2-2020

A Neo-Free Methodism: Shadow-Work as a Model for Racial Justice

Liz Simmons

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

A NEO-FREE METHODISM:
SHADOW-WORK AS A MODEL FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

LIZ SIMMONS

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2020

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Liz Simmons

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 21, 2020
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Carole Spencer, PhD

Secondary Advisor: Ekaterina Lomperis, PhD

Lead Mentor: MaryKate Morse, PhD

*The ESV® Bible is used for its accessibility and familiarity for the local congregation.

To those whose voices we have yet to hear,

To those still awaiting a Deliverer,

To those longing for *Christus Victor*,

You have taught me to hope in the dark.

And to my children, Bina and David.

I long for you to live in a world of equity and inclusion.

I pray always that you are a friend to those whose voices are missing at the table.

Keep giving up your seat.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Behind the scenes of this work is a crew of people that have become the scaffolding of my reality in this season. I owe much to my advisor Carole, whose passion for justice and revision of her own life has given her a lens to see the ongoing movement of liberation everywhere. Your wisdom and insight have been a stabilizing force throughout my own internal struggle. I am also indebted to MaryKate, the lead mentor of this program, whom I also consider a personal friend. MK, you have continued to see the me beneath the me in the midst of this journey. You championed my motherhood and supported me during the loss of my father. I like to think that you see the world always as it could and ought to be. And for Loren, Cliff, and Heather—you are the Doctor of Ministry program become flesh. Thank you for the ways you have supported, challenged and walked alongside me and my cohort mates throughout this process. You have laid the framework for the growth that follows.

The last three years of my life have unearthed in me what I know has been my truth for the last twenty. The values that lift to the surface throughout this work can be found embodied throughout the entirety of my life. I must reflect gratitude for the God who has made me a whole person, who has made congruence and a hidden wholeness my deepest longing. I am not what I do, but this work that follows is as a result of the *imago Dei* in me. I acknowledge first that reality, the ground of my being.

I had my second child and lost my father in the season in which this work was written. For this difficult season of life, I must acknowledge the support and constancy of my Michael—you have helped me to see myself when I could no longer see me, buried beneath the rubble of much celebration and grief. Your tenderness has been a safe harbor

for me in my mourning. Your sense of play has brought me immeasurable joy and has reminded me of God's deepest delight. I could not have found the meaning in this work that I needed in order to see it through without you.

I am grateful for the many shared cups of coffee and conversation that have helped me to verbally and emotionally process this work. It was first brought to life in many passionate and wearying conversations before ever a word was typed—if the walls of Chapters in Newberg, Oregon could talk. I am also deeply grateful for my friend and babysitter and real-time editor, Alicia. Your wearing of many hats in our friendship has given my family Sabbath in this season of grief and grit. For that I am deeply grateful.

I acknowledge how much loss has given shape to my story, and because of my loss I have come to know deep suffering. I am grateful to my brother David, whose life I lost when I was a child, and to my father, Tim, whom I buried just four months ago. Without their lives I would not yet know how to curse. I would not yet know how to sit with people in their pain and in their grief. I would not yet know the value of being stitched back together without the pain of the rending that preceded the mending. I learned through their lives and through my loss of them how to hope against hope. I am grateful for the lens of suffering that they gave to me so that I could hold the fragility of life in tension with its deepest joys.

I am honored to have had some beautiful people put up with my messiness along the way as I have stumbled my way into understanding my own privilege. I have been confused and angry; I have been belligerent and so very sorry. I have carried clenched fists at the injustice of how my friends have been treated along the way, and these friends have shown me the way of forgiveness, of peace. The loss I carry in my body from not

having had your voices in my life before now I cannot forget, but I will do my deepest work to keep giving up my seat at the table. Y'all are my people and you bring my life so much meaning. You are a part of me like I am a part of you. You are the best of *pontifex*—those bridge builders among us.

That is what the church wants: to disturb people's consciences and to provoke a crisis in their lives. A church that does not provoke crisis, a gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not rankle, a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what kind of gospel is that?

—Óscar Romero*, The Scandal of Redemption*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The increase of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States is on a trajectory to shift the demographic of the Church over time to majority non-white. Because of the abolitionist spirit of its genesis, Free Methodist church contexts have the historical and theological foundations to become hosts for multicultural communities and culturally engaging conversations leading to racial justice. The homogeneous demographic of many Free Methodist churches today, however, results in blindness toward privilege and resistance toward social engagement, reinforcing an insulated identity narrative.

Particularly in rural and suburban areas where the surrounding demographic is shifting at a slower rate, majority-culture Free Methodist churches do not understand their role in racial justice. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to answer this question: What could it look like for white people to do their own internal work to take responsibility for their part in racial justice, particularly in majority-culture churches where the surrounding community is also majority white? First, this research recovers and analyzes the inception of the Free Methodist movement in order to understand the gap between its abolitionist beginnings and its present reality. Second, this work identifies the need for a theology of liberation in Free Methodist churches by reviewing the strengths and challenges of Liberation Theology. Third, this research engages the imprecatory psalms and what their presence in Scripture means for our engagement with our own emotion. Finally, this research analyzes Carl Jung's understanding of the human shadow in order to consider the implications of shadow-work on race relations in the Church. Ultimately, this author intends to develop a strategy for church leadership in majority-culture Free Methodist

contexts to give vision for a way forward in the efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Church.

CHAPTER 1:

THE PROBLEM

In November of 2018, *24/7 Wall Street*, an online news source, published an article entitled "The Worst Cities for Black Americans."[1] Cities included on the list represent those places in the United States where the black population, median income, and home ownership rates reflect the continued segregation between races; the lack of equity and inclusion; and the kind of hopelessness that runs like a persistent and unaddressed low-grade fever throughout black communities in the cities the article highlights. This article went viral one day on this author's social media account because, as was quickly discovered, the city listed as number one in 2018 by *24/7 Wall Street* is my hometown, the place where I was born and raised for the first fifteen years of my life. As friends and relatives reposted the article, there was a sharp disbelief particularly among local pastors, discrediting and questioning the legitimacy of the article. As I found myself surprised by the reality that black US-Americans in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls, Iowa area are consistently overlooked for jobs and promotions and have a median income of just below $26,000, I reflected on my upbringing, and the facts slowly revised the history of my earliest memories in that place.[2]

My hometown, like many towns in the United States, was divided into east and west by railroad tracks. Many white friends attended the high school on the west side,

---

[1] Samuel Stebbins and Evan Comen, "The Worst Cities for Black Americans," *24/7 Wall Street*, November 9, 2018, https://247wallst.com/special-report/2018/11/09/the-worst-cities-for-black-americans-4/4/.

[2] Ibid.

whereas East High School was predominantly black or represented other minority groups in the area. The remnants of housing segregation and the lack of ability to improve one's financial situation—no matter the level of education or work experience—plagues the place I call home. How could I have grown up in a town like this and not been aware of it? I attended a church that cared deeply about the world, about the things for which God cares deeply, but the reality of my black neighbors down the street was not something I or my church spent much time considering. The suffering of our black brothers and sisters on the other side of the tracks was somehow too far to reach us. I was not aware of their pain because I did not have to be; the reach of their suffering fell short of the west side of town.

As I have come to understand over the years how my lack of awareness of my privilege has contributed to holding up the reconciling process, I have listened to important voices, people of color in the church, helping me to understand how important lament is in the healing process. In "The American Church's Absence of Lament," Soong-Chan Rah writes, "What is needed is a corporate lament—a corporate acknowledgement of the reality of suffering and pain from which many of us in the United States have benefitted."[3] Though I have read much on lament and confession and its necessity in the church for racial justice to take place, this author is still convinced that there is a step that comes before confession and lament that is missing from churches made up of majority-culture congregants.

Even if Euro-American churchgoers confess and embody practices of lament in order to make reparation for complicity in racism, there is still a question that remains

---

[3] Soong-Chan Rah, "The American Church's Absence of Lament," *Sojourners*, October 24, 2013, https://sojo.net/articles/12-years-slave/american-churchs-absence-lament.

unanswered: How can I truly lament with my brothers and sisters of color whose experience I do not and cannot understand first-hand? It is not physically or systemically possible for me to put myself in their shoes, to see the world through their eyes, and as hard as I may try to understand, as proximate as I may get to the pain, their story is not my story. A practice of lament requires empathy, and empathy's key components are "knowing what another person is feeling, feeling what another person is feeling, and responding compassionately to another person's distress."[4]

The ability to understand another person's feelings has a prerequisite, which is that a person must understand his or her own feelings before attempting to understand the feelings of another. Empathy, an ability to sit with another person in their pain and suffering, can only come once a person has carved out their own space internally for this kind of pain to be understood and interpreted. There is an internal work that precedes a practice of lament in the church—or minimally, goes hand-in-hand with it—and its result is a greater sense of familiarity with anger, sadness, fear, and joy.

Discomfort with harder emotions can cause majority-culture Christians to cast those emotions into the shadow—for psychologist Carl Jung, the shadow is that which is unconscious to us—and then to negatively project those harder emotions onto those who bear the right to be angry, to feel rage, or to fear. According to Jung, "Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. At all counts, it forms an unconscious snag, thwarting our most well-meant

---

[4] Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 74.

intentions."[5] He continues, "By shadow I mean the 'negative' side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the content of the personal unconscious."[6] Throughout this work, I suggest that a Christian's inability to acknowledge and reckon with her personal shadow thwarts any attempt a local church may make toward racial justice; further, the US-American Church's [read: Euro-American] failure to consider its collective and national shadow "takes the form of scapegoating, racism, or enemy-making."[7] Without shadow-work, without getting at what lies below the surface of human consciousness, there can be only failed attempts at true justice.

The purpose of this first chapter is to give context for the need for a model of shadow-work in the church in its efforts toward racial justice. While much has been written on the role of lament and confession in the church as a way forward in the healing and justice process, a gap still remains between the practice of lament and a majority-culture Christian's ability to move toward such a practice. A prerequisite for a practice of lament in the church is the empathy that comes as a result of suffering. While the experience of suffering is not limited to minority groups, majority-culture Christians often struggle with understanding the impact of marginalization on a person's sense of dignity. This disconnect between lived realities results in a gap that an attempted practice of lament cannot bridge. This author suggests here that the Free Methodist movement,

---

[5] C. G. Jung, "Psychology and Religion: West and East," in *The Collected Works,* ed. C. G. Jung, 11 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 7.

[6] Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams, "Part One Introduction," in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed. Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 3.

[7] Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams, "Introduction: The Shadow Side of Everyday Life," in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed. Zweig and Abrams (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), xx.

both historically and theologically, is a fertile container in which shadow-work and ultimately anti-racist endeavors can take root and flourish. I begin with my local context, Journey Church, a Free Methodist church plant, and identify the ministry problem present with its particular demographics in Sherwood, Oregon. I then expand this to address the larger issue of race in majority-culture Free Methodist churches, reaching back to its history and theology in order to establish a foundation that defines Free Methodist social ethic.

The Ministry Context

Journey Church is a Free Methodist church plant in Sherwood, Oregon. It is majority Euro-American, reflecting the population of the surrounding community. The town has a population of 19,000 residents, with 86 percent Euro-American, 7 percent Hispanic or Latino, 3 percent Asian, and a total of thirteen residents who listed Black or African American Alone on the census in 2017.[8]

Social activism present in the community of Journey Church is low. Conversations around race and difference are uncommon. It is difficult to describe the local context as it pertains to awareness of local, national, and global current events because there is almost no content to review. Journey Church is not a liturgical community; there are no Prayers of the People or times of intercessory prayer. There is no celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day; there is no acknowledgment of the ongoing struggle for justice in general, not just as it pertains to racial justice. Conversations are often about a person's individual growth or taking next steps with Jesus. Rarely does the

[8] "Diversity," Data USA, accessed June 4, 2019, https://datausa.io/profile/geo/sherwood-or/#demographics.

call move to a corporate or collective response. Because of this, there is a lacking presence of a prophetic voice at Journey Church, so it is not a place where people feel comfortable bringing their pain. There is no practice of lament or confession or the expression of emotion other than joy.

With as low as 1 percent of Journey Church congregants being people of color, the reality of the racial tensions that still exist in the United States are not brought to bear in our communal space. Rather, the problem is disengagement from and indifference toward some of the social issues that are so pertinent and painful in the current cultural climate of the United States. This reality is highlighted in the following story, which occurred in the summer of 2016 and emphasizes the "missed opportunity" reality present at Journey Church.

It was a humid Sunday in July, and Journey Church was meeting at one of the local elementary schools in town as its gathering place. On this particular Sunday, a guest worship leader was invited to come help lead in musical worship, because as a small church plant of 175 or so people at the time, when the worship director was out of town, guest worship leaders were asked to step in for a Sunday. After a few songs, the guest worship leader, who was a white male, transitioned the space to invite people to be more responsive during the next song. He said it was more of a "gospel" song, so everyone should "let out [their] inner black person" and worship along—"clap, dance, whatever you're feeling." In the moment he said that, I felt a tension run up my spine—I froze, I felt a punch in my gut, and I looked around to see if anyone else was feeling uncomfortable.

"Did he just say that?" I thought. "Is that okay? Wait—that's not okay with me. That was really weird. What should I do?" I was running through this inner dialogue, so I leaned over to the person next to me and asked, "Hey, did that make you feel uncomfortable?" Slowly nodding, my friend responded, "Yes, absolutely." The guest finished the song, closed in prayer, and sent on us our way; the tension in the room remained thick until we dispersed to our cars.

In the church newsletter email the following week, Journey Church's pastor rehearsed what had happened during worship, apologizing for the discomfort that may have come as a result of the guest worship leader's comments that previous Sunday. The newsletter communicated clarity for any regular attenders who may have been absent so that they would know the worship leader was not our regular worship pastor but a friend stepping in on her behalf. He apologized for the situation in that email, but it never came up again and has not been mentioned once publicly in the last two years.

Following that occurrence, I met with a friend from Journey Church, who happened to be one of a small handful of people of color who were members there and one of the only two black people who attended regularly. I asked her about how she felt after that Sunday with the guest worship leader, and as anticipated, she said she almost chose to leave and never come back. She cited staying for other reasons, but she decided to follow up with one of the leaders of the church community about this situation.

