and the theological issues at hand in discussing racism and racial justice after George Floyd. Issues of homiletical style will go without judgment. Feasibly, a preacher can offer narrative, expository, or topical sermons that preach against racism and provide antiracist theological imagination. Like fashion, homiletical style ebbs and flows with the times and depends on congregational ethnography and context. At the same time, homiletical strategies, biblical hermeneutics, and theological content are necessary to evaluate if white evangelical congregations work towards racial justice from the pulpit. As witnessed in the previous chapters and explained in the present investigation, Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church share several commonalities. Minor divergences will be noted and explored to the degree to which they weigh upon the greater scope of their connection to racism and racial justice. This study will seek to tease out the strategies, their merit, and the theological content present and absent from sermons preached in the six weeks after George Floyd's murder.

Homiletics, Christ, and the Trinity

Central to preaching is the proclamation of Christ and the work God conducts amidst the church. Karl Barth argues that preachers are drawn into God's reflective, revealing word and proclaim out of the event of God's self-revelation.²⁴⁰ "Not the mere word 'Christ,' not a mere description of Christ, but solely what God has done with us in Christ, Immanuel, God with us – this is the central point of all preaching."²⁴¹ Therefore, from this Barthian lens, preaching is not fixed on human experience but on the revelation of God's reality.²⁴² The interpretation of scripture serves to 'signpost' human attention to the subject of God's reality, the revelation of Jesus Christ.²⁴³

Glaringly, when you consider the overall content of the sermons preached in the six weeks after the murder of George Floyd, there was only one sermon that anchored itself Christologically with only three marginal references to Jesus Christ. Park Hill Church remained committed to working out its series on the Holy Spirit with two passing comments, one from the concluding remarks by Andrew Wilson and one reference by Wickham in his sermon on hearing from the Holy Spirit. Guest preacher David Lomas spends most of his sermon unpacking the different characters in Mark 3 in relationship to Christ. For All Peoples Church, Christ receives only one mention regarding the conversations about race, racism, and antiracism. Archie Robinson right

²⁴⁰ Karl Barth, *Homiletics*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox. 1991) 50.

²⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Homiletics*. 51.

²⁴² Karl Barth, *Homiletics*. 46.

²⁴³ Karl Barth, *Homiletics*. 45, 49.

connects the Good Friday vigil with the work of confronting racism. At best, in these two congregations, Christ is regarded as tangential to the discussion in their specific responses to racial injustice.²⁴⁴ Christology, the black Christ, death and resurrection, all of it bears little weight on how these churches converse about racism and racial justice. In addition, preaching that concerns the doctrine of the Trinity or the relationship between the Creator, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is non-existent. Except for David Lomas' sermon, two of the three primary theological tools of preaching, Christology and the Trinity, are not employed for any extended amount of theological reflection.

Holy Spirit and Race

Whereas Christ and the Trinity are barely mentioned, the Holy Spirit is front and center in Park Hill's preaching and central to the overall theology of ministry at All Peoples Church. A robust pneumatology is necessary to articulate a Christian theology of racial justice. The fact that the second Sunday after George Floyd's murder was Pentecost Sunday makes the connection between racial justice and the Holy Spirit contextually and theologically intertwined. Although All Peoples Church heavily emphasizes how the Spirit informs their church and ministry, they do not incorporate the celebration of Pentecost or a pneumatological approach into their address of racism

²⁴⁴ The only exception to this is the guest speaker, Pastor Dave Lomas, who exegetes Mark 3 to unpack social justice.

or racial reconciliation. In the sermons that follow after the murder of George Floyd, All Peoples Church's pneumatology exists only in the background.

Park Hill Church puts the Holy Spirit at the center of its sermon series and response to the tragedy and protests surrounding George Floyd. On Pentecost Sunday, Park Hill reads Acts 2 together, and Wickham preaches about divinity and the Holy Spirit. Wickham facilitates the 'Race and Spirit' panel discussion the following Sunday. Rev. Dave Lomas will offer his sermon on the Holy Spirit and social justice next Sunday, the only time there will be a direct, robust sermon on the connection between Christ, the Holy Spirit, and a Christian response to racism and racial justice.

In response to the murder of George Floyd and the reckoning that followed, these two churches offered an anemic theology of the Holy Spirit that lacks trinitarian connections, particularly between Christ and the Holy Spirit. For instance, Andrew Wilson's unpacking of the metaphors of walking, being led, and being filled have little relevance or connection to Christ. It isn't until the very last lines of the sermon that Wilson connects these metaphors of life in the Spirit with Christ; "When we finally see him (Christ), we will be like him, because we will see him as he is." Instead, the relationship between the individual Christians is described as a singular relationship between them and the Holy Spirit. Absent are signs of Christ and the community in which the Spirit dwells. While Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon write that to

experience the Holy Spirit is “to have an experience of something other than yourself”²⁴⁵, the experience described through these three metaphors describes a relationship with one’s consciousness rather than the Holy Spirit. This Jimmy Cricket-edification of the Holy Spirit does not prepare the church with theological tools to combat racism or embody an antiracist vision of racial justice. Wilson’s sermon typifies the lack of substantial reflection on racism and the Holy Spirit.

Further, the metaphors Wilson uses for the Holy Spirit, while appropriate for the context of San Diego (i.e., military and boating metaphors), are relatively inaccessible metaphors. San Diego is a city with a large, significant military presence, but the church he is preaching has vastly more college students than members of the military. Sailing and navigating the harbor are activities at the center of the geography of San Diego. Still, they are only accessible to a few, especially not the church’s predominately college and young adult population. In addition, they are overtly masculine metaphors and are not commonly connected to the work of the Holy Spirit.

For Pastor Wickham, the Holy Spirit is not only the individualized moral, practical consciousness of behavior modification, but it also seems as if the secondary role of the Holy Spirit is as the individualized revealer of Holy Scripture. For Wickham, theological depth is tied to an individualized reading of scripture, which functions as the

²⁴⁵ Hauerwas, Stanley and William Willimon, *Holy Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2015) 2.

place where the Holy Spirit works.²⁴⁶ As mentioned above, such an evangelical emphasis on biblical authority and the role of the Holy Spirit therein squeezes out reason. More importantly, it puts the biblical cart before the pneumatological horse. For instance, in evangelical theologian Stanley Grenz's monumental systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, biblical authority and inspiration are subservient within his discussion of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. After working out the Spirit's role in the economic Trinity and relationship to Christ, Grenz then turns to the Spirit and Holy Writ. "Scripture is *one* aspect of the Spirit's mission of creating and sustaining spiritual life...because the Bible is the Spirit's book, its purpose is instrumental to his mission. For this reason, we construct our doctrine of the Bible within the context of pneumatology."²⁴⁷ Within this evangelical framework, biblical authority is curated by the Holy Spirit. What Wickham does is swap the roles. The Bible reveals the work of the Holy Spirit instead of the Holy Spirit as the impetus for authority.

Alternatively, Luke Powery provides a pneumatological account of race and racism while enabling homiletical resources.²⁴⁸ Powery argues that race exists "because it is socially constructed. It is real and impacts society as a social reality, not a biological one."²⁴⁹ Therefore, for Powery, it is more accurate to say that people are racialized and

²⁴⁶ Park Hill Church, *God is Spirit*. 2:49

²⁴⁷ Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Press, 1994) 379. Emphasis added.

²⁴⁸ Luke Powery, *Becoming Human*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2022)

²⁴⁹ Luke Powery, *Becoming Human*. 46.

are raced.²⁵⁰ For Powery, race and pneumatology begin with the assertion that the divine gift to all humans is the breath we breathe. Powery further exegetes Acts 2 and articulates the unity of the Spirit dwelling in the early Christians and how that Spirit flows through the diversity of humanity. The diverse nationalities and groups of people are representative of the whole broadness of humankind. Specifically, “those speaking with this gift are not speaking in their native tongue but the language of the *other*. The Spirit causes the mother tongue of those who are different to be on the tongues of the other.”²⁵¹ Through this interpretation, the Holy Spirit becomes the vehicle Christians can adapt and include. The Spirit enables cross-cultural communication in which the racialized other can be known, understood, and given a sense of belonging.²⁵² Such communicative inspiration moves all racialized people towards embodying their full humanity.

At the same time, violence against racialized individuals deals in death, not the life-giving nature of God’s breath in human lungs. What binds humanity together is not a shared race but a shared breath. “No human group is self-made, breath is not reserved solely for any particular human being. Breath is not a race or in color; for it is for all flesh and in all flesh.”²⁵³ The breath that animates the diversity of God’s creation. Therefore, “Pentecost offers a positive theology for particularity and racialized differences, one that

²⁵⁰ Luke Powery, *Becoming Human*. 37, 50.

²⁵¹ Luke Powery, *Becoming Human*. 58. Powery’s emphasis.

²⁵² Luke Powery, *Becoming Human*. 59

²⁵³ Luke Powery, *Becoming Human*. 56.

affirms blackness, brownness, otherness, and fleshliness.”²⁵⁴ Pentecost teaches the church, especially the white evangelical church, that otherness is not only God created but an essential quality of God’s vision for the future. All racialized peoples are affirmed as worthy of belonging as they are created without qualification. The work of the Holy Spirit is preparing Christians with the theological linguistics of understanding, belonging, and equity. Such pneumatology affirms the life-giving characteristics of racialized peoples groups for the improvement of the whole community of God.