In her meeting with the leadership, one of the staff members told her that he knew it was a misstep by the guest worship leader. However, as the staff member also talked with another black member of the church community who was not offended, he was surprised that my friend was so impacted by it. Consequently, it was as though the staff

person considered it to be a personal issue for my friend—or at least this was her interpretation in the retelling of the meeting. The situation was ultimately dismissed, and that official apology in the newsletter is the last time there has been any direct commentary or tension regarding race in Journey Church's community.

This author was frustrated by the email apology as it felt like it was thrown from the safe distance and comfort of a computer keyboard. I also found myself frustrated that I had personally done nothing on that Sunday when the situation occurred. Why had I not said something to the leadership? Why did I not I insist on unpacking that experience as a community? Why was I so silent? I was angry that it had happened—I talked to my friends about the audacity of the guest worship leader, about his ignorance, but I had taken zero steps to share my voice at the table with the leadership. I even knew that my friend had been hurt by it, and I reached out to her to try to follow up, but because I never moved forward in bringing the situation to the leadership team, I essentially and effectively had my friend of color absorb the entire experience on my behalf. She then had to deal with my frustration on top of her own pain. Our meeting left me feeling like I had accomplished something simply because I had heard her story, but what I had done was counter-productive to justice and healing.

This case study is one among many that I could relay from my church community wherein the position the community and/or leadership has taken toward a race-related issue is one of indifference, which is one of the significant markers of privilege. Indifference can come as a result of ignorance about a particular issue, but the ability to sit idly by in that ignorance is also the result of privilege. Active engagement and leveraging one's position or voice for others is uncomfortable, whereas passivity and

silence are common and comfortable, particularly in a community whose demographic is overwhelmingly homogenous. A balanced theology of both celebration and suffering in the church, or the resurrection and the cross, respectively, is necessary for majority-culture Christians to move out of indifference. As Soong-Chan Rah writes,

> The theology of celebration which emerges out of the context of affluence and abundance, focuses on the proper management and stewardship of the abundant resources that God has provided. Because there is abundance, the world is viewed as generally good and accommodating to those who are living under the theology of celebration. Life is already healthy, complete and whole. God, therefore, takes on the role of a nurturer and caregiver.[9]

Rah's explanation of a theology of celebration could describe Journey Church's context perfectly. The maintaining of the status quo and the stewarding of the plenty sets the priorities of the church as a whole. As those living in the already/not yet shalom of God, "the intersection between suffering and celebration" is more than a thoughtful suggestion.[10] If those living under a theology of celebration cannot consider the ramifications of a theology of suffering, then there is ultimately no need for the cross or a savior.

A theology of suffering is about survival; it is about *Christus Victor*, the conqueror, and overcomer. The crucifixion is necessary for those who are oppressed, who are treated unjustly, and who find the world to be a hostile and scarce place. What relationship does a church operating under a theology of celebration have to do with any person who suffers? These are not mutually exclusive realities, for even those operating under a theology of celebration desperately need the work of the cross. The intersectionality of a theology of celebration and a theology of suffering is a divine

---

[9] Soong-Chan Rah, The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 153.

[10] Ibid., 146.

imperative for those who would claim the inbreaking shalom of God. Yet for a church operating primarily out of celebration, Journey Church stands at the crossroads confused, because the lived experience of those treated unjustly does not fit inside the frame of our theology. Why do majority-culture Christians so often celebrate the resurrection of Christ almost to the exclusion of his suffering and death on a cross? This author suggests that the cross of Christ and all that it means has been cast into the collective shadow of the Euro-American Church.

As beneficiaries of a system that separates the "haves" from the "have nots," a passive posture toward suffering at its best keeps majority-culture Christians standing still on the moving walkway that is racism.[11] Only an intentional and purposeful turning around and walking in the other direction can interrupt and challenge the flow of things to bring about a prophetic resistance to the status quo that is white privilege. When the apostle Paul admonishes Christians to "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep,"[12] there is inherent in that command the important task of understanding first what it means to weep, to mourn, and to suffer. The context of liberation theology's task is always local; its weeping, mourning, and suffering requires a sense of immediacy in its salvific end. Understanding the work and the insights of liberation theology is a necessary starting place for learning to turn and walk in the other direction, because without the hard work of liberation theologians on behalf of the oppressed, those operating under a theology of celebration do not have language or proximation to the pain of the oppressed in order to understand it.

---

[11] Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision* (Philadelphia, PA: United Church Press, 1976), 31.

[12] Romans 12:15.

Further, although Journey Church is a Free Methodist church (FMC) plant, because of its name, it is unknown by most in the community that it is Free Methodist by denomination. Most assume it is nondenominational because there is little that would outwardly associate us with the Oregon Conference of the FMC. This author suggests that the unknown nature of Free Methodist history and theology as an FMC community results in a lack of foundation and compass moving forward in conversations about the church's role in racial justice. While the Free Methodist Church as a denomination finds its roots in the abolitionist movement, Journey Church is disconnected from that history, as "Free Methodist" is not in the name at Journey Church, is not commonly referenced publicly, and is not a point of reference theologically in sermons or in musical worship. A practice of remembering as well as an acknowledgment of the gap between the past and the present is a necessary piece for moving toward a hopeful future.

The Opportunity: Free Methodism's Foundation

Where the demographics of a community results in homogeneity, churches not only logically reflect that uniformity, they also experience the option toward indifference when it comes to cultural engagement and social responsibility, particularly as it concerns their role in racial justice. That the option of indifference is present is the first marker of privilege. What responsibility does a majority-culture church have in a majority-culture community to engage in the work of racial justice? While the nation is moving toward an increase in diverse populations, many churches continue to remain homogenous, further reinforcing the insulated identity narrative running as a current through systems, people, priorities, and liturgies. Without an anchored theology of suffering and justice, the relationship between the church and culture is informed by the priorities of a majority-

culture church that acts more like a self-interest group than a functioning and responsible member of the larger Body of Christ.

As the white population in the United States begins to decline, the role of minorities in churches becomes paramount. With census projections suggesting that "for youth under 18—the post-millennial population—minorities will outnumber whites in 2020," the racial situation in churches is becoming acute and urgent.[13] By 2045, population projections indicate "the nation will become 'minority white,'" bringing into focus those who have for so long been on the dismissible margins of the church.[14] The urgency in the church surrounds not the majority culture's discomfort with the population realities, but rather with the truth that many of majority-culture churches are in no way impacted by the population shifts. In this way, majority-culture churches are irrelevant, having nothing to say or offer to the current cultural and racial climate.

The Free Methodist (FM) denomination, however, birthed out of an accidental schism with the Methodist Episcopal Church, has historically been a forerunner for justice. Socially engaged, a Free Methodist Church (FMC) context has both the historical foundations and the theological anchoring to become a host for multicultural communities and culturally engaging conversations; however, the racial and ethnic demographics of many FM churches is majority culture. Particularly in suburban and rural contexts in which the demographics of the community are not diverse, FM churches cannot expect to become multiethnic communities. It is logical that in many FMC contexts the demographic of the church community reflects the population of the people

[13] William H. Frey, "The US Will Become 'Minority White' in 2045, Census Projects: Youthful Minorities Are the Engine of Future Growth," *The Avenue* (blog), March 14, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/. See Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

[14] Ibid.

surrounding it. Although United States Census projections indicate that by 2045 the national population will be minority white, majority-culture churches will continue to enjoy the comfort of the cultural lag for years to come, as the diversity explosion will occur first in major United States cities before impacting rural and suburban areas.[15]

Where Euro-American FM churches are concerned, both a historical amnesia and a theological anemia are the ingredients for social disengagement. The Free Methodist Church has largely forgotten both its history and its theology. This author's research seeks to address the gap between the inception of the FMC and its present posture toward social engagement today in hopes of finding a way forward in the work of racial justice. A Free Methodist church cannot begin asking questions about its role in racial justice in a multiethnic society until it can remember its history and reestablish a theological foundation that resets its trajectory moving forward.

---

[15] Frey, "US Will Become."

CHAPTER 2:

THE HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF FREE METHODISM

The historical foundation of the Free Methodist movement lends itself to a trajectory of a lived social holiness; its theological moorings are anchored in an orthopraxy that is bent on welcoming marginalized voices at the table of fellowship in the Church. The heritage of the Free Methodist Church (FMC) assumes a social responsibility in both its theological foundation and its embodied social ethic; however, a gap exists between the denomination's historical foundations and its enacted beliefs in local church bodies in the United States today. To better understand this gap, specifically between the abolitionist movement that accompanied the genesis of the FMC and the homogeneous nature of FMC communities today, this chapter looks first to the historic events and key people that shaped the onset of the FMC.

Next is a review of the theology of the movement, specifically the doctrines of prevenient grace and entire sanctification. These two doctrines illuminate the theology that undergirds the movement, requiring a social ethic that leads to an indivisible personal and public liberation both eschatologically and in the immediate. Finally, in seeking to understand the history of Free Methodism's engagement with the social issue of slavery, is a discussion of liberation theology in its attempt to understand the relationship between Christ and culture. Although engaging with the body of work that comprises liberation theology is challenging because of its vastness and contextual complexity, the voices of those writing amidst the struggle for freedom have something to offer in the gap between FMC's history and its present reality.

John Wesley: Orthodoxy/Orthopraxy

> But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing. Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.
>
> —John Wesley, in a letter to William Wilberforce

From its earliest days, US-American Methodism has been shaped by the theology and practices of John Wesley (1703–1791), an ordained priest in the Church of England, whose ministry of itinerant preaching urged him to bring his "methodist" practices to the United States.[1] Wesley's theology was social in nature; he wrote often of the role of the Church in the plight of the poor, and he is remembered as having preached, "Christianity is essentially a social religion, and…to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it."[2] His understanding of the interconnectedness of life in God required Christians to embody their understanding of personal holiness socially; for Wesley, there was no personal salvation if it was not evidenced in a person's private and public life through virtue, justice, and works of mercy.

In the preface of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Wesley wrote, "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness."[3] While many followers of Wesley take his "social holiness" to imply "social responsibility," there are alternative

---

[1] "Methodist Events and People in American History," Association of Religion Data Archives, accessed April 23, 2018, http://www.thearda.com/timeline/tlDenom20.asp.

[2] James H. Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation in the Black Religious Tradition," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981), 188.

[3] John Wesley, Preface of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: John Wesley and Charles Wesley, 1739), in Eighteenth Century Collections Online (Ann Arbor, MI: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004800840.0001.000.

claims to this interpretation that are worth exploring here. Some would suggest that Wesley's social holiness is separate from social justice entirely and that these two terms have been comingled over the years to become synonymous, which was not Wesley's original intention. In "From Societies to Society: The Shift from Holiness to Justice in the Wesleyan Tradition," Andrew C. Thompson draws a distinction between social holiness and social justice by locating these terms historically. Regarding Wesley's use of social holiness in his *Preface*, Thompson bases his interpretation of Wesley on the grounds of Wesley's own context for writing; he writes,

> [Wesley] takes aim at the mystics once again, using language that evokes images of St. Antony and the early Desert Fathers. He contends specifically that the mystics' understanding of the environmental context of sanctification is badly misguided, or as he puts it, "opposite to that prescribed by Christ." He continues, "[Christ] commands to build up one another. They advise, 'To the desert! to the desert! and God will build you up.'" Recognizing the good of periodic retirement from the world for purposes of prayer or spiritual renewal, Wesley asserts that such a practice is something much different than the sanctification-via-isolation that the mystics teach.[4]

For Thompson, Wesley's social holiness has nothing to do with an ethical implication for Christians but rather with "the environmental context of Christian life in which sanctification can be understood to occur."[5]

Conversely, social justice is a term arriving from the context of Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio in the 1840s, as Taparelli was a contemporary of the industrialization of Europe and the social ramifications of significant economic change. Thomas C. Behr explains Taparelli's concept of social justice as "both a norm and a habit—a social virtue embodied in the political, legal, and cultural institutional conditions obtaining in a given

---

[4] Andrew C. Thompson, "From Societies to Society: The Shift from Holiness to Justice in the Wesleyan Tradition," *Methodist Review* 3 (2011): 160.

[5] Ibid., 161.

society—of promoting the common good by encouraging the free exercise of the rights of persons and particularly of the intermediary associations they freely form to pursue their own good."[6] By highlighting both the historical contexts for Wesley and Taparelli, Thompson underscores the divergence between the two terms social holiness and social justice.

While Thompson's historical work is necessary for rightly interpreting John Wesley in context, the tendency for more progressive Methodists to interpret Wesley's social holiness as meaning social justice, meanwhile more conservative Methodists to interpret Wesley as pertaining to the personal *and* communal environment of sanctification is a moot point. Because these two terms have evolved in their meaning over time, though the definitional debate around the use of these vocabulary terms continues on, the practical value of the discussion is limited. Wesley's own involvement in the social and ethical dilemmas of his time underscores the value of reinterpreting Wesley's use of social holiness according to this particular place and time as pertaining to the work of justice, for if holiness is about the environmental context of the work of sanctification, nowhere is there more acute of an environment for God's sanctifying work than in the work of justice in the world.

Wesley wrote regarding his stance on slavery in the United States in a pamphlet in 1773 entitled, "Thoughts Upon Slavery." According to James L. Gorman in *Slavery's Long Shadow*, for John Wesley, "Slavery could not be reconciled with justice, mercy, or Christianity, and God would atone for the blood of the slaves with the blood of traders

---

[6] Thomas C. Behr, "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice: Rediscovering the Origins of a 'Hollowed' Concept," *Social Justice in Context* 1 (2005): 9.

and owners."[7] Wesley exhorted slave owners to relent from dealing harshly with their slaves and to release them, drawing on their common humanity as the seedbed for extending dignity toward slaves and all people. He writes, "What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as compassion there? Do you never feel another's pain? Have you no sympathy? No sense of human woe?"[8] His letter to William Wilberforce at the age of eighty-six demonstrates his longstanding posture toward slavery in the United States, referring to its practice as "the vilest that ever saw the sun."[9] According to Michael Jagessar, "[John Wesley's] main argument, largely a moral one, was premised on the humanity of the Africans, albeit in a natural Adamic or Edenic state. Hence, the barbaric treatment of humans, even as slaves, was contrary to natural law."[10] As long as there is evidence of Wesley's stance on slavery through his writings, he is consistent in drawing on his belief in dignity for all people as having been made in the image of God.

In his opposition to the practice of slavery, Wesley urged his hearers, "Wealth is not necessary to the glory of any nation; but wisdom, virtue, justice, mercy, generosity, public spirit, love of our country."[11] For slave owners, the loss of wealth seemed an insurmountable deterrent in forfeiting slaves, and Wesley urged his hearers to weigh the cost of the means of gaining wealth in his sermon, "The Use of Money." He instructed,

---

[7] James L. Gorman, "Evangelical Revivalism and Race Relations in the Early National Era," in *Slavery's Long Shadow: Race and Reconciliation in American Christianity*, ed. James L. Gorman, Jeff W. Childers, and Mark W. Hamilton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 25.

[8] John Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Slavery," Evans Early American Imprint Collection (London: Warburton, William, Bp. of Gloucester, 1774), http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N10870.0001.001.

[9] Tomkins, 93.

[10] Michael Jagessar, "Review Article: Critical Reflections on John Wesley, Thoughts Upon Slavery," *Black Theology* 5, no. 2 (2007): 251, doi: 10.1558/blth2007v5i2.250.

[11] Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Slavery."

"We ought not to gain money at the expense of life."[12] Wesley advocated, "Regard not money! All that a man hath will he give for his life? Whatever you lose, lose not your soul: nothing can countervail that loss. Immediately quit the horrid trade: At all events, be an honest man."[13] Wesley saw the practice of slavery as the loss of human life for the slave and the loss of soul for the slave owner—a hefty price to pay for the amassing of wealth. Although John Wesley was staunch in his stance against slavery both theologically and in practice, his followers did not always exercise the same fidelity toward the issue.

While John Wesley's anti-slavery position articulated in "Thoughts Upon Slavery" was culturally controversial, Michael Jagessar's work in critically reviewing Wesley claimed an alternative view that may help explain the gap between Wesley's stance on slavery and his follower's exercise of that position. In *Black Theology*, Jagessar poses that John Wesley's "Thoughts Upon Slavery," and ultimately his posture toward the issue of slavery itself, fell far short of its liberating goal. Jagessar affirms that Wesley's writing "did challenge merchants, captains of slave ships and plantation owners to wake up to the evils of the enslavement of humans"; however, it failed to challenge two of the most powerful institutions of the day: the Church and the Government.[14]

Writing from a British perspective, one can see the parallels to US-American Methodism as Jagessar levies his critique: "Why, after all this glorious kind of transforming theology on which Methodism is grounded, were Methodists in this country

---

[12] John Wesley, "The Use of Money," Wesley Center Online, accessed April 20, 2018, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-50-the-use-of-money/.

[13] Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Slavery."

[14] Jagessar, 250.

less than hospitable (to put it mildly) to the progeny of former enslaved African-Caribbeans?"[15] Further, "Why, if Methodists still continue to revere Wesley and his theology with its high regard for human dignity and equal worth before God, is racism still prevalent among Methodists? And why, in spite of the work of black British theologians, is Methodist theology so frighteningly monochrome?"[16] Here Jagessar's questions are relevant for US-American Methodism, and more specifically for the Free Methodist denomination in the United States today. Perhaps in any given local FMC context in the United States, churches are further removed from understanding the history and heritage they have in Wesley; however, Jagessar's point holds—in many places FMC gatherings are also "frighteningly monochrome."[17]

Although the trickle-down praxis of Wesley's theology often resulted in lasting change for his followers, primarily through his model of classes and bands, Jagessar suggests that his "Thoughts Upon Slavery" fell short of praxis and transformation for his followers in the Methodist movement. Was the gap simply human nature—a failure on the part of Wesley's followers to embody and practice that which Wesley laid out in his culturally controversial tract? Perhaps there is more that must be understood about Wesley than has typically been attributed to his view of slavery. Jagessar contends, "To believe that Wesley had in mind the liberation of enslaved Africans to live a life of genuine freedom as they wished is erroneous. Freedom (which was not removed from progressive enlightenment) actually meant to become and imitate somebody else (that is, White British/European)—internalizing white Christian moral precepts, more subtle

---

[15] Jagessar, 251.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

forms of coercion."[18] Here Jagessar suggests that Wesley did not intend full freedom for slaves as many of Wesley's interpreters applaud him for, but instead Wesley's intention was for slaves to embody a form of cultural Christianity in order to be accepted by the majority-culture church.

While Jagessar's critique is a valuable counterpoint, it is difficult to locate in Wesley's life or writings any semblance of an expectation of assimilation—"to become and imitate somebody else (that is, White British/European)," as Jagessar contends.[19] John Wesley's understanding of scriptural holiness meant that his concept of conversion had little to do with assimilating to a specific form of cultural Christianity. To interpret Wesley on these grounds would be to read the present state of things back into Wesley, revising his staunch review of both the abuse of slaves as well as the institution of slavery. When compared to Wesley's contemporaries, Wesley was far more outspoken, not only in regards to the abuse of human life, but also in regards to the entire institution itself. Although worth a pause for consideration, Jagessar's unsubstantiated claims cause one to wonder about a tendency and temptation Methodists have to lean toward one of two poles: either Methodists proudly claim Wesley as a spiritual father who justly landed on the right side of history in relation to slavery, or Methodists scapegoat him in order to locate the responsibility historically for the alloyed nature of Methodism today. Despite this tendency toward either tokenizing Wesley or blaming him, as history will demonstrate, Wesley continued to take an unapologetic and controversial stance, particularly in comparison to his contemporaries.

---

[18] Jagessar, 255.

[19] Ibid., 225.

For example, one can track the amalgamated view of George Whitefield, who shared with Wesley the position against slavery's abuses but who differed sharply with Wesley on slavery's institution. Brendlinger writes, "[Whitefield] lobbied for the introduction of slavery in the colony of Georgia and when it was legalized he became the owner of some fifty slaves on the land that housed his orphanage, Bethesda."[20] In a letter written to Wesley in 1751, Whitefield explains, "Though liberty is a sweet thing to such as are born free, yet to those who never knew the sweets of it slavery, perhaps, may not be so irksome."[21] The maddening nature of this kind of reasoning suggests that, for example, if a person has never seen the light, then he or she does not know they are in the dark. However, humans inherently know what freedom is, and on these grounds of liberty, having been created in the image of God, Wesley disagreed sharply with his contemporaries. Although the contrast between Whitefield and Wesley is sharp, to a lesser degree one can trace the compromise that Wesley's followers, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, made with culture on the issue of slavery. These concessions began to occur during Wesley's lifetime.

Syncretism in the Methodist Episcopal Church

In December of 1784, the Christmas Conference was established in Baltimore, Maryland, and Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury were ordained as the first bishops of the US-American Methodist movement and at that time reaffirmed their stance against

---

[20] Irv A. Brendlinger, Social Justice Through the Eyes of Wesley: John Wesley's Theological Challenge to Slavery (Peterborough, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2006), 57.

[21] Ibid.

slavery.[22] After outlining their anti-slavery position at the conference and articulating the steps in the next year that would guide the movement toward the emancipation of slaves, Coke and Asbury received highly critical feedback. One of the stringent rules they proposed at the conference was a vote to dismiss any person who owned slaves if they had already received a warning and if it was legal in their state to emancipate them. The result of this vote created such great turmoil that Coke and Asbury found their lives in danger. Fearing that "slave owners would no longer allow access to their slaves, effectively shutting off evangelism and the teaching of the faith," the rule was suspended at the following conference in Baltimore in 1785."[23] While Brendlinger argues that the reversal of the rule in 1785 resulted in the "acquiescing of the church to the prevailing culture," it would seem that Coke and Asbury showed themselves fiercely opposed to slavery until around 1804 when the issue of slavery was removed completely from *The Discipline*.[24]

The leaders of this fledgling Methodist movement in the United States were walking a tightrope in terms of how they understood the relationship between Christ and culture. This was not an easy time to lead; Coke and Asbury were forced to make a difficult decision: Do they draw a hard line against slavery and risk losing access to preaching the Gospel to the slaves, or do they hold their position against slavery and continue working the long road toward emancipation? In his journal, Thomas Coke wrote about the delicacy of the times: "I bore a public testimony against slavery, and have

---

[22] "Thomas Coke's Anti-Slavery Resolution: Christmas Conference," Association of Religion Data Archives, accessed April 20, 2018, http://www.thearda.com/timeline/events/event_171.asp.

[23] Brendlinger, 59.

[24] *The Discipline* is the official publication of the FMC with its doctrinal statements and polity.

found out a method of delivering it without much offence, or at least without causing a tumult."[25] It is noteworthy here to also include that along with losing access to evangelizing slaves, Coke and Asbury risked losing numbers in their churches. Many pastors were slave owners; many committed, tithing churchgoers were slave owners. It would seem that their decision would greatly impact the fledgling Methodist movement in the United States, perhaps limiting its efficacy or even ending the movement entirely. The suspension of the rules in 1785 may be seen as the first compromise that the US-American Methodist movement made with the majority culture.

During this time, Richard Allen, now known as the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), purchased his freedom in 1783 and was preaching and teaching in Philadelphia at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church to the fifty-member African American community attending.[26] This service was held at five o'clock in the morning, separate from regular morning services for the white members of the church. When Allen and his constituents began attending the regular morning service at St. George's, segregated seating was instituted, and in reaction, Allen and the other African American Methodists eventually walked out. As Allen and his parishioners soon discovered at St. George's, "When it came to questions of the exercise of leadership or control over property, white power was the almost invariable rule," resulting in an undermining of their leadership and place in the community.[27] An independent church had to be formed, and Asbury supported this endeavor among African American

---

[25] Brendlinger, 59.

[26] Priscilla Pope-Levison, "Allen, Richard (1760–1831)," Black Past, October 18, 2007, http://www.blackpast.org/aah/allen-richard-pennsylvania-1760-1831.

[27] Gorman, Slavery's Long Shadow, 35.

Methodists by ordaining Richard Allen as the deacon of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME).

Despite strong support for the abolitionist movement and antislavery sentiments in the 1780s and 1790s and his ordination of Richard Allen of the AME church, by 1809 Asbury compromised his abolitionist position, insisting that "the salvation of the souls of the slaves was finally more important than [their] emancipation."[28] It is worth mentioning again that the softened position against slavery in US-American Methodism had a two-fold impetus: evangelizing the slaves and the fear of losing numbers and social status. James L. Gorman writes, "White evangelical leaders, who focused on building their quickly-growing denominations, compromised to conciliate their newly won slaveholding adherents; what they condemned as satanic in 1800, they had learned to tolerate by 1810."[29] The placating of slaveholders early on in the American Methodist movement resulted in a rupture between white US-American Methodists and black US-American Methodists.

Evidence for cultural accommodation began in 1785 with the Christmas Conference in Baltimore; from that point forward concessions continued to be made in US-American Methodism, slowly compromising with power and accommodating culture by varying degrees. Eventually, Asbury abandoned his staunch position of the early 1780s, writing in his journal: "Would not an *amelioration* in the condition and treatment of slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans than any attempt at their *emancipation*?...What is the personal liberty of the African which he may abuse, to

---

[28] William B. Gravely, "African American Methodism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. James E. Kirby and William J. Abraham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 116, 7, http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093.oxfordhb/9780199696116.001.0001/oxfordhb978019969.

[29] Gorman, Slavery's Long Shadow, 37.

the salvation of his soul; how may it be compared?"[30] While it would seem that amelioration, as a basic solution for the church's tangle with slavery, could be a temporary solution to the quandary, what Asbury might not have been able to see was how the enrichment of the lives of slaves resulted in their further abuse. Improving the quality of life of slaves through education, for example, resulted in their ability to read abolitionist materials. Slave owners believed that the more educated the slaves became, the greater the likelihood of revolt, as seen in the Vesey Revolt in South Carolina in 1822 and Nat Turner's Rebellion in Virginia in 1831.

The perhaps well-intentioned nature of Asbury and other Christians at the time to simply improve the lives of slaves without emancipating them resulted in a deep betrayal that extended beyond race and into the church. By and large, racism and the church were indivisibly intertwined. To hold a position outside of a hardline approach was betrayal for black Christians in the United States. Taking a soft position on the issue of slavery would have, for all intents and purposes, resulted in the support of slavery. The issue of slavery in US-American society at the time was an either/or, for or against reality. Amelioration in this sense must be viewed as a cowardly cop-out; a true spirit of abolition in the church would have moved beyond the best of intentions and into immediate action.

Christian slave owners and preachers committed some of the most terrible occurrences of brutality and abuse of slaves. Susan Boggs, a former slave, recalls, "The man that baptized me had a colored woman tied up in his yard to whip when he got home [after preaching]."[31] Mrs. Joseph Smith echoes that the harshest masters were Christians:

---

[30] Gorman, Slavery's Long Shadow, 36.

[31] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 167.

"The Christians will oppress you more … I would rather be with a card-player or sportsman, by half, than a Christian."[32] In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacob reflects, "I supposed that religion had a purifying effect on the character of men; but the worst persecutions I endured from him were after he was a communicant."[33] She continued,

> No wonder the slaves sing,
> 'Ole Satan's church is here below;
> Up to God's free church I hope to go.[34]

That Harriet Jacob distinguished between "'Ole Satan's church" and "God's free church" is a reflection of the ways in which Christian religion among slaveholders intensified the poor treatment of slaves.

It is not difficult to find account after account of the condition of slaves growing more extreme and inhumane the more religious their slave owner, particularly when the slave owner was a Christian or a pastor. The comingling and downward cycle of racism and shame on the part of Christian slave owners only intensified the brutality. It is as though there was a quickening of conscience toward Wesley's understanding of the divine image in each person; a Christian slave owner's denial and rejection of that image of God in another person resulted in more anger and increased violence toward slaves. In his narrative, Frederick Douglass writes,

> Revivals of religion and revivals in the slave-trade go hand in hand together. The slave prison and the church stand near each other. …The dealers in the bodies and souls of men erect their stand in the presence of the pulpit, and they mutually help

---

[32] Ibid., 166.

[33] Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Random House, 2000), 204.

[34] Ibid., 205.

> each other. The dealer gives his blood-stained gold to support the pulpit, and the pulpit, in return, covers his infernal business with the garb of Christianity.[35]

The sense that the US-American church and institution of slavery were in bed together is glaringly obvious. Any softened, amelioration-intentioned approach to slavery did not have the efficacy, the purchasing power, to embody a prophetic voice or liberating spirit.