Representation

Another commonality between Park Hill and All Peoples is the impulse to include an interview or panel discussion between the pastor and black and brown community members. Pastor Wickham invites members of his church and pastoral staff to offer their experience of racism and response to the murder of George Floyd. Pastor Robert Herber invited a black pastor and couple to be interviewed in consecutive weeks. Both pastors clearly and sincerely desire to learn and listen to their counterparts. They earnestly desire a conversation they and their congregations can hear in a non-hostile setting, which recognizes the participants in their faith community and develops a sense of understanding and empathy. Both pastors ask questions like, ‘What would you want the members of our congregation to know or do?’ Both of these pastors turn the pulpit into a setting for dialogue in which they join their predominately white congregants to

²⁵⁴ Luke Powery, *Becoming Human*. 70.

listen and learn. At the same time, each pastor acts as the moderator, ever steering the conversation. Their pulpit gives space to other voices, but the voices of the others from the community are facilitated and curated. They are only given the space allowed by the white male pastor. Pastor Herber's conversation with Nick and Ashley replicates their previous conversation. Although Pastor Herber facilitates a discussion with Pastor Robinson, he also gives Pastor Robinson a lot of latitude and creativity in how the conversation moves. Their conversation seems genuinely organic while being heavily edited.

The impulse to involve non-white sermonic interlocuters demonstrates the necessity of broadening the racial representation in the pulpit. Representation matters. Nick and Ashley suggest this in their interview with the Herbers. During his introduction during the "Race and Spirit" panel at Park Hill, Wesley confessed that diverse racial representation is essential to creating an environment where racism and racial justice can be openly confronted and engaged. The expression of the experience of racism is necessary for making the narratives of pain and suffering accessible to predominately white churches. And yet, such narratives cannot stop there. White pastors need to confess the ways they have been complicit in the sinfulness of racism.²⁵⁵ Without such a confession, narratives around racism will continue to place the impetus for confrontation and transformation on racial minorities and maintain a white

²⁵⁵ Carolyn Helsel, *Preaching About Racism*. (Saint Louis: Chalice Press. 2018) 88

supremacist ethos. Representation matters but cannot be the be-all and end-all of one congregational response to racial injustice. Racial empathy is necessary, but antiracism goes beyond such empathy toward a holistic, concrete vision for equity and belonging.

Evan Wickham and Robert Herber are trying to develop a communal awareness of the significance and impact racism has had on their congregation by platforming racial minorities from their community. The invitation to share the pulpit in this conversational manner enables both pastors to address racial injustice in a disarming, narrative way. In his book *How to Fight Racism*, Jemar Tisby outlines the ARC model of Racial Justice.²⁵⁶ ARC stands for awareness, relationships, and commitment. “It is by knowing others that those we previously viewed as ‘problems’ become people.”²⁵⁷ Wickham and Herber demonstrate this pastoral impulse. They rightly pivot away from planned sermon series to direct conversations that humanize the racial minorities in the congregation.

What Herber and Wickham develop, in their initial sermonic moments after the murder of George Floyd, is racial sympathy. Racial sympathy is the development of white sensitivity to BIPOC experiences of racism without commitment to long-term or concrete transformation. By interviewing these particular congregants, the predominately white congregation is given access to the experience and knowledge of

²⁵⁶ Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021) 5

²⁵⁷ Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism*. 5

racialized people groups in a disarming and informative way. What is disheartening is that Herber and Wickham only briefly stay with the awareness and relationship strategies without preaching a thoroughgoing understanding of the commitment necessary for confronting the sin of racism. Both Herber and Wickham quickly pivoted the pulpit to guest speakers who will move away from the racial reckoning in the summer of 2020.²⁵⁸ While it is not a stated goal, it is clear that Wickham and Herber both try to create awareness through public dialogue without committing to a long-term preaching series on race, racism, and racial justice. A quick scan of sermons over the last three years shows that race, racism, and racial justice have not been topics of a sermon series for either congregation.²⁵⁹

Guest Speakers

A second commonality between Park Hill and All Peoples is the pivot to guest speakers. The second Sunday after protests erupted, Park Hill turned the pulpit over to guest speakers for consecutive weeks. While Park Hill hears a sermon on social justice from guest preacher David Lomas, the lead pastor from Reality San Francisco, Pastor

²⁵⁸ The exception is guest preacher David Lomas, a person of color preaching on racial justice issues.

²⁵⁹ Here lies one of the advantages of evangelical preaching. Most evangelical churches do not follow the lectionary as the source of their preaching material. Most will develop their pattern or series for preaching, usually topical of some sort or another. There is tremendous flexibility with such an approach to the biblical source material and the overall trajectory of a set of sermons over a chosen number of weeks. A 4-6 week series on race, racism, and racial justice is possible with the necessary commitment and follow-up. Commitment that both All Peoples and Park Hill have yet to show. It should also be stated that Park Hill and All Peoples are not alone. There are numerous evangelical churches in San Diego, and, as far as my research has shown, not one of them has developed and preached a sustained sermon series on race, racism, or racial justice.

Herber is interviewing Nick and Ashley, two black congregants from their church. Wickham and Herber clearly show an ability to adapt to the circumstances. Why, then, at the height of the racial reckoning during a global pandemic, do both of these pastors abdicate the pulpit to other voices? In San Diego, as it was all of different parts of the world, non-violent protesting continued through the third Sunday after George Floyd's murder. Yet, Park Hill invited a pastor from across the Atlantic Oceans to preach a sermon on the Holy Spirit that does not address the particular context of San Diego or the cultural moment. Andrew Wilson's guest sermon at Park Hill Church entitled 'Walking the Spirit' is about a white, evangelical male pastor with little to no contact with the congregation he is preaching. Two weeks after the death of George Floyd, while a mass demonstration is taking place, a sermon is given by a pastor wholly disconnected from the context of the church. While Wickham tries to make the bridge from Wilson's sermon to the ongoing protests, he makes it sound as if Wilson will speak directly to those connections between the Holy Spirit and living amid the present upheaval. Disconnected from the actual congregation and the cultural moment, this sermon, possibly even the whole of this pneumatological frame, does not move the congregation toward racial justice. If anything, it provides an individualistic frame in which the work of racial justice can be sidelined in favor of an over-spiritualized response.

All Peoples Church picks up a generic, evangelical sermon from a biblical counselor on fatherhood for its third Sunday after the murder of George Floyd. Like the

Wilson sermon at Park Hill, Eldredge's sermon does nothing to connect the sermon to the context of All Peoples Church or the ongoing racial reckoning. Further, the selection of one of the central figures of the evangelical reclamation of muscular complementarianism as one of its guest speakers underscores its patriarchal underpinnings. Such patriarchal commitment ought to question the capacity of All People's Church to strive for racial justice and a multi-ethnic church.²⁶⁰

Wickham and Heber's abdication from the pulpit creates a vacuum in which other voices can step in and fill the void. Indirectly, such abdication communicates that issues of racism and racial justice are not worthy of sustained articulation by the leader of the faith community. Such 'topics' are only addressed when they are blatant, and the world is on fire with their discussion.

This prompts the question, when is it appropriate to preach on race, racism, and racial justice? If it is undeserving of sustained theological and biblical exegesis and proclamation immediately after one of the most notable racial reckonings in recent memory, when is it time? When is it time to suspend the plan for guest speakers and devote oneself to studying and preaching on race, racism, and racial reckoning? It seems as if, at least, when Pastor Wickham does preach, he is aware of the necessity to connect the sermon, in part, to the ongoing conversation over racial justice. And yet, such overtures do not fully exegete either the moment or challenge a predominately white

²⁶⁰ hooks. bell. *Feminist Theory*. 71.

congregation's preconceived beliefs about race, racism, or racial justice. Antiracist preaching develops sermons that directly challenge unspoken racism and racist ideologies and employs indirect theological and biblical tools for long-term, sustainable homiletics.

Sin and Racism

Pastor Evan Wickham and Pastor Robert Herber both articulate the dehumanizing nature of racism as a counter ideology to the message of Christ and faithful Christian witness. Both pastors, when they are in the pulpit, stress the damaging impact racism has on their black and brown brothers and sisters in Christ. Both pastors desire to know the stories that have significantly affected their congregants, and both seem to have a posture of humility and learning about the impact of racism. At the same time, two crucial necessary categories are missing from the sermons at Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church: sin and white supremacy.

While racism is stated as a horrific position of the heart and incompatible with Christian witness, neither Wickham nor Herber nor any of the guest speakers offers a concise definition of racism. No one states what is meant when they talk about racism. Carolyn Helsel argues that providing explicit definitions of racism does not necessarily help congregants, especially white congregants, recognize racism.²⁶¹ In addition, for Helsel, racism often defies clarification, and therefore, it is the narrative expression of

²⁶¹ Carolyn Helsel, *Preaching About Racism*. 20

the experience of racism that may enable white congregants avenues to recognizing racism.²⁶² At the same time, it is of the utmost importance to name racism as a sin. Will Willimon writes, “Racism is worse than the bad things we sometimes do; it is who we are in contradiction of who God is,” and then puts a finer point when he argues, “a church that no longer knows how to name sin has no need for talk of redemption because we have lost the ability to know what we need redeeming.”²⁶³ While definitions may not necessarily help a congregant recognize racism, it is necessary for racism to be defined as sinful. Willimon encourages white preachers to move away from a moralistic, therapeutic approach to racism in favor of a whole theological approach, which anchors itself first and foremost in confession.²⁶⁴

Carolyn Helsel outlines three metaphors in which racism as sin can be used to develop and understand the connection between the two: idolatry, estrangement, and bondage.²⁶⁵ Helsel anchors these metaphors within the larger theological and biblical tradition to enable the theological vocabulary of faith leaders. Notably, in her explanation of racism as estrangement, Helsel notes to the societal structures that are infected with the sin of racism and argues that racism estranges us from the mystical

²⁶² Carolyn Helsel, *Preaching About Racism*. 21

²⁶³ Will Willimon, *Who Lynched Willie Earle*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2017) 67-68

²⁶⁴ Will Willimon, *Who Lynched Willie Earle*. 78. While Pastor Herber does not necessarily confess his racism, he does confess the limitations and unlearning he needs and how All Peoples Church has failed to live up to its moniker.