The impact of this level of betrayal is far-reaching for black Christians in early US-American Methodism. To prioritize a liberty of soul to the exclusion of a liberty of body was to confirm an insidious divorce in the church between the physical and spiritual. Asbury's contention for amelioration for slaves instead of emancipation demonstrates the problem of power already present in US-American Methodism at this time. It is not up to the powers that be in the church to decide what kind of liberty is sufficient for a person. Improvement of a slave's situation still results in slavery and an inability to be responsible for one's own life and situation. If John Wesley were alive for the first two decades of the new century, he would have had something to say to the leaders of early US-American Methodism. Brendlinger contends, "It is safe to project that he would have responded to Asbury's concessions with, 'better no Methodist growth than growth procured by compromise with men butchers, men stealers and slave owners, the spring that puts the rest all in motion.'"[36] For John Wesley, compromising with slave owners was too great a sacrifice to make for the mere numerical growth of the US-American Methodist movement.

During this time of difficult decision making in the US-American Methodist movement in regards to slavery, the divide between the spiritual and physical continued

---

[35] Douglass and Jacobs, 108.

[36] Brendlinger, 62.

to deepen, dividing the "spiritual mission to the slaves" from the "condemnation of slavery."[37] Asbury's decision inaugurated a new framework that prioritized evangelizing slaves without specifically seeking their liberation, supposing that the salvation of slaves was more significant than their physical freedom. By the 1850 general conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, thirty-four of the forty-seven southern delegates were actively participating in slaveholding practices.[38] Ironically, this is a far cry from John Wesley's understanding of Christianity as a social religion. The Methodist Church in the United States was stained by the seemingly impracticable endeavor of un-wedding the church from the economic reality wherein "cotton had become king."[39] Rather than suffer the financial fallout of Wesley's abolitionist approach, the Methodist Episcopal Church accommodated the culture instead, resulting in an amalgamation that stood in direct conflict with Wesley's understanding of holiness and sanctification entirely.

Despite the syncretism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Richard Allen continued his work in the AME based on the theological foundation established by John Wesley, being, as Allen reflected, "so 'confident that there was no religious sect or denomination [that] would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodist.'"[40] That Richard Allen continued to call himself a Christian and lead the AME amid the betrayal that black Methodists were experiencing is as prophetic as it is courageous. Gorman extends Raboteau in reflecting, "Blacks could accept Christianity because they rejected the white version with its trappings of slavery and caste for a purer

---

[37] Gravely, 7.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation," 241.

[40] Ibid., 187.

and more authentic gospel."[41] It is this authentic gospel to which B. T. Roberts and his followers sought to return.

B. T. Roberts, Charles Finney, and the Abolitionist Movement

Three streams emerged in the abolitionist movement, accommodating culture by varying degrees. The "ultraist view" understood all slaveholding as a sin against God and humanity, and those who participated "had no further rights to fellowship in the believing community."[42] The second view agreed with the first but held that slavery ought to be abolished through proper channels of government and legislation, so this view had more patience for the process than the ultraist view. The third view asserted that "Gradually, without radical upheaval," slaves "could be assisted educationally, religiously, culturally, until slavery was abolished."[43] This view valued what could be done for slaves in the meantime over and against the urgent pursuit of abolition in the immediate. While there were many white Methodists at the time that resonated with the abolitionist movement, one pastor, B. T. Roberts, emerged as having taken hold of the ultraist view with an undivided constancy.

In a poem to his sister Florilla entitled "Am I not a Woman and a Sister?" B. T. Roberts writes:

> To my dear Sister
> The voice of a Female Slave
> 'Am I not a woman and a sister'?
> Yet have I not that form divine

---

[41] Gorman, Slavery's Long Shadow, 37.

[42] James Arnold Reinhard, "Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church: 1852–1860" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1971), 102.

[43] Ibid.

Which God to all mankind hath given?
Is not that soul immortal mine
Which e'er must dwell in hell or Heaven?
Abides there not within my breast
Devotion pure Affection deep?
Oppression's rod can ne'er arrest
Those powers of soul that never sleep.[44]

It is B. T. Roberts' understanding of the "form divine" and "those powers of soul" in every person that caused him to regard the practice of slavery as abhorrent, leading to his criticism of the backslidden Methodist Episcopal Church. Because B. T. Roberts was an abolitionist before he was ever a Christian, the unalloyed nature of his religion is worth investigating.

B. T. Roberts' father, Titus, experienced conversion to the Christian faith in the mid-1830s by way of the revival that swept through the country in connection to Charles Finney and the Second Great Awakening.[45] Titus' coming to faith at such a time through Finney's influence is significant; the timing between his conversion and the influence of the abolitionist movement was nearly concurrent. Because B.T. Roberts was a young abolitionist before his conversion to faith in Christ, his antislavery views would have been deeply established. A juvenile antislavery society was formed in 1838; it is likely that Roberts had a connection to this group by age fifteen, and "may well have been a member" of the society.[46]

As a contemporary source of influence on both Titus and B. T. Roberts, Charles Finney's role in the abolitionist cause necessitates evaluation. As a revivalist, Finney's

---

[44] Howard Snyder, Populist Saints: B. T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 34.

[45] Ibid., 22.

[46] Ibid., 44.

impact on the antislavery cause is both extensive and problematic. He "made opposition to slavery an aspect of Christian discipleship," going so far as to claim that "those who owned slaves were not Christians."[47] Finney did much to advance the work of the abolitionist movement in urging Christians to abandon slaveholding practices completely. In contrast, however, Finney eventually disavowed the movement, because he felt that its cause "had grown too big" and had become "a detriment to evangelism."[48] He ultimately rejected the movement because of its distraction from the work of converting people to faith in Christ. This is precisely the compromise Francis Asbury made years earlier in 1809—a sectarian approach to Christ and culture that excuses the Church from engaging holiness socially, from dirtying its hands in the economic and thus systemic affairs of humanity. The vision of salvation for Finney was more eschatological, not pertaining to human dignity or freedom in the immediate.

Finney believed that slaveholding was a sin but did not believe that racial prejudice or segregation were sins. Finney's prioritization of conversion over the social and moral issue of human dignity and freedom is noteworthy, because this view, a divorce between the spiritual and physical, has embedded itself into the fabric of the evangelical landscape. This divorce was seen earlier in George Whitefield's reflections in a letter to John Wesley in 1751:

> I had no hand in bringing them [slaves] into Georgia, though my judgment was for it, and I strongly importuned thereto….Now this is done, let us diligently improve the present opportunity for their instruction. It rejoiced my soul to hear that one of my poor Negroes in Carolina was made a brother in Christ. How know we but we may have many such instances in Georgia! I trust many of them will be

---

[47] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32.

[48] Ibid., 32–33.

> brought to Jesus, and this consideration, as to us, swallows up all temporal inconveniences whatsoever.[49]

Whitefield's reflections to Wesley in 1751 are the precursor to the Second Great Awakening in the United States. Perhaps by "temporal inconveniences" Whitefield meant the complication of preaching to the slaves, or perhaps by "temporal inconveniences" he meant the institution of slavery itself; in either case, what can be seen through Whitefield's reflections to Wesley is a compromise whose offspring bore a bifurcated belief in the eternal convenience of "soul-winning" over and against the "temporal inconvenience" of slavery.[50]

In many ways the culture forced the hand of the Church; the Church was not on the forward edge of culture, deciding in advance how much of the Gospel it would value; instead, the US-American Methodist movement at the time became reactive to culture, responding essentially with a cost-benefit analysis in its weighing in on the institution of slavery and the role of the infantile and fledgling church in the United States. It is this divorce between the physical and spiritual that the US-American Quakers sought to repair fifty years or so prior and that B. T. Roberts made the focus of his reforming efforts in the Methodist Episcopal Church, resulting in the establishment of the Free Methodist Church as it is today. Intent on avoiding a church split, Roberts and others sought the reformation of the contaminated Methodist denomination mainly through their writings on holiness, including antislavery appeals.

---

[49] Brendlinger, 57–58.

[50] Ibid., 57–58.

A Return to Scriptural Holiness

According to Bishop Wilson T. Hogue of the Free Methodist Church, B. T. Roberts and the other originators of the FMC sought to address the lack of Scriptural holiness they saw evidenced in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Hogue called this a "gradualism in perfection," citing "worldliness, slavery and secret societies" as examples of backsliding.[51] The pew rental system in place also resulted in elitism, division, and disunity in the church. Roberts intended to confront these issues surrounding social holiness through many of his writings, hoping to address the "decline in spirituality and discipline, and doctrinal drift regarding entire sanctification."[52] As an abolitionist, Roberts was radical, determined to side with the oppressed. He wrote, "The Bible is a Radical book. It never proposes halfway measures. The word radical comes from *radix* [root]—and the Bible always goes to the root of the matter."[53] For Roberts, a return to Scriptural holiness meant a radical approach that was intolerant of sin in society or church. There was no halfway measure when it came to holiness.

As a contributor to the weekly paper, the *Northern Independent*, Roberts was known widely in Methodist circles in western New York as an abolitionist because of this publication. The *Northern Independent* was established in 1857 when the official Methodist publication, the *Northern Christian Advocate*, sought to rid its writing of another ultraist anti-slavery proponent, editor William Hosmer.[54] The writings in these

---

[51] Reinhard, 8.

[52] Snyder, xvi.

[53] Ibid., 36.

[54] Reinhard, 105.

publications are important to note because through them the ultraist anti-slavery position came to be widely circulated in Methodist circles. For example, one such editorial included the heroic story of a slave mother who killed one of her children once she realized their efforts to flee had failed. Noting this as "justifiable homicide," editor William Hosmer wrote, "We believe no man or woman is fitted to be the possessor or guardian of personal freedom, who is not nerved by about the same amount of courage, and actuated by the same invincible determination to die rather than be enslaved."[55] These progressive views by Roberts, Hosmer, and others were seen as radical and crusading. For these originators of the FMC, however, their views espoused "an uncompromising practical Christianity" in keeping with what they believed to be evidenced throughout Scripture.[56]

B. T. Roberts was eventually tried by the Methodist Episcopal denomination and expelled in 1858 for his article entitled "New School Methodism," which was published in the *Northern Independent*, and although that particular article does not address slavery directly, it "decries a backslidden Methodism."[57] When asked about his expulsion, however, Roberts cited that the reasoning had to do predominantly with "striving to have slave-holders excluded from the Church."[58] Although the Methodist Episcopal denomination cited his "New School Methodism" article as the grounds for his expulsion, Roberts knew that his dismissal largely had to do with his challenging of slaveholding practices in the church.

---

[55] Ibid., 108.

[56] Ibid., 103.

[57] Ibid., 113.

[58] Ibid., 134.

Returning to an orthopraxy that would have cheered the heart of John Wesley, B. T. Roberts and his "Scriptural holiness" cohort found themselves in an accidental schism with the Methodist Episcopal Church on all matters pertaining to the lived social ethic that was germane to the origins of US-American Methodism. According to Howard Snyder,

> "Free" specifically meant freedom from slaveholding and, by implication, freedom for slaves and the end of slavery, as well as freedom from the spiritually numbing influence slavery had in the church. Thus it is accurate historically to say that the "Free" in Free Methodist signifies freedom from slavery, oppression, and racial discrimination, as well as free seats and freedom of the Spirit.[59]

This orthopraxy that characterized the onset of the Free Methodist Church, this "right practice," has everything to do with a lived ethic that embodies social holiness—the expression of holy love toward God and toward neighbor that can only be the result of a grace that enables human response to God and of sanctification in the life of the believer. This quickening grace cannot be the offspring of the spiritual/physical divorce that symbolizes the US-American Methodist movement in its leaning away from the hard decisions that culture forces it to make. This orthopraxy cannot be dualistic in nature; to be liberated personally through salvation in Christ is to be liberated socially, publicly, corporately, politically, and collectively. To understand how Free Methodist theology lends itself toward liberation as its chief end, one must understand John Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace and sanctification.

---

[59] Snyder, 486.

Prevenient Grace and Sanctification

In the common struggle for justice, John Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace is paramount, because it draws on God's enabling humans to respond to conscience and natural law regardless of spiritual motivation, intention, or influence. Because of that created ability to respond to God, according to British Methodist theologian William Burt Pope, it is the theology of prevenient grace that "lights up the whole sphere of ethics," drawing individuals to respond to the work of the Spirit with the hope of justice for all.[60] Pope defines prevenient grace as God's Spirit at work within humanity, "regardless of people's religious beliefs or lack thereof."[61] It is John Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace that pushes back against the dualistic spiritual/physical dynamic that was so prevalent in the church at the time. In honoring the image of God that is ascribed to every person, the doctrine of prevenient grace puts trust in the quickening ability of God's Spirit to stir humans toward action and to "fuller expressions of justice, mercy and truth in society."[62]

More specifically, an embrace of John Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace results in a tireless ethic that acknowledges and champions God's work amongst the vulnerable, marginalized, and oppressed of society, because prevenient grace recognizes that there is no hopeless situation or cause beyond God's ability to heal, redeem, and restore. From a human perspective, the depravity of people and the brokenness of systems of power lead to hopelessness and a nearsighted Gospel. In contrast, the doctrine

---

[60] David Field, "The Unrealised Ethical Potential of the Methodist Theology of Prevenient Grace," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71, no. 1 (January 2015): 2.

[61] Ibid., 5.

[62] Ibid., 6.

of prevenient grace expects that "the Spirit is more particularly present amongst those who suffer, who are rejected and downtrodden. It is here that the Spirit groans with the suffering and works to heal, to transform and to empower them to become God's agents of change."[63] An embrace of the doctrine of prevenient grace results in a fuller expression of justice, as those who are suffering become the change agents in transforming society to reflect God's imagination of justice in the world.

In regards to the issue of slavery, John Wesley understood its system as unjust and believed that God was more present with the suffering and the wounded. It was incomprehensible to him that Christians would be participants in this dehumanizing work, and the doctrine of prevenient grace would have turned the entire system of slavery on its head, resulting in an ethic that "places the margins of human society at the center of our ethical concern."[64] That a denomination birthed out of this kind of theology—the Methodist Episcopal Church—could have misinterpreted Wesley on this point, or perhaps forgotten it in such a short time, seems outrageous. The compromise with culture began in the early 1800s with the first bishops, and by the mid-1800s there seems to be almost no memory of Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace or the societal implications of such a theology. At the heart of Free Methodist theology is a requisite practice of remembering the social responsibility embedded in a belief that the Spirit of God is at work enabling individuals to respond to his grace.

In regards to Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, to be sanctified is to be liberated from sin, and with varying points of view regarding the process and timing of

---

[63] Field, 6.

[64] Ibid., 7.

sanctification, John Wesley's understanding of entire sanctification expected that God could, in a moment, bring down the whole "house" of sin at once, or He could also bring about liberation in a more progressive way, "brick by brick." If the goal of entire sanctification is for the human heart to be bent toward holy love of God and love of neighbor, then for Wesley, there is great expectation that new birth in Christ must inherently result in liberation from sin in the life of the believer. At this point one must understand that the doctrines of prevenient grace and entire sanctification lead one to reconsider the voices of the marginalized as they are brought into focus in the Free Methodist movement. Perhaps reflection on the emphases of the black church in the United States, and specifically black Methodism, is necessary to understand the repercussions of the cultural compromise the Methodist Episcopal Church made in the 1800s.

Liberation: A Wedded Physical and Spiritual

When Richard Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church and was ordained deacon in 1799, the necessity of a church specifically for African Americans became a clearer and more urgent reality. In reflection on early American Methodism, James H. Cone, who wrote prolifically on Black Liberation Theology writes, "The central difference between black and white Methodism was and is the refusal of black people to reconcile racism and social injustice with the experience of conversion and new birth. We do not believe it is possible to be sanctified and a racist at the same time."[65] In Cone's reflections on the social imperatives and expectations of Christians, it is not difficult to

[65] Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation," 188.

hear John Wesley's theology bleeding through. He speaks of conversion, new birth, and sanctification, each of which has its place in Wesley's order of salvation, *ordo salutis*.

For black Methodism, spiritual liberation was inextricably tied to political and social liberation. In this light, black religion, in general, came to espouse the goal of a praxeological faith in God. Orthopraxy and orthodoxy were wed in an indissolubly vital union that had an eschatological vision of human freedom and its anticipated participation in the Divine life. Cone continues, "Black religion…is a spiritual vision of the reconstruction of a new humanity in which people are no longer defined by oppression, but by freedom."[66] For Cone, "Sanctification *is* liberation," but what about for whites in the Church?[67] From what have they been liberated? How can personal and private liberation hold gravity and meaning if collectively there are still groups defined not by freedom but by oppression?

At this juncture, in its history, white Methodism must be understood as that which has sought to reconcile the sin of racism with a person's individual experience of conversion to Christ. But these two things are incompatible. The commonplace indifference of white Methodism "led to the creation of a white spirituality that is culturally determined by American values"—Euro-American, majority-culture values complicit with attempts to divorce the physical from the spiritual—the struggle for human freedom, and the push toward evangelization.[68] But "black religion…refuses to

---

[66] Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation," 189.

[67] Ibid., 190.

[68] Ibid., 188.

accept any view of sanctification that substitutes inward piety for social justice."[69] The necessity of social justice in early black Methodism was its moment-by-moment reality. There was no personal liberation without a hoped-for communal liberation, and the struggle toward that end continues on today in churches all over the United States.

In his work *The Embourgeoisement of the Free Methodist Ethos*, Robert Walter Wall identifies the two components that gave rise and shape to early Free Methodism: self-denial and the spirit of abolition. In reflection on the changes to Free Methodism's *Discipline* throughout its history, Wall suggests that one can pull a thread through its edits to evaluate its present reality against its founding values, particularly as those edits to *The Discipline* pertain to the theology of entire sanctification. He writes,

> The [*Discipline*] reflects the growing bifurcation of private and public worlds within [Free Methodism]…Such a bifurcation is evidence of *embourgeoisement—i.e.,* the movement of a prophetic community, which stood on society's margins with its poor and powerless, toward society's mainstream. This movement demands at least public conformity to the political and economic agendas of its middle class. In this sense, [Free Methodism] has become the very kind of denomination against which it once reacted and which it sought to revive.[70]

Here Wall pulls in Max Weber's cyclical concept of *embourgeoisement* in his *The Society of Religion*, helping Free Methodists to make sense of the gap between the genesis of the FMC and its present reality today. While *The Discipline,* during the civil rights movement, for example, would reflect a more distinct position than other conservative Christian denominations at the time, "affirming the equal worth of all persons" and pledging "a determined effort to eliminate the unchristian practice of racial

---

[69] Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation," 190.

[70] Robert Walter Wall, "The Embourgeoisement of the Free Methodist Ethos: A Content-Analysis of the Free Methodist Discipline's Idea of the 'Christian Life,'" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 25 (1990): 127.

discrimination and injustice," the growing pressure from embourgeoisement perhaps led to inaction on the part of Free Methodists during this time.[71] It would seem that the sense of betrayal experienced by black Christians during Asbury's leadership of US-American Methodism comes full circle.

No longer standing on society's margins with the poor and powerless, the embourgeoisement of the FMC banked on its good intentions as enough to withstand its conformity to mainstream culture. The idea that once in a place of power and cultural dominance, the FMC would use its position to leverage good for the margins only resulted in deeper betrayal. What began with Wesley, was "embourgeoised" with Asbury, and sought a resurrection through B. T. Roberts, leaves Free Methodism with the broken-up pieces and scattered histories that carry the hope of a lived theology without the legs to move it toward the lived social ethic embodied through John Wesley's preaching and writings.

Conclusion

John Wesley's theology and practice are the foundation of the Free Methodist Church, beginning with the faithful protest of B. T. Roberts and others who insisted on a lived Scriptural holiness evidenced in social distinctiveness from the cultural milieu. However, the expected praxeological outcome of Wesley's theology is absent from many Free Methodist Churches today. Today it is easier to identify the white spirituality and Euro-American values present in a church community than it is to identify the ways in which the church has been liberated from the majority culture. The lack of awareness around social justice issues in majority-culture Free Methodist Churches may be

[71] Wall, 124.

perceived as numbness toward the collective pain experienced by non-majority-culture brothers and sisters. Without a shared table to suffer with, majority-culture Christians are in the dark about those whose reality is still defined by oppression and not by freedom. If Cone is right that "sanctification *is* liberation," then majority-culture FM churches must either abandon Wesley's theology of entire sanctification, or acknowledge that US-American churches are still a people defined by oppression.[72]

Although B. T. Roberts founded the FMC with an abolitionist pulse as its heartbeat, "There is little evidence to prove that in subsequent years Roberts and his followers showed continuing creative concern for blacks."[73] It would seem that the integration of John Wesley's theology into practice fell far short of its intended goal; according to Jürgen Moltmann, as extended by Theodore Runyon, "*The new criterion of theology and of faith is to be found in praxis.*…Truth must be practicable. Unless it contains initiative for the transformation of the world, it becomes a myth of the existing world."[74] What accounts for the gap between the abolitionist history of the FMC's foundation and its culturally apathetic reality today has to do with a dualistic physical/spiritual divorce that is identified in Asbury and the great revivalists in the United States, as well as a theological amnesia and anemia when it comes to interpreting and integrating Wesley. An integration of Wesley's theology requires a look at those places in the Church where liberation is applied both to the physical and spiritual as well as to the individual and collective.

---

[72] Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation," 190.

[73] Reinhard, 104.

[74] Theodore Runyon, "Introduction: Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981), 9–10.

CHAPTER 3:

A NEO-FREE METHODISM: TOWARD A LIVED THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

Considering the socially situated Gospel of Free Methodism, the connection between the theology of John Wesley and the movement toward liberation is evident. That the African Methodist Episcopal Church found a friend in Wesley is striking, for Wesley, a highly educated white male, must have understood his reality from the standpoint of the oppressor. Yet Wesley seemed to have positioned himself as an advocate of the oppressed, attempting to stand in solidarity with those on the margins of society.

After deviating from the Methodist Episcopal Church on issues surrounding slaveholding and a lived scriptural holiness, Free Methodism grew and developed as a denomination with a strong social conscience. Although many Free Methodist churches today are comprised of the majority culture in their demographic, historically speaking, the seeds of Free Methodism's social ethic are still relevant and brought to bear on today's culture.

US-American Methodism's historical divorce between the spiritual and the physical, "the spiritual mission to the slaves" from "the condemnation of slavery," poses for us an eschatological question regarding the role of the Church and the chief end of humanity.[1] Is the freedom of God—from sin and a future spiritual death—primarily spiritual or does it also have immediate and physical implications for the present life as well? If so, are those implications economic? Are they political? Are they social?

---

[1] William B. Gravely, "African American Methodism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. James E. Kirby and William J. Abraham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7, http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093.oxfordhb/9780199696116.001.0001/oxfordhb9780199696116.

In seeking to mend the dualistic gap of that spiritual/physical divorce, it is important to define what it means to be poor, to be oppressed, and to be liberated. While these are often used as spiritual terms, they are also significantly physical. The failure of early US-American Methodism was to define these terms only as spiritual, reflecting the impact of the dominant culture's power and privilege on the movement. While there was an awareness of the stalemate between slavery and the church, there was a lack of movement toward liberation and a resulting comprise. Perhaps defining *oppressed*, *liberated*, and *poor* merely as spiritual realities removed early US-American Methodism from the abuse and sting of slavery, discharging the responsibility elsewhere. A disembodied spirituality has hope only for the afterlife; it has no legs or feet to move toward hope in the present.

In the preface to his work, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman asks a profound and fitting question that remains to be answered: "Why is it that Christianity seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively, with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race?"[2] I argue here that its impotence is first a theological problem—one birthed from a Western and individually-oriented worldview that is anemic and ultimately powerless to answer the problem of suffering. If John Wesley is right in advocating, "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness," then the current social-less Gospel must be something other than the Gospel of Christ.[3] Reflection on the theology birthed out of an oppressed people is necessary in order to answer Thurman's critical question: "Is there any help to be

---

[2] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), preface.

[3] John Wesley, Preface of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: John Wesley and Charles Wesley, 1739), in Eighteenth Century Collections Online (Ann Arbor, MI: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004800840.0001.000.

found for the disinherited in the religion of Jesus?"[4] If there is, it has present and future, physical and spiritual implications for the theology and praxis of Free Methodism.

No Justice, No Peace

> Social justice is a redundant statement. There is no justice that isn't social, and what we want is a justice that is a living, breathing justice.
>
> —DeRay Mckesson, Portland, OR, 2018

DeRay Mckesson, author, civil rights activist, and a leading voice in the Black Lives Matter movement, expressed in his talk, "The Other Side of Freedom," the need for truth to precede reconciliation. Far too often, those in the majority culture begin moving toward reconciliation long before people of color have had the opportunity to express the truth of the pain behind their lived experience. Mckesson entered the truth-telling scene when Michael Brown Jr. was shot seven times and killed in the street by police in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. Mckesson left his home in Minnesota and his steady job as a math teacher in order to participate in the protests in Ferguson. He said he intended to stay in Ferguson for one to two weeks, but those one to two weeks turned into 400 days. During the height of the protests, Mckesson shared that they could not stand still for more than five seconds at a time, or the police would arrest them. He said they were hungry and living out of cars, but they were energized by a passion to tell the truth of their lived experience. Mckesson said the mantra in Ferguson became, "No justice, no peace!" as they marched and shouted to be heard. Most poignantly, Mckesson expressed, "Social

---

[4] Thurman, 47.

justice is a redundant statement. There is no justice that isn't social, and what we want is a justice that is a living, breathing justice."[5]

Mckesson's words are reminiscent of the theological pulse of John Wesley, who said, "Christianity is essentially a social religion, and…to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it."[6] Wesley's belief in the social nature of religion became something of an ultimatum for his followers. In his preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Wesley wrote, "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness."[7] The connection between Mckesson's words, "Social justice is a redundant statement. There is no justice that isn't social," and Wesley's words over two hundred years prior is striking. For Mckesson, those words point to an ethos embedded into the very fiber of what it means to be human; for Wesley, the nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was itself social or nothing at all.

Each of these men in their time point to a reality beyond the circumstantial toward a re-imagined belief that dignity is the inalienable right of every human being. For Wesley, this belief is tied to his theology that understood the image of God as imprinted on every person, and that regardless of skin color or social standing, the *imago Dei* must be honored. Without the reality of the social implications of that theology, there could be no justice; without justice, no peace among humanity. "No justice, no peace," Mckesson echoes.[8]

---

[5] DeRay Mckesson, "On the Other Side of Freedom Tour" (lecture, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland, OR, September 20, 2018).

[6] James H. Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation in the Black Religious Tradition," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981), 188.

[7] Wesley, Preface of *Hymns*.

[8] Mckesson.

The Genesis of Black Theology

In James H. Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone asserts that Black Theology "began when black churchmen refused to accept the racist white church as consistent with the gospel of God."[9] Cone credits the rise of Black Theology to the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—and others like it—a church founded by Richard Allen when he and his black congregants walked out of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church after having been segregated to the balcony seats for the church service.[10] Richard Allen, a black preacher who purchased his freedom in 1783, was a Methodist circuit preacher with no intention of starting an independent black congregation. He was "so 'confident that there was no religious sect or denomination [that] would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodist.'"[11] When Allen and his congregants left St. George's, it was due to the failure of "white religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society."[12]

Allen and his black parishioners needed an experience of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that had an answer for their own lived experience. When white US-American theology could not respond to the experience of blacks in the United States, white Christians "simply remained silent, ignoring the condition of the victims of this racist society."[13] The sin of US-American theology is in its silence, disregarding the pain of

---

[9] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1970), 59.

[10] Priscilla Pope-Levison, "Allen, Richard (1760–1831)," Black Past, October 18, 2007, accessed June 20, 2018, http://www.blackpast.org/aah/allen-richard-pennsylvania-1760-1831.

[11] Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation," 188.

[12] Cone, *Black Theology*, 23.

[13] Cone, *Black Theology*, 46.

racism's victims, and its complicity with systems of oppression. The unwillingness of US-American churches at the time to confront the structures of racism resulted in churches like the African Methodist Episcopal Church with Richard Allen, a devout Methodist, at its helm.