²⁶⁵ Carolyn Helsel, *Preaching About Racism*. 72

body of the Trinity.²⁶⁶ While such trinitarian consideration is crucial for developing a homiletic of racial justice, which will be discussed below, Hessel's metaphors do not address the political economies systematically propping up racism. Such strong theological metaphors could include a confrontation of the political-economic dimensions of racism.

In his book *God Neighbor Empire*, Walter Brueggemann argues that the OT/HB biblical text emerges out of the macro-context of a political economy of empire.²⁶⁷ Brueggemann states that ancient, as well as contemporary, empires pursued three specific, recurring policies. Imperial political economies pursued policies of (1) wealth extraction from the vulnerable to the powerful, (2) commodification of communities and resources as dispensable entities that could be bought, sold, and traded, and (3) undertake violence and the threat of violence to whatever degree was necessary to accomplish the policies of extraction and commodification.²⁶⁸ Through this political-economic context, Brueggemann argues that "the Old Testament is offered as an alternative to the imperial narrative that dominates ordinary imagination."²⁶⁹ The OT/HB narrates the story of the God who liberates from slavery and offers a political-economic alternative to empire. It is grace and law held tightly together. For instance, Brueggemann argues that the Decalogue acts as a counter-command to the commands of

²⁶⁶ Carolyn Hessel, *Preaching About Racism*. 77

²⁶⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *God Neighbor Empire*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016) 1.

²⁶⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *God Neighbor Empire*. 2

²⁶⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *God Neighbor Empire*. 3

imperial authority. They reveal a God who stands outside the system of enslavement and emancipates the enslaved into endless possibilities. Such radical exclusive worship of the Emancipator excludes commodification and invocation of the divine name. Brueggemann states, "The history of idolatry in the biblical communities is the endless, restless effort to hyphenate the God of Sinai to images or causes or programs."²⁷⁰ Therefore, the sin of idolatry is no longer just an individualistic position of the heart but includes participation in the totalizing political economy in which racism is constructed and thrives. Brueggemann supports Helsel's argument that the three metaphors for sin are idolatry, estrangement, and bondage. He intentionally anchors these metaphors in the OT/HB biblical narrative and provides homiletics with hermeneutical tools for addressing the political-economic systematic sinfulness.

For Brueggemann, the Exodus narrative illustrates the OT/HB commitment to interrupting such totalizing political-economic policies and developing an alternative imagination, which the OT/HB prophets would further develop through artistic interpretations.²⁷¹ Moses is a witness to the violence that is enacted on the oppressed Hebrew people; public speech becomes essential to the pursuit of a just alternative to the totalizing political economy. "It is simply the bodily protest against abusive violence that is the most elemental insistence on justice, and so an exposé of injustice."²⁷² Such

²⁷⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *God Neighbor Empire*. 120

²⁷¹ Walter Brueggemann, *God Neighbor Empire*. 55

²⁷² Walter Brueggemann, *God Neighbor Empire*. 56

public speech is essential to breaking justice into political-economic totalism. While Brueggemann does not directly associate public speech with preaching, the broad usage of 'public speech' includes the pulpit, especially in a day and age when many white evangelical churches post their sermons to YouTube.²⁷³

Preaching and Non-violent Resistance

The sermon is an essential avenue in which the preacher embodies a non-violent resistance to the totalizing schemes of a white supremacist political economy. Charles Campbell argues in *The Word Before the Powers* that 'Domination Systems,' the material and spiritual systemic powers that oppress and objectify human life, "pursue their way of death by silencing their victims and opponents, for silence, is one of how the deathly status quo gets authenticated."²⁷⁴ In this regard, silence in the face of white supremacy is an authentication of the violence it impinges on. Silence is injustice. The sermon, then, as a non-violent act of resistance, enacts "solidarity with the victims of violence in the world, including victims of the systematic violence of the social order," which explicitly means for white, male, evangelical preachers "who belong to one of the powerful nations and who are themselves privileged members of world society will have to be not for themselves but for others- the poor and underprivileged."²⁷⁵ Preaching against

²⁷³ Walter Brueggemann suggests that preaching is sub-version; "a rendering of reality that lives under the dominant version, or an alternative strategy of showing our 'under-version' to be in deep tension with the dominant version." Brueggemann, Walter. "Preaching a Sub-Version." *Theology Today* 55 (July 1998) 199.

²⁷⁴ Charles Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) 75.

²⁷⁵ Charles Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*. 87.

dominative power systems requires confessing one's privilege and position while attuning and advocating for the marginalized.

Preaching as non-violent resistance will require the preacher to exhibit ideological suspicion and cautious narration. First, Justo and Catherine Gonzalez, drawing upon liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo, argue that a preacher who looks to preach a confronting word against systematic oppression must go through the painful experience of having the superstructure of one's ideological commitments challenged, revealed to be out of step with God's reality, and embrace a new theological and biblical hermeneutic which accounts for the undoing of one's inherited ideology.²⁷⁶ The way forward in confronting white supremacy within predominately white, evangelical congregations will come through the "pain and struggle of the hermeneutic (of suspicion) circle."²⁷⁷ It is essential for white, male evangelical preachers to go through such an overturning of ideological commitments, for "he cannot live out of another's experience of oppression. He must discover how the system that oppresses the African American, the Hispanic, the native American, and the woman also oppresses him. He must see for himself how much of the theology he has been taught serves to bolster that system of oppression."²⁷⁸ White evangelical preaching does not have the theological equipment for racial justice or antiracism if it cannot locate itself within the history of

²⁷⁶ Justo Gonzalez and Catherine Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit*. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers. 1994) 32.

²⁷⁷ Justo Gonzalez and Catherine Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit*. 52

²⁷⁸ Justo Gonzalez and Catherine Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit*. 52

white supremacy in the United States, broadly speaking, and its local manifestations and articulate such ideological suspicion as a part of the homiletical task.

Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church do not define race, racism, or racial justice and do not offer any substantive theological tools for understanding white supremacy and sin in their public speech; they do exercise an informal ideological frame for understanding how they understand race and power. The following ideological frame is the type of articulation that should be brought under suspicion. A phrase that is often used at both Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church to name the possibility for injustice or discomfort to take place is the phrase “culturally dominant race” or “racially dominated group.”²⁷⁹ This phrase is employed as indirect speech describing the possibility of racist comments or psychological unease. Wickham uses this phrase, or a variation of it, three times during Park Hill’s *Spirit and Race* panel interview, and Pastor Herber employs the phrase twice, once as a preface to further statements and a second time as a way of summarizing a story in which he was the “racial minority.” The phrase “culturally dominant race” names the power dynamic when one raced people group holds the majority in a given space or context. This gives racial power dynamics contextual flexibility. For instance, it allows a white male the ability to claim to be in the ‘racial/cultural minority’ while inhabiting a predominately black, Latinx, or Asian

²⁷⁹ Pastor Wickham will use such a phrase on multiple occasions in the panel discussion in “Race and The Spirit” and Pastor Herber uses this phrase at the end of his conversation with Nick and Ashley in “We Are All Peoples, We Are Family.”

American Pacific Islander context. In identarian racial politics, the feeling of marginalization and ostracization is possible for a white man to feel in such an instance. At the same, “culturally dominant race” denies the long history of white supremacy.

Take, for instance, the print Willie James Jennings so expertly exegetes in his book *After Whiteness*²⁸⁰. The print, “Slaves at worship on a plantation in South Carolina,” depicts an enslaved black minister preaching to the enslaved congregation. Highlighted at the center of the print is the enslaver, the Bible closed and resting on his knee. The enslaver’s family is highlighted but off to the side. The perimeter of the print depicts enslaved people in various stages of engagement, ranging from calm to mournful. As Jennings infers, what is displayed is not boredom but “a slow death in slave obedience.”²⁸¹ Jennings uses this print to demonstrate the bounded nature of theological education, church, and academy to the advent of whiteness through colonialism.²⁸²

At the same time, the enslaver and his family are in the “racial minority” when considering the number of white people to black people occupying the room. And yet, Jennings rightly underscores the “racial paterfamilias” shaping the social system of the print.²⁸³ The legacy of white supremacy follows into the spaces in which white people inhabit, even if they are the numerical minority. In Europe, North America, and other places, the “culturally dominant race” will always be the white race because of the long

²⁸⁰ Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2020) 78-83.

²⁸¹ Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness*. 81.

²⁸² Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness*. 83.

²⁸³ Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness*. 79.

history of colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy, no matter the racial numerical imbalance. The indirect political-economic power structures persist into spaces even when white people are the numerical minority. It is the unspoken legacy of white supremacy. Therefore, the phrase “culturally dominant race” or “racially dominant group” does not accurately describe the dynamic of a white numerical minority in non-white spaces or contexts. The broader American context is one of white cultural dominance.

Therefore, the contextual flexibility of the phrase “racial/cultural dominant group” does not address the long history of white supremacy in the United States. Indeed, there is always the potential for un-comfortability when an individual is a categorical minority. Pastor Herber states that he was very uncomfortable and felt like an outsider when he approached a group of black men at a park to offer prayer for them. Yes, such discomfort exists and shapes the behavior and language employed. The feeling of discomfort is a natural feeling for white people when they may be in the numerical racial minority, but such feelings are temporary. Phrases like “racially dominant group” do not name the long history of white supremacy nor the broader political and economic system white supremacy enjoys.

Whereas, if the scenario Pastor Herber gives were reversed, a black woman approaches a group of white men at a park in a predominately white neighborhood to pray for them, the un-comfortability the black woman holds is not just a temporary

feeling, but the culmination of historic white supremacy and sexism held within her body.²⁸⁴ Her feeling of un-comfortability reaches through time and space. The phrase “racially dominant group” allows for a false equivalency between the temporary discomfort of a white male and the historical trauma of a black, Latinx, or Asian American woman.

The pastoral impulse to use the phrase “racially dominant group” may allow all people to come to a place of empathy, harkening to times in which any individual listening may have felt discomfort from being in the categorical minority. And yet, this phrase, and ones like it, surreptitiously circumvents direct confrontation with white supremacy. It can name racism, broadly speaking, and feelings of discomfort, but it does not have the power to confront the specific sinfulness and abuse of the particular racism that infects American culture and political economies: white supremacy. Instead, if evangelical pastors are to preach a non-violent word of resisting the powers of racism in the form of white supremacy, such white-washing of racial power dynamics must come under suspicion.

Secondly, preaching as non-violent resistance to white supremacy ought to exemplify cautious narration. Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church do well at

²⁸⁴ Resmaa Menakem, in her book *My Grandmother’s Hands*, goes to great lengths to explain how everyone carries the trauma of the myth of race in our bodies and explores how American individuals may be able to mend our collective bodies through mindful body practices. Specifically, in her book *Too Heavy a Burden*, Chanequa Walker-Barnes outlines the StrongBlackWoman narrative, its racist variations, and how such a narrative weighs physically and psychologically on black women. The body holds the score of racist and sexist political economies.

allowing cautious narration in their sermons. While they do not look to narrate the heritage of systematic white supremacy and the sinfulness therein, they do not overstep in their narration of the stories of violence and discrimination in their congregations. Both Pastor Wickham and Pastor Herber allow for discomfort in the predominately white congregations as they listen to the stories of rejection and out-and-out discrimination that has taken place. Both of these white male pastors do not try to narrate stories of oppression on behalf of their BIPOC congregants but give them the platform to speak for themselves. Such a practice is precisely what Charles Campbell suggests in *The Scandal of the Gospel*.²⁸⁵ To resist the weaponization of the “grotesque,” the open-ended, unresolved wounds that oppressive systems inflict, “turn(ing) over our pulpits to others so that they can tell their own stories, provide their descriptions, and share their memories, even if some people get mad sometimes.”²⁸⁶ Platforming the oppression of others, in their own words, is necessary for confronting the reality and pain of racist, sexist, and classist systems of oppression.

At the same time, as Carolyn Helsel suggests, it is necessary that not all sermons about racism ought to be about people of color.²⁸⁷ The truth is that all people are racialized, even ‘white’ people.²⁸⁸ If racialized white people are going to be able to see their complicity in racist structures, preachers must narrate stories of their own or a 3rd

²⁸⁵ Charles Campbell, *The Scandal of the Gospel*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox. 2021)

²⁸⁶ Charles Campbell, *The Scandal of the Gospel*. 35.

²⁸⁷ Carolyn Helsel, *Preaching About Racism*. 88.

²⁸⁸ Luke Powery, *Becoming Human*. 31

party's recognition of their participation in systems of oppression. To some extent, Pastor Herber opens this door in the interview with Nick and Ashley when he admits that he has not led the church well in fully embodying its mission to be a church for all people. White male preachers cannot exclusively rely on BIPOC voices to speak on racism and resist narratives that center white people as the saviors of stories of injustice.²⁸⁹

Preaching as Lament

Fortunately, there is a profoundly theological and biblical practice of public proclamation that narrates histories of systematic violence, abuse, and objectification in the hope that God's justice may 'roll down.' Soong-Chan Rah argues that the path toward justice in North American Christianity is a commitment to lament.²⁹⁰ Rah exegetes the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible book of Lamentations to offer a biblical language and theological frame for pursuing God's shalom in the communities Christians inhabit.²⁹¹ American evangelicalism avoids lament and, therefore, lacks the theological language and imagination necessary to articulate the whole breadth of

²⁸⁹ According to Matthew Hughes, the "magical negro" and "white savior" cinematic tropes are common in progressive, liberal film production. Such tropes trade in "cinethetic racism" which reverses some historical cinematic atrocities (such as white actors in 'blackface') while such story telling functions to limit racial agency and uplift 'black' story telling insofar as it benefits whiteness. The most recent, critically acclaimed version of these tropes appears in the Academy Award-winning film *The Green Book*. Preachers would do well to adhere to such critical film studies theory and resist making their narratives into the "magic negro" or "white savior" tropes. Matthew Hughes, *Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in "Magical Negro" Films*. (Social Problems, Vol. 56, No. 3. August 2009.) 543-577.

²⁹⁰ Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015)

²⁹¹ Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. 21.

human experience, to unveil the injustice of oppressive political economies, and reveal the shallow nature of a celebratory triumphalist theology propagated by American evangelicalism.²⁹²

In Rah's exegesis of Lamentations, he connects the dots between Lamentations and the present injustices that face the American evangelical church.²⁹³ Specifically, Rah exegetes Lamentations 2:1-9 to understand lament's connection to embodied, systematic justice. "The city lament is not an occasion to dream of a better future for the city; it is a time to recognize the concrete material realities of the city."²⁹⁴ Rah argues that Christians, and by extension, preachers, are to be knowledgeable about the ongoing injustices of their city, lament over their occurrence, and provide leadership in how the stories of injustice are proclaimed. Such an ability to tune into the socio-political ongoing of the city requires attention not only to the events that take place in the local community but also an examination of the structural injustices allowed to be perpetuated. Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church intend to pursue racial justice

²⁹² Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. 23-24, 68-69

²⁹³ Racial justice seems to be immediately at the top of mind for Soong-Chan Rah. He begins with the personal context of developing this writing first as a sermon series preached as the inauguration of his church plant in inner-city Cambridge, Massachusetts, between the prestigious educational institutions of Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A congregation that is described as urban, multi-ethnic, and disenfranchised from the prestigious institutions around them. In addition, Rah's epilogue is a lament about the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO in which he fears that a weak lament of feeling bad is substituting for the type of strong lament he proposes.

²⁹⁴ Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. 84.

and the 'peace of the city.'²⁹⁵ The type of economic inequality in San Diego, such as border issues, immigration, or housing costs, are not developed in addressing racism. Pastor Herber at All Peoples Church tries to wade into the social and church pressures of the black church in San Diego. Still, much of that investigation is propelled by an identarian understanding of antiracism. For the most part, the concrete realities of injustice go unarticulated. Therefore, if white evangelical pastors are going to speak to the economic-political injustices that take place, they need to engage with the problematic economics of the communities they live in and develop relationships with those in their congregation that such systematic inequality affects.

As mentioned above, both Park Hill and All People's platform the lament of BIPOC congregants in their initial responses to George Floyd's death. To their credit, Park Hill moves the conversation on racism beyond the black-white binary by inviting other racialized people to participate in the panel discussion. Such platforming could fulfill Rah's emphasis on personalized articulations of injustice. Rah writes, "We abstract injustice, allowing ourselves to believe we no longer have a direct hand in it. We make injustice impersonal; if everyone is responsible, then no one is responsible. However, injustice should not be abstracted to a corporate concept that justifies ongoing individual

²⁹⁵ For Park Hill Church, the phrase "in San Diego as it is in Heaven" is on the website's home page. While All Peoples Church has a distinctive global mission of church planting, their mission statement states that they "will also partner with him (God) in transforming lives to bless San Diego..."

injustices. Justice is social and corporate, but it requires a personal face.”²⁹⁶ Lifting these voices is essential. And yet, as Rah argues, ‘Lamentations reminds us that privilege needs to be acknowledged but cannot be assumed.’²⁹⁷ Therefore, the personalizing of systematic oppression must be held together with the naming of privilege and exceptionalism held by the preacher.

One aspect that Rah addresses in *Prophetic Lament* that goes unexamined in both Park Hill Church and All People’s Church is the role of American Christian exceptionalism. For Rah, the triumphalism closely tied between evangelicalism and American exceptionalism continues to hinder the church’s practice of lament. Lamentations 2 prophetically articulate God’s anger towards the exceptional people of Israel, specifically in Jerusalem. Interpreted in our context, if Jerusalem, the capital of the chosen people of God, can incur God’s wrath, wouldn’t the Western ‘Christian’ nation-states have the same capacity? Rah wonders aloud, “While we lament the loss we experience in Western Christianity, we should acknowledge that it may be God’s will that oppressive Western systems decline.”²⁹⁸ The proclamation of a prophetic word of lamentation over the wayward city challenges the American exceptionalism in which most evangelicals operate.²⁹⁹ Preaching lament in the vain Rah instructs is closely tied to developing a hamartiology that includes the imperial socio-political economies

²⁹⁶ Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. 89

²⁹⁷ Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. 93

²⁹⁸ Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. 79.