The Sin of US-American Theology

Not only did US-American theology fail to address the lived experience of the suffering of blacks in the United States, but—if it had anything to say at all—it also spoke without fervor or zeal. Cone writes, "When it has tried to speak for the poor, it has been so cool and calm in its analysis of human evil that it implicitly disclosed whose side it was on."[14] Black Theology, and its neighbor, Liberation Theology, has emerged as a necessary response to the experience of oppression. The vilest sin of US-American theology is its compatibility with racism. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news, but if it is not good news for everybody, then it is not good news for anybody.

James H. Cone defines the two failures of US-American theology as "defining the theological task independently of black suffering, or by defining Christianity as compatible with white racism."[15] Each of these is evidenced in the responses of the revivalists during the birth of Black Theology and the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Charles Finney, George Whitefield, and Francis Asbury are each examples of peddlers of US-American theology, each contributing, albeit perhaps unintentionally, to the white evangelical response toward racism by accommodating culture to varying degrees. One approach allowed for the abolition of slavery only

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 22.

through the proper channels of government; the other approach allowed for the gradual, and "without radical upheaval," eradication of slavery.[16] While they did indeed "oppose slavery," the leaders of the church in the United States at the time took a gradual stance toward its abolition, making Christianity compatible with racism and "defining the theological task independently of black suffering," as Cone has written.[17]

The lack of passion toward the eradication of slavery at all costs communicated to suffering blacks in the United States that their physical circumstances were not as important to God as the eternal state of their souls. For believing blacks, this was an unacceptable hermeneutic. Either God must care about their suffering, or they could no longer call themselves by the same name as their white Christian brothers and sisters. Thus the sin of US-American theology is its silence and therefore its perceived indifference, because that kind of silence in the midst of their suffering points to a hermeneutic of Scripture that is inconsistent with the Jesus of the Gospels. In the Gospels, Jesus consistently took the side of the oppressed by confronting the systems and structures that kept people trapped in cycles of poverty. For Cone, "The God of the biblical tradition is not uninvolved or neutral regarding human affairs; rather He is quite involved. He is active in human history, taking sides with the oppressed of the land. If God is not involved in human history, then all theology is useless, and Christianity itself is a mockery, a hollow, meaningless diversion."[18]

---

[16] James Arnold Reinhard, *Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church: 1852–1860* (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1971), 102.

[17] Cone, *Black Theology*, 22.

[18] Cone, *Black Theology*, 26.

That Richard Allen and those under his pastoral care had the capacity to continue calling themselves Christians in the midst of betrayal and indifference is astounding. Perhaps a well-rounded view of a theology of suffering is necessary at this point in order to hear the voices of others who write from the position of the oppressed. Understanding how they interpret Scripture, their lives and God's activity in this world is necessary in order to adequately draw a line in the sand between the Kingdom of God and the ideology that undergirds US-American theology. It is striking that white US-American theology has the capacity to remain silent under the most grievous of circumstances for other human beings created in the image of God; that reality smacks of an incestuous relationship between the Gospel of Jesus and a US-American ideology that has nothing at all to do with the ethic of Jesus or the reality of God's coming Kingdom in this world.

Although B. T. Roberts' return to scriptural holiness caused an accidental schism with the Methodist Episcopal Church on these issues, because "there is little evidence to prove that in subsequent years Roberts and his followers showed continuing creative concern for blacks," Free Methodists ought not to hold him as their token prophet who righted the wrongs of early US-American Methodism.[19] The embourgeoisement of Free Methodism that took it from a grassroots prophetic movement to the mainstream of Christianity in the United States is worth reviewing. As liberation theology comes to the forefront as a critique of the physical/spiritual dualistic theology in the United States, one must consider the predictable reflex to throw the proverbial baby out with the liberation theology bathwater.

---

[19] Reinhard, 104.

When B. T. Roberts and his followers were simply on the margins pursuing justice, they had little power to bring about change, particularly in the dominant mainstream culture. By the time they came center-fold, it seems as though their priorities shifted. What accounts for the gap between the genesis of the FMC and even the civil rights movement, for example, is silence. The evolution of a group's values and priorities is the unfortunate expectation of the influence of power; however, it is ironic to consider a connection between B. T.'s rise from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie in the church and Western Christianity's fear of a Marxist liberation theology. With a prophetic voice, B. T. Roberts and his followers rose up and rebelled against the Methodist Episcopal Church, starting their own denomination, albeit unintentionally. However, their uprising resulted in moving toward the center of power in the dominant culture of the church, and instead of carrying that initial prophetic voice with them, they allowed themselves to become silent toward the social issues they initially sought to change. In this way, oppressed become oppressor, and the cycle continues, as Marx's conflict theory articulates.[20]

Perhaps liberation theology has something to offer to the problem of embourgeoisement in the church. While the dominant culture in Western Christianity has spent its time locating the problems and shortcomings of liberation theology, perhaps the fear of its assumed Marxist agenda has sealed the divorce between the physical and spiritual, creating an impassable chasm between the two. In this way, the divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is ever-widening.[21] As Soong-Chan Rah extends

---

[20] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat," *The Manifesto of the Communists* (International Publishing Company, 1886), used by permission the British Library Board, http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen /21cc/utopia/methods1/bourgeoisie1/bourgeoisie.html.

[21] Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 146.

Brueggemann, "The tension between the theology of celebration and the theology of suffering is the tension between the now and the not yet. In the same way that a proper kingdom theology demands an intersection between the now and the not yet—a proper shalom theology dictates that there is an intersection between suffering and celebration."[22] Perhaps liberation theology has tools that could help construct a bridge toward a proper shalom theology, closing the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

It is a false construct to suggest that those with privilege operate under a theology of celebration while those without it operate under a theology of suffering, for the image of a theology of celebration is an empty tomb and of a theology of suffering, the cross. Liberation theology can offer a vision to see that inherent in a true theology of celebration is an acceptance and requirement of suffering, that inherent in a theology of suffering is the move toward celebration despite circumstance. The middle of the pendulum swing between US-American theology and liberation theology is an intersection between suffering and celebration—a realized theology of both the resurrection and the death of Jesus.

Contrasting Theologies Shed Light

Writing in El Salvador, liberation theologian Jon Sobrino distinguishes between Latin American theology and European theology. For the purposes of this research, European theology, or that theology which emerges out of Central Europe, stands in for US-American theology, as the impact of the first phase of the Enlightenment on Central

---

[22] Ibid.

Europe has had a similar impact on US-American theology. European theology, both in function and approach to reality, is an endeavor handled on the level of "thinking." In this way, the theology emerging out of Central Europe was indeed liberating in that its efforts to liberate theology from "authoritarianism, historical error, myth, and from the obscuring meaning of the faith" set people free in their explanation of the truth.[23] It liberated the crisis of meaning for faith post-Enlightenment.

While European theology's approach to reality is vital and its liberating function significant, Sobrino contrasts this approach to reality with Latin American theology's intention to "confront reality as it is."[24] Its concern is with the real, lived experience of people and the state of the world as people are experiencing it. Latin American theology "is not so much concerned that the hunger of the masses seems senseless to the contemporary world; its concern is the hunger."[25] It is important to note here the "why" behind liberation theology; it is not intended to participate in the mental jumping-jacks of theologizing for its own sake. Perhaps this is an endeavor in which only a privileged people have the opportunity to engage. Instead, the why behind Latin American theology is about the people; its concern is for those whose physical state is impacted by systems and structures that keep people in bondage. Sobrino asserts,

> Latin American theologians believe that as long as European theology looks upon itself, even unconsciously (and this only aggravates the situation), as a theology emanating from the geopolitical center of the world, it cannot grasp the wretched state of the real world. … European theology is trying (admittedly in goodwill) to reconcile the wretched state of the real world at the level of theological thought, but it is not trying to liberate the real world from its wretched state.[26]

---

[23] Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 14.

[24] Ibid., 16.

[25] Ibid., 17.

[26] Sobrino, 18.

It is out of the wretched state of things that a theology of suffering emerges and has a word to speak to a theology of celebration as US-American theology has come to understand it. The resurrection of Christ cannot come without his cross, and yet, US-American theology in its Lenten-less Easter settles for a theology that begins and ends at the level of thinking, and without a body leads to an empty sentimentality whose thin hope cannot go the full distance that suffering requires. Inherent in Latin American theology though, is enacted belief that bodies are the recipients of theologizing. There is a liberated embodiment by which Latin American orthopraxy must be measured. If liberation is not found in the real world, its theology has fallen short of its aim.

The proclivity of US-American theology to passively accept the *status quo* of culture is almost too convenient. The United States' history demonstrates a hermeneutic of Scripture that supports all kinds of evil in the culture and in the church, certainly the institution of slavery being one of the more pronounced logs in the church's eye with its hermeneutical lens unchallengingly silent and supportive. Nancy Pineda-Madrid reflects on the impact of an Anselmian salvation, the atonement theory most prevalent in US-American churches today. Anslem's theory holds that the image of the brutal death of Jesus in order to satisfy the wrath of God and his divine justice reconciles a person before God. As "Jesus is reduced to his death," a believer can relish in the assurance of salvation with little expectation that transformation will come about in the life of a believer through the exercise of ethical behavior or decision-making.[27] A person's reconciliation and ethical behavior can become two separate realities.

---

[27] Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 87.

Further, as Pineda-Madrid contends, "Atonement theories [like Anselm's] have far too often put forward a model in which God approves of violence against God's son, Jesus, and approves of Jesus' passive submission to the violence directed at him. Thus, passivity in the face of violence takes on a mantel of divine blessing and providence."[28] It is not difficult to trace the impact of this satisfaction theory through the passivity toward violence and the acceptance of behavior in the church that is incongruent with a transformed life.

Liberation theology, however, goes beyond the suffering and death of Jesus, anticipating his resurrection. Bishop Gustaf Aulén's work in extending the *Christus Victor* motif may better describe Latin American theology's approach to the atonement of Christ. Christ has come to defeat sin and death and to release people from their bondage and captivity, which includes the systems and structures that keep them from that liberation. While the satisfaction theory of Christ's atonement and the *Christus Victor* approach may be seen as mutually exclusive, they are two theories that must be held in tension with one another in the movement toward liberation. An exploration of the values of liberation theology will help to nuance what resurrection encompasses.

The Scope of Liberation Theology

> Unfortunately, brothers and sisters, we are the product
> of a spiritualized, individualistic education.
> We were taught:
> try to save your soul and don't worry about the rest.
> We told the suffering:
> be patient, heaven will follow, hang on.
> No, that's not right, that's not salvation!
> That's not the salvation Christ brought.

---

[28] Ibid., 88.

> The salvation Christ brings
> is a salvation from every bondage
> that oppresses human beings.
> —Archbishop Oscar Romero, September 9, 1979[29]

Understanding the sin of US-American theology is critical, but understanding the cost of that sin as it claims its victims is also significant, because it helps to define the requisite scope of liberation for the oppressed. Gustavo Gutiérrez, known as one of the key founders of liberation theology, defines the *poor* as those nameless "non-persons" who count neither in society nor in the Church as people of significance.[30] The poor have "no social or economic weight"; they are "robbed by unjust laws," and have "no way of speaking up or acting to change the situation."[31] Poverty is evidenced in statistics, to be sure, but poverty is also related to the structures of oppression in place that keep the poor in a system and cycle of poverty.

The very root and essential nature of oppression is sin—the exploiting of humanity by humanity, which ultimately separates humans in their relationships with other humans, as well as with God. Ironically, sin is also defined by liberation theologians in similar terms as justice and holiness; it is "regarded as a social, historical fact," and is "not considered as an individual, private, or merely interior reality."[32] The historically factual nature of sin means that it is also public, collective, and connected to an external reality. That the word *injustice* could be substituted into the definition for *sin* is critical; the social nature of sin and of justice is vital for understanding the way forward

---

[29] James R. Brockman and Óscar A. Romero, *The Violence of Love* (Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1998), 163.

[30] James B. Nickloff and Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Essential Writings: The Making of Modern Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 144–145.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Nickloff and Gutiérrez, 194.

in this discussion. Gutiérrez expresses that "spiritual" redemption is not enough; a spiritual salvation "does not challenge the order in which we live." When it is considered in this way, the collective dimensions of sin are rediscovered, and rediscovered they must be, if the collective nature of justice is also to be rediscovered."[33]

Gutiérrez writes of suffering from his contextualized experience with the poor in Peru. No matter how technical or academic the task of theology, Gutiérrez argues, "theology has always been contextual;" it has always been situated in a particular time and place, and those particularities are intrinsically tied to how theology is embodied and lived out.[34] It is the contextualization of theology that becomes the litmus test of its orthopraxy. For the oppressed, theology is not an academic task; when theology is detached from the people it impacts, it is, as Cone writes, "a mockery, a hollow, meaningless diversion."[35] In connecting the task of theology back to the people it impacts, Gutiérrez writes about the lack of neutrality required on the part of those who claim to be followers of the Jesus of the Gospels. He writes,

> There always remains the practical question: what must we do in order to abolish poverty? Theology does not pretend to have all the technical solutions to poverty, but it reminds us never to forget the poor and also that God is at stake in our response to poverty. An active concern for the poor is not only an obligation for those who feel a political vocation; all Christians must take the Gospel message of justice and equality seriously.[36]

By ascribing the task of justice and equality to all Christians, Gutiérrez makes indifference toward poverty a non-option for those who claim to follow Christ.

---

[33] Ibid.

[34] Daniel Hartnett, "Remembering the Poor: An Interview with Gustavo Gutierrez," *America: The Jesuit Review*, February 3, 2003, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2003/02/03/remembering-poor-interview-gustavo-gutierrez.

[35] Cone, *Black Theology*, 26.

[36] Hartnett.

A Corporate and Corporeal Liberation

Taking the Gospel message of justice seriously means there is an obligatory response to the oppressed on the part of those who would claim to be followers of Jesus, and that response is not simply from a spiritual reality. As Archbishop Oscar Romero writes, "We told the suffering: be patient, heaven will follow, hang on. No, that's not right, that's not salvation! That's not the salvation Christ brought. The salvation Christ brings is a salvation from every bondage that oppresses human beings."[37] The dualism inherent in US-American theology that divorces the physical from the spiritual is brought to bear at this point. Its disembodied nature has done violence to its black and brown-bodied members over the years, and the history of racial ruptures must be admitted and confessed before reconciliation and repair can occur. A bringing back together of what has been separated cannot take place without the lived experiences of the oppressed on the margins, because their suffering is a part of the make-up of their existence. As Cone confirms, "Black soul is not learned; it comes from the totality of black experience, the experience of carving out an existence in a society that says you don't belong."[38]

The problem of integrating the truth of the experience of the oppressed into the understanding of the grand salvation of God is that the guilt of white US-American churches is often satisfied simply by a percentage of diversity in its demographics. Diversity, though, is about bodies and the experiences of those bodies; it is not about inclusion. A church could be 80 percent black and still be racist. Further, inclusion itself, as with integration, smacks of cultural assimilation, of asking the margins to come to the

---

[37] Nickloff and Gutiérrez, 163.

[38] Cone, *Black Theology*, 57.

center in order to belong, as though their experience could be absorbed and adapted in order to be acceptable and grafted into the whole. US-American churches dabbling in the sin of that white US-American theology desire an increase of the number of black and brown bodies demographically; however, majority-culture churches want the skin of the marginalized without the experiences that mark their oppression.

The offense of the cross of Christ is that He was crucified for victim and perpetrator alike. In *The Spirit of Life*, Jürgen Moltmann expresses the complexity of this reality. The crucified Christ atones for the violence that humans commit against each other, justifying the sin of the unjust perpetrator. At the same time, the salvific work of Christ on the cross is also a great act of solidarity with the victims of the unjust. He writes, "When we say that God is on the side of the most vulnerable creatures, we can call this His 'preferential option for the poor,' if we add that God's empathy—his *feeling with* the least of those he has created—is involved in this option, so that their experience is his experience too."[39] Through solidarity with the poor, God vicariously experiences their suffering, so when God enacts justice on their behalf, God does so from a place of having also been violated along with them. Moltmann explains both sides of the violence: the first is the dehumanization victims experience by being oppressed and the second is the dehumanization perpetrators experience by oppressing others. Because of these two sides, Moltmann explains, the path to reconciliation includes the liberation of both: "Liberation of the oppressed from the suffering of oppression requires the liberation of

---

[39] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 129.

the oppressor from the injustice of oppression."[40] In this way, the liberation of the one depends upon the liberation of the other.

The holistic nature of true liberation results in freedom for both parts, oppressor and oppressed. This is how the Gospel becomes good news for everyone. The interconnectedness of life in God means that what impacts even a single part impacts the whole. While some remain oppressed, none can be free. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Brazilian author and educator Paulo Freire describes the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. He writes,

> As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors' power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors.[41]

The work of reconciliation, then, is about the restoration of full humanity for oppressed and oppressor alike. Liberation theology contends that God has a "preferential option for the poor" because of the inhumane situation they experience that leaves them defenseless.[42] The essence of liberation is both corporate and corporeal; there is no liberation for one if there is no liberation for all, and that liberation is defined in the physical and immediate here and now just as it is in the spiritual and future eternal realm.

---

[40] Moltmann, 132.

[41] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th ed. (New York: Continuum International, 2005), 55.

[42] Jeffrey S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 132.

A Theology of Liberation in the West?

Howard Thurman's critical question remains unanswered: "Why is it that Christianity seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively, with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race?"[43] The answer is found in the desperate need for the Church in the West to abandon its individualism-oriented white US-American theology that has a grievous compatibility with racism and embrace a theology of liberation. However, liberation from what, consumerism, ethnocentrism? The oppressor must be liberated just as the oppressed, but the oppressor's liberation depends entirely on the oppressed in liberating themselves.

Because of the systems of oppression in place that keep the oppressed from rising up to liberate themselves, the oppressed have no ability to free themselves without an advocate in a converted oppressor. Freire writes about the need for these converts who "truly desire to transform the unjust order."[44] While an alliance between a converted oppressor and the oppressed is fundamental to revolution in the struggle for justice and the restoration of full humanity on both sides, Freire argues that the ally will "always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want, and to know."[45] The oppressor cannot be the executor of the revolutionary change required for the oppressed to go free. There must be an inherent trust in the people who have been oppressed to know what they need, to know how to think, and to know what they want. Advocacy for

---

[43] Thurman, preface.

[44] Freire, 60.

[45] Freire, 60.

the oppressed class depends completely on trust; it is the "indispensable precondition for revolutionary change."[46]

Problems with Liberation Theology

Alternatively, liberation theology has been viewed as a threat to democracy and to capitalism by the majority-culture church in the US since it first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s because of the perception of its association with Marxism. As the pendulum swung from the spiritual emphasis of American theology to the physical primacy of Latin American theology, the majority-culture church in the US perceived liberation theology's pursuit of a utopian classless society as idealistic and even sinful. Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith contend, "Because of its engagement with Marxist thought, white evangelicals tended to reject liberation theology altogether as communist and hence unbiblical."[47] Evidence for some liberation theologians pursuing social, political, and economic deliverance has much to do with a hermeneutic of Scripture that lends itself toward that interpretation.

Some liberation theologians, for example, held Acts 2:44–45 as the model for life in God in the here and now: "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." Acts 4:34-35 echoes a similar sentiment: "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was

---

[46] Ibid.

[47] Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith, Introduction to *Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice*, ed. Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), viii.

distributed to each as any had need." These two sections are echoed by Karl Marx in a letter written in 1875, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"[48] According to Marx, the cyclical uprising of the *proletariat* to overthrow the *bourgeoisie* would result in a final struggle that would defeat and overthrow capitalism indefinitely.[49]

Because there were some liberation theologians "very engaged in Marxist thought," particularly in regards to their stance against colonialism at the time, white American evangelicals lumped all liberation theologians in this Marxist category.[50] Many evangelical theologians, however, also consider themselves to be liberation theologians. These are not mutually exclusive categories. Robert Chao Romero, for example, writes from the perspective of what he calls brown theology – the "vital expression of the ecclesial capital of the brown church…forged in the fires of five hundred years of Latina/o racial and religious struggle."[51] According to Romero, radical Latin American evangelicals saw themselves as faithful to Scripture while steeped in the socio-political realities of their local context. He writes, "[D]espite being sympathetic to many of the concerns of liberation theology, radical evangelicals opposed the explicit adoption of Marxist ideology, the sacralization of revolution, disregard for the authority of the Bible,

---

[48] Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," accessed October 11, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm.

[49] Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat."

[50] Cannon and Smith, *Evangelical Theologies*, viii.

[51] Robert Chao Romero, "Toward a Perspective of 'Brown Theology,'" in *Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice*, ed. Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 77.

and any simplistic reduction of the gospel to political, sociological, or economic terms."[52] These radical evangelicals also upheld the theological tenets of evangelicalism with their "theocentric, bibliocentric, Christocentric, and pneumatological" foundations.[53] Romero confirms that a category for liberation theologians who are not dependent on Marxist ideology does indeed exist.

Further, Gustavo Gutiérrez contended in his works that true liberation means both justice and freedom, meaning that people "need interior as well as exterior liberation."[54] Robert McAfee Brown, in his introduction to liberation theology, writes of Gustavo's view, "Although change in social structures can help achieve such realizations [as justice and freedom], [social] change 'does not automatically bring it about.'"[55] In this way, the focus of liberation on both communal justice and individual freedom is antithetical to Marxism. While some would hold Gustavo's views as dependent on Marxist ideology, Gustavo held social liberation in tension with individual freedom to "assume conscious responsibility for their own destiny."[56] This concept of individual human freedom alone is enough to free Gustavo from the perception that all liberation theology necessarily depends upon Marxist ideology.

One of the key components of the brown church is the theological movement known by Latin American evangelical theologians as "*misión integral*." This movement "declares that the gospel involves both vertical salvation (reconciliation of an individual

---

[52] Romero, *Evangelical Theologies*, 83.

[53] Ibid., 82.

[54] Robert McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 153.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

with God through Christ) and horizontal engagement with the pressing social concerns of the day."[57] The idea of a holistic gospel that Protestant evangelicals know today comes from this concept of *misión integral*, birthed out of the heart of Latin American struggle in very particular local contexts. While these Latin American evangelical theologians were critical of Marxist ideology, they wholly embraced the necessity of the horizontal engagement in the work of justice in their communities.

Further, the framework of oppressor and oppressed in liberation theology can be problematic, lending itself to a sectarian approach to understanding the relationship between two groups: rich/poor, oppressor/oppressed, dominant or normative culture/the other. When liberation theologians speak of Christ's "preferential option for the poor," some would argue the preference is not an option but an obligation.[58] McLaren writes, "We cannot shirk from this obligation without imputation of culpability and still remain Christians. There is no abstention from this struggle. The condition of the poor obliges a restitution since such a struggle is injustice writ large."[59] While the poor must be seen not as a preferential option but as a requisite for Christian identity, still, the categorical division calls into question how the divide will ever be crossed. While early Free Methodists proposed this idea of self-denial and a spirit of abolition in order to cross the divide, the pattern of embourgeoisement stands as a warning sign that the divide cannot be crossed merely through a prophetic dissenter calling out from the outskirts of the oppressor's group.

---

[57] Romero, Evangelical Theologies, 85.

[58] Peter McLaren, *Pedagogy of Insurrection: From Resurrection to Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 106.

[59] McLaren, 106.

Ruether calls this dissenting voice the "alienated intelligentsia" who hails from the side of the oppressor, speaking a prophetic word to its own dominant culture in order to close the gap.[60] The problem with this model of transformation arises when the dissenting oppressor,

> Becomes concerned primarily with its own self-purification through disaffiliation with its own class, race or nation; when it seeks primarily a parasitic identification with the oppressed, who are viewed, idealistically, as the "suffering saviors," who can do no wrong or in whom all is to be excused. The prophet in the dominant society, thus becomes involved in an endless movement of self-hatred and a utopian quest for identification with and acceptance by the victims, making it impossible for him to see either side of the social equation as it really is.[61]

On the other side of the chasm is the oppressed, who are always at risk of having their voice and leadership role taken away by oppressor and dissenting oppressor alike. As victims in this model, the oppressed "can most readily disaffiliate their identities with [the dominant culture], for they have the least stake in its perpetuation."[62] In one sense, the oppressed have the most literal "skin in the game," but in another sense, they have very little to lose in disengaging from the struggle.

As Ruether suggests, the oppressed "have a very considerable task of inward liberation to do."[63] While liberation theology's model of oppressor and oppressed may not be the most helpful in terms of a hopeful attempt in bridging the gap between the two, or to use another image, of slowing the swinging pendulum between two polarities, the task of inward liberation is necessary for both parties. As Moltmann explains, "Liberation

---

[60] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 14.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 11.

[63] Ruether, 12.

of the oppressed from the suffering of oppression requires the liberation of the oppressor from the injustice of oppression."[64] Both are equally involved in the struggle, so this task of inward liberation for oppressor and oppressed requires a partnering and trust between the two. As Thomas Merton affirms,

> He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening their own self-understanding, freedom and integrity and capacity to love, will not have anything to give to others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, aggressiveness, ego-centeredness, delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas.[65]

The inward task of liberation applies to oppressor and oppressed alike. Any movement toward action without inward liberation, the self-understanding that leads to freedom because of the integrous nature of personhood, will be limited in his or her capacity to love others in a self-giving manner.

Conclusion

Given that any theological endeavor is situated contextually, it is important to note the context of Free Methodism's theological heritage. That the African Methodist Episcopal Church gave rise to what is now known as "Black Theology" is noteworthy. That Richard Allen chose to steep himself in Wesleyan theology despite how the Methodist Episcopal denomination oppressed him and his parishioners demonstrates his commitment to a theology that believes in a God who is for the people and deeply concerned with the social nature of sin and salvation. The sin of US-American theology has long been its silence toward social issues, and in particular, the problem and

---

[64] Ibid., 132.

[65] Lawrence Cunningham, *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master: Essential Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 375.

devastation of racism in the United States. Its indifference has located it on the side of the oppressor, and its lack of passion when it has chosen to speak to the culture is insult to injury for the marginalized. The dualistic nature of US-American theology keeps social issues swept under the rug by focusing on the spiritual and eternal while ignoring the physical and immediate. If the oppressed are to be liberated, the physical and immediate needs must be addressed.

The nature of one's life in God means that if even one is in chains, then none are free. The movement toward liberation, then, is corporate; it requires the whole body in order to do the work. While the oppressed work to free themselves from the systems and structures of oppression, the oppressors must convert to side with them, becoming advocates who trust and support the work the oppressed are already doing, in large part by oppressors engaging in their own work of inward liberation from the injustices they commit. Until oppressed and oppressor alike are liberated, there can be no liberation for victim or perpetrator. The theology of the crucified Christ means that our suffering God liberates victim and perpetrator both through the death of Jesus on the cross.

If embraced in a praxeological sense, the theology that undergirds the Free Methodist movement has the capacity to acknowledge the truth of its violations against the oppressed, to speak with passion, to come alongside by becoming allies in the work, and ultimately to trust the work of the people who have been oppressed. Only then will both victim and perpetrator be on the road to freedom. Only then will there be a "living,

breathing justice."[66] Only then will Christians be able to answer Thurman's question: "Is there any help to be found for the disinherited in the religion of Jesus?"[67]

If there is to be any resurrection of the true self, particularly for the oppressed, Ruether argues that anger and pride are "vital virtues" for salvation.[68] Anger can move a person to revolt and to define the boundary lines of their personhood, and pride is "experienced as the recovery of that authentic humanity and good created nature 'upon which God looked in the beginning and, behold, it was very good.'"[69] Engaging in anger is necessary in the process of recovering self, particularly for the oppressed. While this "vital virtue" is traditionally frowned upon and shamed in Christian spirituality, its expression and re-interpretation is necessary in the task of inward liberation, as righteous anger becomes the engine for justice.[70]

Pursuit of anger in Scripture is an essential next step. Because much has been written about lament in the role of racial reconciliation, beginning with the Psalms of lament and moving into the cursings will illuminate the role of anger for both oppressed and oppressor alike. A theology of suffering can only be understood when a definition of terms can be agreed upon by both sides. As Ruether writes about the role of projection on the part of oppressor and oppressed, understanding how each views and interprets anger through the lens of Scripture is paramount to the discussion regarding reconciliation and resurrection hope. Further, grappling with the wrath of God as the engine of God's justice

---

[66] Mckesson.

[67] Thurman, 47.

[68] Ruether, 12.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

in Scripture must also be explored, as wrath shows up most often when the divine justice has been violated in some way, particularly on behalf of the poor or marginalized.