²⁹⁹ Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament*. 95

mentioned above. Preaching as lament is only effective if it can shape the broader, collective imagination regarding systematized sinfulness. Lament without naming the idolatrous spirit of American imperialism and exceptionalism can only function therapeutically. It will not be able to inspire the collective action necessary for communal, antiracist transformation.

One wonders if such lament is even possible in the context in which these two churches exist. Walter Brueggemann argues that among the characteristics of American exceptionalism is the overemphasis on American militarism and that preaching against such deep militarism comes with great resistance from congregants.³⁰⁰ As mentioned, the American military-industrial complex is ever present in San Diego. Military installations are scattered across the city. Fort Rosecrans, the Marine Corp Recruit Depot, and the Naval Air Station North Island on Coronado are at the city's geographical heart. The road leading to Park Hill Church is lined with American flags every Sunday. Suppose the prophetic task of preaching is to "expose the distorted view of societal reality sustained by the ideology that breeds unrealistic notions of entitlement, privilege, and superiority (i.e., American imperialism and exceptionalism)."³⁰¹ How can such a task be completed if there is, at best, ignorance of the effects of American exceptionalism-imperialism or, at worst, an unwillingness to name the spirit of American

³⁰⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Reality Grief Hope; Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*. 30. Brueggemann will go on to say that American exceptionalism "continues to have a racist component...the not subtle claim is that to be an American means to be of European stock."

³⁰¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Reality Grief Hope; Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*. 30.

exceptionalism-imperialism as systematized injustice? Injustices cannot be lamented without the naming of such powers. And yet, such powers go unnamed at Park Hill Church, All People's Church, and many others in San Diego and North America.

The denial of American exceptionalism-imperialism not only perpetuates racist ideologies and violence against racial minorities³⁰², it does violence against those who would hope to maintain such structures. As Wendell Berry articulates, the wound of slavery and economic-political oppression inflicted upon black people (and other people of color) is not only imposed upon white people, but the denial of such historical wounding further wounds the present soul.³⁰³ The unacknowledged and unnamed American exceptionalism-imperialistic systems of oppression by the church further racist ideologies and wounds the community of faith. Without naming the systematized sinfulness and lamenting the concrete political-economic oppression, the church, specifically the evangelical church, will remain in the wounds of racism without a way towards an antiracist imagination.

White evangelical congregations have an overt emphasis on the biblical authority of Scripture. Setting aside the possible biblio-idolatry many congregations practice, evangelical congregations will need biblical interpretation to name the above homiletical and theological issues. With such an emphasis on biblical authority, biblical texts

³⁰² Walter Brueggemann, *Reality Grief Hope; Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*. 71.

³⁰³ Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound*. (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010)

become essential tools for shaping how white evangelical congregations understand race, racism, and racial justice. The next chapter will provide three examples of biblical texts that can enable lament concerning the present American political economy of exceptionalistic imperialism and provide Christological and ecclesial interpretative resources for supporting antiracism.

Chapter 6: Biblical Resources for Evangelical Antiracism

For many white evangelicals, issues of racism and racial justice are too quickly sidelined because of a presumption that such efforts at racial justice are motivated by virtue signaling or related to political liberalism. If systematic racism and its entanglement with American imperialism and exceptionalism are to be named as the evil it is, a shaping of a biblical imagination that challenges such presumptions will be necessary to form for white evangelicals. The exegesis and proclamation of biblical texts that reveal sinful oppressive systems, like white supremacy and political-economic exploitation, must be informed by a biblical account that informs the antiracist theologies we have covered thus far. Since there is an overemphasized authority of the biblical text within the practical theology of many evangelicals, there needs to be biblical resources for addressing racial justice and antiracism.

We have addressed several biblical passages, specifically Christological interpretations of the ministry of Christ and the Pentecost chapter in Acts 2, as forming an antiracist biblical imagination around Christology and pneumatology. At the same time, this study will offer up three additional biblical resources to further develop an antiracist imagination for white evangelical preachers and congregations. The oracle against the nations pericope in Amos 2, Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman in Matthew 15, and the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 will provide further clarity

and theological resources for white evangelical congregations as they seek to develop an antiracist pulpit.³⁰⁴

“For Three Transgressions of Israel, and for Four”

Biblical readers do not usually turn to the prophet Amos for an encouraging message of hope and peace. For this eighth-century Judean prophet, there is little hope for the northern kingdom of Israel. This “prophet of doom” brings God’s message of judgment against a regime that has systematically oppressed the faithful, the poor, and the women of its nation-state. Amos, an untrained prophet from the small agrarian area of Tekoa in Judah, presents a message of divine reality and judgment for the ‘chosen’ people of God in the northern kingdom.

While only a little is known about Amos, compared to Isaiah or Jeremiah³⁰⁵, many contextual clues can inform our understanding of the prophet. Amos’ prophetic ministry took place during the reign of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel in or around the year 760 BCE. 4 Under the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel expanded its

³⁰⁴ There is an apparent omission of the liberation narratives of Exodus from this study. While there has been an abundance of comparison to many enslaved people and the liberation of the people of Israel, such a study will not be included here. As mentioned, an abundance of interpretive resources can be found, and inspiration is given from exegeting and preaching the Exodus liberation from a marginalized, raced, enslaved group. And yet, such hermeneutical emphasis for white evangelical congregations will miss the socio-political liberation narrated in the text and may place themselves as the group that is being liberated out of Egypt in a Christian nationalistic hermeneutic. Secondly, there is some discussion about the viability of a hermeneutic of liberation from the Exodus narrative since the violence impinged upon Israel in Egypt is replicated in its triumphant conquest of the indigenous people of Canaan through the conquest narratives of Joshua. Robert Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” in R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed. *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, (London: SPCK, 1991), 287-295.

³⁰⁵ Thomas Edward McComiskey. *The Minor Prophets*. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock. 2014) 315.

population and socioeconomic stratification. Archeological evidence shows a wide-ranging economic disparity between those in power in Samaria and the general population in the outlying villages.³⁰⁶ “The relationship between the rural sector and urban elites was probably complex, ranging from exploitative conditions in some regions to mutual dependency in others.”³⁰⁷ The socio-economic life is hypothesized to be a pre-capitalistic system of a ‘tributary form of contribution.’ This ‘tributary form of contribution’ has three central characteristics: the absence of private landownership (alternatively, land would be owned by large landowners or the nation-state), independently sufficient villages subordinate to the control of urban areas, and a centralized state governance.³⁰⁸ Such a socioeconomic system would have had the capacity for broad economic stratification and allow for severe socioeconomic injustices to take place.

Amos, the untrained prophet whom God prompts to prophecy against Israel and secondarily against Judah, is popularly described as a shepherd, conjuring up images of the lone, poor shepherd tending to his flock. And yet, through comparative textual analysis, it is more likely that Amos would have been a person of some means.³⁰⁹ It is more likely that, instead of Amos, the poor shepherd from the backwaters village of

³⁰⁶ M. Daniel Carroll R. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; The Book of Amos*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020) 16.

³⁰⁷ M. Daniel Carroll R. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; The Book of Amos*. 17.

³⁰⁸ M. Daniel Carroll R. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; The Book of Amos*. 21.

³⁰⁹ M. Daniel Carroll R. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; The Book of Amos*. 35.

Tekoa, he is Amos, the 'middle class' manager of land and animals, witnessing the injustice that takes place only 10 miles from his residence in Jerusalem and an even greater injustice inhabiting Samaria.³¹⁰ While it seems that Amos was called to this temporary task of prophecy, like that of Jonah, his message is fueled with no less zeal for God's justice.

The Book of Amos begins with oracles against the nations surrounding Israel's nation-state. In rhetorically formulaic construction, Amos pronounces God's judgment on Israel's political rivals and economic partners. As the tour of God's judgments proceeds, it moves closer and closer to Israel.³¹¹ Each city-state receives God's judgment because of war crimes committed against various people groups. From gruesome violence against women and children, selling off conquered peoples as enslaved people, to breaking diplomatic treaties, Amos articulates the harshness in which God will deal with these violent city-states.

Chapter 2 of Amos' oracles against the nations begins a bit closer to home for the northern kingdom of Israel. Moab will be judged because they desecrated the grave of the king of Edom. Then, Amos turns his attention to Judah. Amos states that God's judgment will come down on Judah and Jerusalem because they "rejected the law (Torah) of the LORD and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the

³¹⁰ Victor Matthew. *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012) 80-81.

³¹¹ Victor Matthew. *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*. 82.

same lies after which their ancestors walked.”³¹² God’s justice will befall Judah and Jerusalem, for they had abandoned God’s instruction. “The people have believed a lie; they have followed gods who are themselves lies.”³¹³ Jerusalem has pursued idolatrous practices, and judgment will come for the unfaithful people.

By far, Amos’ longest and harshest judgment falls at the climax of his rhetoric, those at the geographical center of these oracles against the nations. Judgment has come for Israel, for Samaria. While God’s judgment is passed on the surrounding nations for their gruesome war crimes, Israel incurs God’s anger because “they sell the righteous for silver...they trample on the heads of the poor...push the afflicted out of the way...father and son go in to the same girl...lay themselves down beside every altar...drink wine by fines they imposed”³¹⁴ There is an entangled sense of vice and oppression. God’s judgment on Israel centers on its economic exploitation of the poor and righteous, the sexual objectification of women, and the idolatrous practices of the wealthy.³¹⁵ Amos condemns all, and condemnation is found in the Torah.³¹⁶ Amos outlines the judgment God has passed on them in verse 9 and then reminds Israel that God is the God who brought them out of Egypt and provided for them in their wandering of the wilderness for 40 years. In 2:11, Amos reminds Israel that God raised prophets in their midst to

³¹² Amos 2:4 (NRSV)

³¹³ Thomas Edward McComiskey. *The Minor Prophets*. 361.

³¹⁴ Amos 2:6-8 (NRSV)

³¹⁵ M. Daniel Carroll R. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; The Book of Amos*. 183-190.

³¹⁶ Thomas Edward McComiskey. *The Minor Prophets*. 365-366.

correct and encourage faithfulness to God and God's instruction. And yet, Israel has rejected the worship of the one God, and they have set up systems of injustice to oppress the poor (like they had experienced in Egypt) and sexually exploit young women. Their economic and sexual exploitation is symptomatic of their rejection of God and the covenant.³¹⁷ God's judgment and Amos' anger towards Israel is on behalf of those exploited by systematic injustices when God's desire is pointed in a different direction.

Systematic political-economic oppression is as old as the Hebrew Bible, and Amos' prophetic ministry seems to articulate the righteous outcry against such evil. Amos condemns the exploitation of the poor. He condemns the sexual exploitation of those who lack power. He connects these systematized exploitations to idolatry. This connection cannot be overstated. The 'exceptionalism' of Israel has given way to idolatry and systematized commodification, extraction of wealth, and violence to maintain the oppressive system.

It is clear from Amos' condemnation of Israel that such exploitative political-economic systems entail an aspect of sexual objectification. Chanequa Walker-Barnes notes that one of the central controlling images for black women is that of 'Jezebel.' "The Jezebel stereotype was the first and most predominant image of Black womanhood in the United States precisely because it was critical to maintaining not only the American

³¹⁷ Victor Matthew. *The Hebrew Prophet and Their Social World*. 83.

slave economy but the ideology of White supremacy and Black inferiority.”³¹⁸

Oversexualization and fetishization of racial minority groups is a hallmark of white supremacy. It was tragically unsurprising that the white male gunman who killed eight people, 6 of whom were Asian women, in the metro Atlanta area in March 2021 claimed to have been motivated by sexual addiction and a religious compulsion to eliminate temptation with violent means.³¹⁹ Sexual exploitation goes hand in hand with political-economic oppression. Such exploitation is feverishly condemned in the prophetic ministry of Amos—God’s divine no rejects political-economic exploitative practices.

It should come then as no surprise that Martin Luther King Jr. preferred to think of his work and ministry not as a Moses-like persona but in the vein of Amos.³²⁰ Race is a technological development in exploitative political-economic practices condemned by the prophet Amos, among others. Amos demonstrates the essential nature of naming these exploitative systems as central to the task of preaching. Emphasizing individual sinfulness will not give the whole picture of evil oppressive systems, and a vernacular of institutional, corporate sinfulness is necessary to preach from the white evangelical pulpit.³²¹ American exceptionalism does not allow for such sermonic condemnations. Still, suppose white evangelical preachers are concerned with confronting racism and

³¹⁸ Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy a Yoke*, 84.

³¹⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/03/19/robert-aaron-long-evangelical-treatment-facility-sex-addiction/>

³²⁰ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 24, 48, 126.

³²¹ It may then be necessary to develop a biblical understanding of the Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16 and the Christological dimensions therein.

developing congregations where racial justice is pursued, as Park Hill Church and All Peoples Church claim. In that case, the Amos-like naming of systematic political-economic exploitation is essential to the antiracist imagination.

“Yet, Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children’s Crumbs”

An often overlooked narrative within the Gospels is Jesus’ interaction with the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21-28.³²² And yet, the exchange between the Canaanite woman and Christ alters the narrative trajectory and reveals not only the humanity of Christ but also the full inclusion of the political-cultural other.

According to Matthew, Jesus had just come from another confrontation with the religious elite from Jerusalem to question Jesus why his disciples broke from tradition on ritual cleanliness. Jesus turned it on the Pharisees, asking them why they twisted the law to their advantage. Jesus critiques the religious elite on their twisting of the law and educates Peter and the other disciples on what truly defiles. The Pharisees argue that the lack of ritual hygiene defiles, and Jesus argues that what defiles comes from the heart.³²³

Afterward, Jesus travels with his disciples to the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon. Other than the naming of this Gentile region, no setting is given. Matthew 15:21

³²² If the Q source criticism theory of the gospels is to be believed, the Gospel according to Matthew has elaborated on the Markan narrative of the Syro-Phoenician woman in Mark 7:24-30. There are many overlapping similarities between these two narratives. One central difference is the disciples' appearance in Matthew's account. In Mark's account, disciples are not present and Christ is alone. The Matthean account has extended comments from the disciples, which further heightens the cultural/contextual differences between Jesus' disciples and the Syro-Pheonician woman. While Sarah Travis will exegete the Markan version of the story, similar imperial/colonial critiques remain available to this Matthean version.

³²³ Matt. 15: 1-20 (NRSV)

depicts a Canaanite woman emerging into the narrative, seeking to have Jesus heal her daughter. While the designation of this woman as a Canaanite person indicates a religious affiliation, the woman's Canaanite description connotes her racialized otherness. Written from a Jewish perspective for a Jewish audience, Matthew's use of the Canaanite designation for this woman would have signified not just her otherness but her historical opposition to the Jewish people and tradition.³²⁴ An "anti-Canaanite sentiment in the Hebrew Bible is an ideological theme and is not based on any set of 'historical facts.'³²⁵ The anti-Canaanite rhetorical used by Jesus and the disciples is a human construct anchored in bigotry, not theology or tradition.

It is evident in Matthew's account that Jesus' mission was the salvation of the people of Israel.³²⁶ And yet, we have this distinct encounter where this unnamed Canaanite woman comes to Jesus, interrupts what he and his disciples are doing, and pleads that he heal her daughter. As Glenna Jackson points out, the Canaanite woman pleads with Jesus four times.³²⁷ The Canaanite woman pleads with Jesus, but she is ignored. She persists, and Jesus's disciples tell him to have her removed for calling out to them. Jesus tells her that he has only come for the 'lost sheep of Israel,' yet she continues to urge for her daughter's healing. His focus is not on the Gentile people but

³²⁴Glenna Jackson. *Have Mercy on Me: The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21-28*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.) 77.

³²⁵ Glenna Jackson. *Have Mercy on Me: The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21-28*. 82.

³²⁶ Matt 1:21

³²⁷ Glenna Jackson. *Have Mercy on Me: The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21-28*. 102.

on behalf of the restoration of Israel. Even though he claims an exclusive mission to the Jewish people, she persists. The Canaanite woman pleads a third time, 'Lord, help me,' which is the second of three times the Canaanite woman will call Jesus "Lord." Jesus responds a third time with an implied slur; "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the (little) dogs.' The diminutive phrase, whether it be a common Jewish ethnic slur or the testing of her faith, is absorbed by the Canaanite woman. She bears the implied, deeply offensive insinuation and turns it back on Jesus. 'Yes, Lord, yet even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'³²⁸ The Canaanite woman crosses every boundary³²⁹; she is one woman addressing a crowd of men, she is Canaanite, and Jesus is Jewish; she is an unnamed woman, and this a highly regarded rabbi who she claims is the Son of David, the Messiah. The Canaanite woman crosses ethnic, gender, and power boundaries to have her daughter released from torment. She pleads a fourth time by using her speech to remind Jesus that there is enough to eat at the table, even for the little dogs who get the leftovers. She resists all of the ways Jesus and his disciples seek to marginalize her. She resists being ignored, she resists the insistence that she 'go away,' she resists the abusive insinuation, and persists so that her daughter might be restored.

³²⁸ Matt 15:27.

³²⁹ Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*. 119.

In his theological commentary on Matthew, Stanley Hauerwas notes two essential aspects of the Canaanite woman. First, she is an outsider who recognizes what Jesus can accomplish. “Outsiders recognize, unlike many of the people of Israel, that he can do what no other person can do.”³³⁰ The outsiders, those who are oppressed, can view what those who benefit from the culture and system cannot: God’s restoration. Such restoration motivates the resistance of dehumanizing language and hopes persists by embodying what God can accomplish. Secondly, Hauerwas notes that this woman is not only the forerunner in faith for all Gentile believers, “but her reply to Jesus teaches us how to speak.”³³¹ She non-violently resists humiliation and oppression through her speech. Her speech acknowledges the oppression she has undergone and turns it in such a way that reveals it is a corrupt human construct. Her dignity is shown as she resists the totalizing slur uttered by Jesus. Not only is the Canaanite woman dignified through resistance, but she does so non-violently so that her daughter might know complete restoration. In this narrative, we see the language of dehumanization employed to maintain patriarchy and religious elitism, and it is the non-violent resistance of the Canaanite woman that reveals its moral bankruptcy.

In this narrative, Jesus remains focused on his mission to the detriment of his disciples. His disciples position themselves as greater than others because of their

³³⁰ Stanley Hauerwas. *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press. 2006) 144.

³³¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*. 144.

relationship to Jesus. And yet, when the Canaanite reveals that he has “succumbed to the privileges of being Jewish and male in that particular society” and therefore responds by “rejecting the validity of those privileges by helping the woman.”³³² Jesus grants the woman’s plea because he sees that her faith in him has far outstretched the boundaries of human-constructed privilege and position. While his disciples encouraged such boundaried positionality, Jesus emptied himself of his privilege of being correct so that the Canaanite woman and her daughter might be restored. In this way, Christ makes space, even at his own expense, when he employs the offensive slur. Christ is not immune from the humanness of language. And yet, the true power is in Christ’s corrected stance. It should not surprise the reader that Jesus’ next move is travel further in the Gentile region, where he will feed 4000 Gentile followers. In the Markan version of this narrative, the encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman inaugurates Jesus’s Gentile inclusion within the Kingdom of God.³³³

In Matthew 15, on the one hand, Jesus subverts the religious elite who seek to hem in his disciples into a legalistic framework of identity. On the other hand, Jesus embodies a similar ‘pouring out’ of his position of privilege as space is created for this woman to dignify her position and community resiliently. Jesus is humbled. Some might take offense at interpreting this moment as Jesus being humbled by the woman’s

³³²Kelly Brown Douglas. *The Black Christ*. 105.

³³³ Mark 7:31-37.

response. Jesus employs an indirect offensive slur, and the Canaanite woman responds with a revelation of dignity and grace. In response, Jesus does not double down or puff up with pride or rebuke her with a “Don’t you know who I am?” She does know who he is and reckons to him the sort of inclusion God desires. To those who might find it offensive that Jesus is humbled in this fashion, let us merely read twelve chapters later, where Jesus is stripped naked and lynched by the Roman state. The humbled Christ endures for the sake of the dignity of the woman, and her daughter’s restoration is menial compared to the lynching he will endure. As Kavin Rowe argues, the meta-narrative of the gospel is one of death and resurrection.³³⁴ If the white evangelical pastor is unable to proclaim the small death of Jesus’ ego before the Canaanite woman, then what hope is there for finding hope in the humiliation of a state-lynched rabbi? Here lies the Christian paradox necessary to hold faith in Jesus Christ; at once, he is human and God. At once, he has the capacity for great humiliation and the site of restoration. Weakness and glory. In this way, the triumphalism of Christ is not in his perfection but in the willingness to be humbled, exemplify correction to disciples in need of it, and move towards the full inclusion of others, even though they are perceived as opponents. The Canaanite woman is not only an example of the methodology of non-violent resistant speech but also the catalyst of an antiracist imagination that reveals dehumanizing language and systems across racial, sexual, and religious categories to be

³³⁴ Kavin Rowe. *Christianity’s Surprise; A Sure and Certain Hope*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 2020) 24.

incompatible with faith in Christ. Racial justice is inextricably entangled with pursuing gender equality and holistic economic prosperity.

“He Has Made No Distinction Between Them and Us”

The church in Antioch began to pose theological problems for the Christian movement. After the religiously motivated execution of Stephen and the beginning of Saul’s terrorist activities in Jerusalem, the apostles and followers of The Way began to fan out throughout the Judean and Samaritan regions, taking their faith in Christ and indwelling of the Holy Spirit with them. Eventually, as Acts 11 indicates, followers of Christ made their way to the city of Antioch, and many Gentiles came to faith and joined the community. Eventually, Barnabas and the aforementioned terrorist-turned-apostle Paul joined and led what would become the church in Antioch. This predominately Gentile church would challenge the Jewish imaginations about this “Christian” movement.

The growth of the Antiochene Church seems to have prompted some skeptics and pushback from a sect of Jewish Christians who had serious problems with Gentiles joining the movement. According to Acts 15, the symptomatic issue concerned circumcision and adherence to the Jewish law. We find out in verse 5 that these Jewish Christians were former Pharisees, maybe not unlike Paul, who had joined the Christian movement. The debate over Gentile inclusion seems to have occurred over a significant

period.³³⁵ The apostles and elders called a meeting to discuss Gentile inclusion into this initial Jewish movement. While Luke notes that there was “no small discussion” about Gentiles and their relationship to the Jewish law, he narrates the ongoings of this council meeting as a relatively ordered procedure. If biblical commentators are correct to understand Galatians 2 to be Paul’s account of the debate at the Jerusalem Council meeting in Acts 15, then there was more vim and vigor to the discussion between Paul and those who would force Gentiles to assimilate to Jewish law.³³⁶

After Peter’s experience with the Holy Spirit and Cornelius’, the Roman military leader, conversion to following Christ, he declares that those who seek to put Gentile believers under the ‘yoke’ of the Jewish law are putting God to the test. God has “intimate knowledge of the human heart (which) extends to every human, Jew and gentile, which means that God, who makes no ethnic distinctions among human beings, can sense a genuine desire for salvation.”³³⁷ Here, Peter argues that the Holy Spirit is the ministry of Christ and has moved amongst the Gentiles, turned over their allegiances and transformed, “cleansed,” their hearts. Further, Peter points out that the ‘yoke’ of the law that these particular pharisaical Jewish Christians are insisting that Gentile Christians adhere to was never successfully obeyed by their Jewish ancestors. Instead, all are saved through Christ’s grace.

³³⁵ Justo Gonzalez. *Acts; The Gospel of The Spirit*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001) 172.

³³⁶ Carl Holladay, *Acts; A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016) 296 and F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1988) 283.

³³⁷ Carl Holladay, *Acts; A Commentary*. 298.

James, a Jewish elder who seems to have been on the side of the Gentile inclusion by way of circumcision, “quilts”³³⁸ together several OT/HB scriptures³³⁹ to imagine how the law and prophets anticipated or prefigured³⁴⁰ this innovative inbreaking of the Holy Spirit. Willie James Jennings states, “Quilting Scripture is of the new order. Such interpretative work takes seriously a living God who lives in and with the human creature and who invites us to weave together the word of God spoken (in the past) with the word of God being spoken into lives (in the present) by the Spirit.”³⁴¹ According to Jennings, James is not only weaving together a biblical hermeneutic that understands the Holy Spirit’s present movement alongside the tradition and imagination they inherited, but he also provides a methodology in which biblical hermeneutics is dually informed by tradition and present experience. The past interprets the present (and future), and the present shapes the past. To use Jennings’ verb, biblical texts are woven together through tradition and experience. Such a biblical hermeneutic does not deny biblical authority but keeps it closely tied to the concurrent activity of the Holy Spirit, the living God.

³³⁸ Willie James Jennings. *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017) 143.

³³⁹Notably, in reference to this study, James quotes the prophet Amos 9:12 as evidence of Hebrew prophecy pointing towards Gentile inclusion. Amos 9:11-12 speaks of a remnant of David that will repair the damage that has occurred to the tree of Israel so that the inclusion of a “remnant of Edom” will occur. This may be the only glimmer of hope for the northern kingdom in the whole of Amos, and it is tied to the inclusion of non-Israelites.

³⁴⁰ Richard Hays argues in *Reading Backwards* that each of the gospels interprets the OT/HB as prefiguring what takes place in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. James, in Luke’s voice, epitomizes such prefiguration. Richard Hays. *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness*. (Waco: Baylor University Press. 2016).

³⁴¹ Willie James Jennings. *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. 143.

What do we make of the mandate agreed upon at the end of the Jerusalem Council? James proposes, and all seem to agree, that Gentiles should abstain from “things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.”³⁴² Would not these mandates contradict Peter and James’ declaration of Gentile inclusion without the mandate of submitting to the Jewish Law? According to Carl Holladay, these abstentions are outlined in Leviticus 18 and 19 as mandates for Israelites and non-Israelites who ‘reside among Israelites’ in the land, and these four mandates are connected to weekly worship.³⁴³ Justo Gonzalez analyzes the differences between ancient manuscripts, in which some of the most ancient texts remove sexual immorality from the list of required abstentions. Cross-referencing these ancient manuscripts reveals that the necessary abstentions are not moral but ritual.³⁴⁴ These abstentions inform how Gentiles approach worship within a predominately Jewish movement. These are worship mandates that make space for Jewish Christians to join Gentiles in worship gatherings. These are boundaries that allow all to come to a unified table. Therefore, cultural assimilation is not a theological good within the Christian community. Instead, the beauty of God’s creative mosaic is embodied through the expression of cultural diversity and the celebration of the life-honoring, life-giving practices.

³⁴² Acts 15:20 (NRSV)

³⁴³ Carl Holladay, *Acts; A Commentary*. 302-303.

³⁴⁴ Justo Gonzalez. *Acts; The Gospel of The Spirit*. 176.

And yet, as Willie James Jennings points out, there is a glaring absence to this council on Gentile inclusion, and that would be Gentiles. Gentiles are absent from this discussion on the Holy Spirit's effect and transformation of Gentile's hearts and minds. Jennings argues that the absence of Gentile believers constitutes this a Gentiles-in-theory conversation and not a Gentiles-in-reality conversation. Absent from this conversation is "reciprocity and mutual" interaction.³⁴⁵ While Paul and Barnabas are fierce allies and advocates for Gentile inclusion, they are no substitute for the stories and experiences of Gentile followers. Their pasts, transformations, and freedom in Christ are witnessed secondhand through the thoughtful yet intense lens of Paul. As Jennings points out, normalizing "other-in-theory" conversations is a deterrent to the work of the Holy Spirit because such discussions are not about moral recommendations but the joining together in communion.³⁴⁶

Here lies the limitation of antiracist preaching. Preaching all of the theologies and texts above, disconnected from communion with brothers and sisters of diverse economic, racialization, and gender, creates an objectification that cannot be sustained. While white evangelical preachers may muster up the courage to name the imperial/excptionalistic superstructure that enables white supremacy, to tell the stories of how that superstructure shapes racist systems and actions, and then proclaim the

³⁴⁵ Willie James Jennings. *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. 144.

³⁴⁶ Willie James Jennings. *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. 144.

ways God has inaugurated and continues to build a subversive kingdom at odds with such violent and dehumanizing practices and rhetoric, it will remain hollow if such proclamation is disconnected from a vibrant life within a diverse community. Preaching names the entangled ways the Christian community is caught up with what God is doing in Christ through the Holy Spirit. If we are to join in the perichoretic embrace of the Trinity, we then make room for the cultural and socio-political differences and offer avenues in which that community lives in reciprocal, generous practices.³⁴⁷ Preaching divorced from diverse human entanglement only maintains the imperial/exceptionalistic system, which enables white supremacy.

³⁴⁷ Sarah Travis. *Decolonizing Preaching*. 128.

Conclusion

Before the Slaughtered Lamb takes the scroll with its seven seals and begins to unfold the salvific plan for all things, John the Revelator receives a window into the fulfillment of all things. At the appearance of the Slaughtered Lamb, the old song “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD” is interrupted by a new song. The record scratches, and all present in the throne room burst out singing a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood, you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving God, and they will reign on earth.”³⁴⁸ At the end of all things, Christ has gathered and empowered a multi-ethnic people, serving the one kingdom of God, the one people of the Slaughtered Lamb. No human construction has kept God’s grace at bay. The salvific atoning sacrifice of Christ has united one people in the beautiful mosaic of God’s diverse creation. God’s future, the future of the church, is antiracist.

Is there hope for the white evangelical church? Can an antiracist imagination take root in the white evangelical church? Willie James Jennings argues that Christians worship and serve a God of revolution, a God of overturning.³⁴⁹ Following a

³⁴⁸ Revelation 5:9-10 (NRSV)

³⁴⁹ Willie James Jennings, *The Revolution of Salvation*. (The H. Orton Wiley Lectures, Point Loma Nazarene University. March 21, 2022.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ieaz9eHGk2E>

revolutionary God means Christians attune themselves to what is and what will be.³⁵⁰

The core of white evangelical theology centers the experience of white protestant Christians as *the* archetypal faith experience and theology.³⁵¹ To respond to racism with a panel discussion between racialized individuals without challenging the white supremacist, America political economy maintains the white evangelical experience as the central theological frame. It will take more than two weeks of a panel discussion or two interview to de-center the white evangelical experience as the archetype.

The hope for white evangelical congregations is in the revolutionary God of Israel, the incarnation of this God in Christ, and the Spirit who is in the business of overturning lives and communities. Proclaiming the radical revolution of God will necessitate the public naming of the imperial/exceptional political-economic powers that have enslaved our patterns of speech and action. Moving beyond racial sympathy will consist of lamenting our individual and collective past participation in systems of oppression and inequity, educating ourselves and our congregations on local and global political economies in light of the economy of God, and catechizing our congregants into a richer theological and biblical imagination; an imagination where God is not disengaged, Christ is not a white guy, and the Holy Spirit is not Jimny Cricket. Instead,

³⁵⁰ Willie James Jennings, *The Revolution of Salvation*. 3:20

³⁵¹ Jennings put this in an epistemological frame. Imperial colonialism centers white knowledge and experience and thus views others as students in need of teaching. The 'white' teachers then in part knowledge instead of embodying epistemological humility. Willie James Jennings, *The Revolution of Salvation*. 34:20.

developing a truly antiracist imagination means proclaiming a God who is triune, a Christ who subverts and exposes the political economies of imperialism through his teaching, death, and resurrection, and a Spirit who is restoring our authentic communion with God and each other.

God's future reality is breaking into our world. It will take God's overturning, God's revolution for the white evangelical church to break with its white supremacist history and ideology and embrace the patterns and practices of God's kingdom come. Therefore, let us continue to pray: Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. May God find us faithful to his inbreaking, antiracist kingdom.

References

- Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage Books 1991.
- Balmer, Randall. *The Making of Evangelicalism*. Waco: Baylor University Press. 2010.
- Barth, Karl. *Homiletics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox. 1991.
- Bebbington, David. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Christ the Center*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Collins, 1960.
- Brown Douglas, Kelly. *The Black Christ*. Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2019,
- _____ *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2021.
- Bruce, F.F. *The Book of Acts*. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1988
- Brueggemann, Walter. *God, Neighbor, Empire*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016.
- _____ "Preaching a Sub-Version." *Theology Today* 55 (July 1998).
- _____ *Reality, Grief, Hope*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2014.
- Brueggemann, Walter, et al. *Struggling With Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2002.
- Butler, Anthea. *White Evangelical Racism*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021.
- Carter, J. Kameron. *Race; A Theological Account*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008
- Carroll R., M. Daniel. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; The Book of Amos*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020.
- Campbell, Charles. *Preaching Jesus; The New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers. 2006.

- _____. *The Word Before the Powers*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- _____. *The Scandal of the Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021.
- Culpepper, Alan R. *Matthew; a Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021.
- DiAngelo, Robin. *White Fragility*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018.
- DuMez, Kristin Kobes. *Jesus and John Wayne*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020.
- Grenz, Stanley. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Press, 1994.
- Gonzalez, Justo and Catherine Gonzalez. *The Liberating Pulpit*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994.
- Gonzalez, Justo. *Acts; The Gospel of The Spirit*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001.
- Gushee, David. *After Evangelicalism*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006.
- _____. *Unleashing the Scriptures*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.
- Hauerwas, Stanley and Will Willimon. *Holy Spirit*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015.
- Hays, Richard. *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016.
- Helsel, Carolyn. *Preaching About Racism*. Saint Louis: Chalice Press, 2018.
- Holladay, Acts; *A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory; From Margin to Center*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Horowitz, Anthony. *A Twist of the Knife*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2023.

- Hughes, Matthew. *Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in "Magical Negro" Films*. (Social Problems, Vol. 56, No. 3. August 2009.) 543-577.
- Jackson, Glenna. *Have Mercy on Me: The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21-28*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.
- Jennings, William James. *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.
- _____. *After Whiteness*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020.
- _____. *The Christian Imagination; Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- _____. *The Revolution of Salvation*. The H. Orton Wiley Lectures, Point Loma Nazarene University. March 24, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ieaz9eHGk2E>
- Jones, Robert P. *The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy and the Path to a Shared American Future*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 2023.
- _____. *White Too Long*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020.
- Kendi, Ibram X. *How to Be an Antiracist*. New York: One World Books, 2019.
- Leong, Nancy. *Racial Capitalism*. Harvard Law Review (Jun2013) v.126 n8. 2151.
- Lischer, Richard. *The End of Words*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005.
- Lloyd, Vincent. *Black Dignity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022
- Lodahl, Michael. *All Things Necessary to Our Salvation*. San Diego: Point Loma Press, 2004.
- Maier, Francis X. *Hope and Her Daughters*. First Things. March 2021.
<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/03/hope-and-her-daughters>
- Matthew, Victor. *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

- McCaulley, Esau. *Reading While Black*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2020.
- McComiskey, Thomas Edward. *The Minor Prophets*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014.
- Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother's Hands*. Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017.
- Murphy, Nancy. *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996.
- Noll, Mark. *The Rise of Evangelicalism*. Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2003
- Pagitt, Doug. *George Floyd anniversary is chance for white evangelicals to stand up for Black lives*. Religion News Service. May 25, 2021.
<https://religionnews.com/2021/05/25/george-floyd-anniversary-is-a-chance-for-white-evangelicals-to-stand-up-for-black-lives/>
 (Accessed. October 24th 2022)
- Perry, Samuel and Philip Gorski. *The Flag and the Cross*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/metro-area/san-diego-metro-area/#beliefs-and-practices>. (Accessed July 13th 2023)
- Powery, Luke. *Becoming Human; The Holy Spirit and the Rhetoric of Race*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022.
- Rah, Soong-Chan. *Prophetic Lament*. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015.
- Rowe, Kavin. *Christianity's Surprise; A Sure and Certain Hope*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020.
- Smith, Christine, *Preaching Justice*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 2008.
- Tisby, Jamar. *The Color Of Compromise*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2019.
- _____. *How to Fight Racism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2021

- Tran, Johnathan. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Travis, Sarah. *Decolonizing Preaching*. Eugene: Cascade Press. 2014.
- Venter, J. Craig, *Life Decoded: My Genome, My Life*. New York: Viking, 2001
- Warrior, Robert. "A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," in R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed. *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, (London: SPCK, 1991), 287-295
- Walker-Barnes, Chanequa. *I Bring the Voices of My People*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2019.
- _____. *Too Heavy a Yoke*. Atlanta: Cascade Publishing. 2014.
- Webster, John. *Holy Scripture; a Dogmatic Sketch*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.
- Wellman, Kathleen. *Hijacking History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2021.
- Williams, Montague. *Church in Color*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020.
- Willimon, William. *Who Lynched Willie Earle*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017.
- Witterington, Ben. *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary – Matthew*. Macon: Smyth and Helwys Publishing. 2006

Biography

Matt Wilson (he/him) lives in San Diego, California, with his wife, Lindsay, and two children, Rosie and Luke. Matt earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Biblical Studies and Christian Ministry from Point Loma Nazarene University in 2008, a Master of Arts in Religious Studies in Theology from Point Loma Nazarene University in 2012, and a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2015. He currently works as an adjunct professor in the School of Theology and Christian Ministry at Point Loma Nazarene University.