CHAPTER 4:

BROUGHT TO SPEECH: LAMENT AS EVOCATION OF REALITY

James H. Cone, the founder of black liberation theology, makes the claim, "Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology."[1] In step with this claim, the genesis of the Free Methodist movement found itself in the current of a socially situated Gospel in which the "ultraist view"—which regarded all slaveholding as a sin against God and against humanity—defined the very boundaries of its community.[2] This was a movement that was not "soft" on slavery and did not accommodate culture when it came to slaveholding practices. At its very inception, the Free Methodist movement actively exercised its belief that all people are created in the image of God, and that as image-bearers, salvation of the soul and liberation of the body were two inalienable sides of the same coin.

In reviewing the history of the Free Methodist movement, however, the contrast between its abolitionist roots and its more socially disengaged presence in many majority-culture local churches is glaring. In attempts to name this gap experienced in many local FMC churches today, the theme of indifference toward social concerns is both prevalent and insulating. "Indifference to evil," as Abraham J. Heschel writes, "is more insidious than evil itself; it is more universal, more contagious, more dangerous."[3] The contagion of indifference is flourishing in majority-culture FMC churches. Cone's claim

---

[1] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1970), 9.

[2] James Arnold Reinhard, "Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church: 1852–1860" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1971), 102.

[3] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 1962), 364.

that indifference toward liberation is the mark of a false Christian theology is as damning as it is prophetic.

In his talk, "The Other Side of Freedom," DeRay Mckesson said, "Truth must come before reconciliation."[4] Jemar Tisby similarly echoes a nuanced sentiment in his work, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*: "History and Scripture teaches us that there can be no reconciliation without repentance. There can be no repentance without confession. And there can be no confession without truth."[5] Two questions emerge: what would it look like for a majority-culture church to not be indifferent, and what does it mean to tell the truth so that reconciliation may come?

In recent years there has been a surge of writing on the need the global church has to lament with those who are suffering. Soong-Chan Rah, Walter Brueggemann, Christena Cleveland and others have been leading voices in the move toward recovering a practice or liturgy of lament in the church, perhaps because in so doing there is hope for a shift out of indifference and into truth-telling and confession leading toward reconciliation.[6] Although writers like Rah, Brueggemann and Cleveland have written poignantly on how a recovery of the embodiment of lament in the church has the capacity to act as a prophetic voice in the work of justice and social change, the question remains: what does it look like for dominant culture church-goers to lament? Does a Scriptural

---

[4] DeRay Mckesson, "On the Other Side of Freedom Tour," (lecture, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland, OR, September 20, 2018.

[5] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 15.

[6] See related works: Soong-Chan Rah's Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times; Walter Brueggemann's Psalmist's Cry: Scripts for Embracing Lament; Johnny Bernard Hill's Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation; and Christena Cleveland's Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart.

understanding of lament have the capacity in FMC contexts to bridge the gap between the ultraist view at its inception and its insulated reality today?

The Object Permanence of Suffering

In *Mirror to the Church: Resurrection Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*, authors Katongole and Wilson-Hartgrove claim, "The resurrection of the church begins with lament."[7] There is little question that the gap between the FMC's abolitionist movement and its present reality today may have something to do with an inability to enter into the suffering of others, perhaps because FM churches are generally non-liturgical settings, so avenues for the expression of pain are not offered as frequently. The further removed the FMC gets from its abolitionist heritage, the more insulated the identity narrative becomes. Where there is indifference, imposing a liturgy of lament is not only foreign to its Euro-American hearers, it is also a pearl that must not be trampled by the swollen feet of the privileged. Rah writes, "The loss of lament in the American church reflects a serious theological deficiency."[8] That theological deficiency finds its mooring in a Scriptural anemia that cannot embrace the lament found in Scripture because the US-American church has spent so little time engaging it.

Because the majority-culture church's engagement with lament in Scripture comes more as a divine "should" than as a "need", its result is a tipped-hat to issues surrounding pain and suffering. Walter Brueggemann writes, "Life is…savagely marked by disequilibrium, incoherence, and unrelieved asymmetry," but the reality of this kind of

---

[7] Emmanuel Katongole and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrection Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 1.

[8] Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 24.

pain so rarely makes it to the table of discussion on a typical Sunday morning in the United States.[9] Brueggemann continues, "A church that goes on singing 'happy songs' in the face of raw reality is doing something very different from what the Bible itself does."[10] This results in what Brueggemann refers to as *disorientation*. The capacity to go on singing songs of orientation and order while the lived experience of the world is disorientation and chaos demonstrates a disconnection from the reality of pain in the world.

The singing of "happy songs" in "the face of raw reality" demonstrates the privileged nature of many majority-culture churches.[11] They live in the luxury of a reality that says, "If I can't see, hear, taste, touch or feel suffering, it does not exist to me." While this may happen naturally on an individual scale as people go about their own business, that this absence of suffering would occur on the communal level is, as Abraham J. Heschel writes, not just an "episode" of injustice, but a complete "catastrophe."[12]

Here the distinction between Central European theology and Latin American theology is again brought to bear; liberation theology's emphasis on salvation here and now means that it cannot lose sight of suffering, as it is the lens through which the world is viewed. Liberation theology's adherents cannot possibly be at risk of amnesia because of the urgency of its claims, whereas the theology that undergirds the dominant culture is

---

[9] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 51.

[10] Ibid., 52.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Heschel, *Prophets*, 4.

ever in danger of losing sight of a theology of suffering, choosing to live in a world of symmetry, coherence, and orientation, despite the suffering of the world around it.

Engaging lament and cursing in Scripture, and the Psalms in particular, is a necessary step toward truth-telling—telling the truth to ourselves about our own lives, to each other about our collective lives—in order that we may move toward repentance and confession, as Jemar Tisby advocates.[13] Without an engagement with the Psalms of lament, and perhaps more importantly, with the imprecatory Psalms, the Euro-American affluent tendency is to regress into amnesia, to use the power of privilege to "tame the terror and eliminate the darkness" resulting in numbness toward or in denial about the ever-present pain surrounding.[14] The practice of lament and cursing through the use of the Psalter has the capacity to affix suffering before the eyes of the majority-culture church as an ongoing reality of all that awaits the eschaton when all will be made right.

St. Augustine writes, "What is mourning for? [One] longs for what [one] does not possess."[15] Without the mourning, without the groaning, without the longing, one is formed by what C. S. Lewis named as being "far too easily pleased."[16] Psalms of lamentation and cursing keep our gaze looking through the suffering, so that it becomes a part of the landscape of life—the lens through which all of reality is viewed, because "if one member suffers, all suffer together."[17] Bradford E. Hinze extends St. Augustine: "If the psalm prays, you pray; if it groans, you groan, for all [the psalms] written here are a

---

[13] Tisby, 15.

[14] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 53.

[15] Bradford E. Hinze, "Ecclesial Impasse: What Can We Learn From Our Laments?" *Theological Studies* 72, no. 3, (2011): 483.

[16] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 1949), 26.

[17] 1 Corinthians 12:26.

mirror to us" of our own reality, if we have the courage to look.[18] If the psalms are written as "a mirror to us," then if the psalm curses, we also curse. If the psalm expresses the full range of human emotion, then we also express the full range of human emotion.[19]

Psalms of Lament: Form and Function

The Psalms include hymns, thanksgivings, poems, and laments, both personal and public. In *Hurting with God*, Glenn Pemberton depicts a breakdown in the types of psalms in Scripture, demonstrating that 40 percent of the psalms are laments.[20] In his work specifically with the psalms of lament, Claus Westermann explains, "The lament in the Psalms is three-fold. It is divisible according to its three subjects: God, the one who laments, and the enemy."[21] In addressing God as the recipient of the complaint, the lamenter brings the alleged enemy before God as one who is bearing false witness or standing in accusation or judgment over the one lamenting. By bringing the enemy before God through lament, "the work of lamentation aims to reconceive and redistribute power between the one who laments and God, and between the one who laments and the others."[22] This desire for the redistribution of power helps to give shape to the kind of change the lamenter is seeking through his or her speech to God, the One ultimately responsible to answer the cry of the one lamenting. Psalms of lament must be understood

---

[18] Hinze, 484.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Glenn Pemberton, *Hurting with God: Learning to Lament with the Psalms* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2012), 32.

[21] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 169.

[22] Hinze, 478.

as more than a simple "airing out" of grievances before God. A closer look at the structure of the lament reveals an urgent expectation that God will hear and God will and must act on behalf of the speaker.

The loose structure of a psalm of lament includes an introductory address, the lament, a confession of faith or trust in God, a petition or request of God, and a vow that the speaker will praise God. Westermann names the importance of the lamenter's complaint against God himself, usually in the form of two questions: "Why?" and "How long?" These two questions come before God as an accusation, which Westermann writes is "the heart of the lament of the people in ancient Israel. There are no laments of the people in which they are totally absent. Indeed, the phenomenon of lamentation is concentrated in this one motif."[23] He continues,

> The question "Why?" asks why God has rejected, abandoned, or forgotten his people. In the blow he has suffered, the lamenter has experienced God's denial. The experience is utterly unnerving and incomprehensible. The question "Why?" is like the feeble groping of one who has lost the way in the dark. It has the sense of finding one's own way; it assumes that what has been suffered has its origin in God's alienation.…The question "How long?" just as the question "Why?" asks about the absence of God. In them verbs of anger predominate.[24]

That the heart of the psalms of lament would focus so keenly on accusing God of being absent, of rejecting, forgetting or abandoning the lamenter, could perhaps come across as dishonoring, disrespectful, and demanding. The speaker of the lament cries out with expectancy, as one who is entitled to a response from God. One could easily counter the entitlement by calling to mind passages like Ecclesiastes 8:4—"For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, 'What are you doing?'"—or perhaps other

---

[23] Westermann, 177–178.

[24] Ibid., 176–177.

passages of Scripture that communicate the sovereignty of God, keeping God at a distance and withholding the pain of human suffering out of fear of God's power even in the midst of desperate cries for help.[25] Instead, however, through psalms of lament, the speaker holds up the covenant relationship between God and Israel as an expectation that God must act on his or her behalf. There has been an agreement of terms: God must hold up God's end of the contract and act in accordance with God's covenant with God's people.

More than the question of "How long?" the question of "Why?" directed at God is significant, because it pulls the question of theodicy onto the table for review. "Why?" is the question any griever must ask in the midst of pain and suffering. Why would a powerful and loving God allow this suffering to occur, to continue? How can God's love and God's might both be a part of God's being in the midst of this experience of evil? Did God author it? Is God extending it by not acting on behalf of the lamenter? Perhaps God loves but is powerless to intervene; perhaps God is powerful but does not love enough to intervene. These questions are essential elements of lament itself; the process of having to hold in tension this paradox of God—God's love and power with the problem of evil in the world—is a necessary part of what it means to truly suffer. The questions themselves beg God to answer the possibility of indifference: God, do You care about what is happening to me?

Using the psalms of lament functionally to move toward praise, however, can be risky. Their presence illuminates for the reader strong, negative emotions that are true to the human experience and cannot be resolved as easily as interpreters can make the jump

---

[25] Ecclesiastes 8:4.

exegetically from lament to praise. The communal lament of Psalm 89 highlights this swift transition. Verse 46 reads, "How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?" By the time the reader arrives at verse 52, the psalmist reflects, "Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and Amen." While it is difficult to presume upon the emotional movement of the psalmist coming from the Ancient Near East, interpreters by and large use this lament-to-praise formatting as the lens through which to interpret the purpose of lament.

Beverly Jameson writes, "Taken in a literary context, as poetry expressing the depths of human emotions, they [the depths of human emotions] are relevant to contemporary society, regardless of the specific historical cause of that emotion. More importantly they give us permission to rant."[26] This phrasing, "permission to rant," is problematic, as it seems an insufficient description for what is taking place in the psalm at the intense level of human emotion. Instead, Walter Brueggemann calls this "courageous candor," and a "major mark of faithful humanness."[27] The swift movement from "courageous candor" to praise, as in Psalm 89, is not a prescription for the expected length of time a griever is given to express pain and be done with it, and the act of lamenting itself emerges from a place deeper than the level of rant.[28] On display through the psalms of lament is this deeply human experience; its objective is located in its emetic movement that withholds nothing from expression. The continual crying out with no

---

[26] Beverley Jameson, "Permission to Rant," *Theology* 119, no. 5 (2016): 343, doi: 10.1177/0040571X16647864.

[27] Walter Brueggemann, "On 'Being Human' in the Psalms," *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199783335.013.035.

[28] Ibid.

response in the psalms of lament reads like a dry heave. It leaves the psalmist undone, laid bare, whittled down to the bare bones of existence.

The form of the psalm of lament then, "exhibits a recurring pattern of speech that bespeaks a certain kind of covenantal performance as quintessentially human."[29] Its function is not simply to move to praise; the psalm of lament recovers humanness, inviting a "courageous candor" before God. Its purpose goes beyond function and the superficial outcomes of a vent session before God. Something human is recovered in the process of one-sided questions. The courage of the psalmist to bring everything to speech when the questions remain unanswered and unresolved indicates a trust in the silence, as seen below in texts where praise is not always found in the lament format.

Without Praise: Interpreting Violence

A handful of Psalms demonstrate the ways in which the format of lament-to-praise is absent in psalms of lament. This subcategory of psalms of lament is called "imprecatory psalms," for these psalms take a direct approach, petitioning God to bring retribution on enemies for their violence against God's people. Psalm 58:6 and 10, for example, reads, "O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord! The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked." There is a clear enemy of the psalmist in Psalm 58 the absence of a statement of praise to wrap up the hopeful complaint of the writer communicates a lack of resolution; and there is no provided response to the petition.

---

[29] Brueggemann, "On 'Being Human,'" 7.

Psalm 137:8–9 similarly articulates a gruesome description of the desired outcome of the psalmist's enemies: "O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" While this psalm stands as one of the more violent requests of the psalmist, there is no response by God articulated in Psalm 137, and there is no movement of the psalmist to lighten the mood, rescind the statement, or communicate a sense of hyperbole in the request. As many have sought to interpret these psalms on the basis of allegory, it would seem that quite literally, the psalmist is calling for God to enact God's covenantal faithfulness through vengeful action and violence toward enemies. The literal nature of the psalmist's request has implications for Christians that are worth exploration and explanation.

It is significant to note at this point the poetic nature of the imprecatory psalms. In *Crisis, Cursing and the Christian: Reading Imprecatory Psalms in the Twenty-First Century*, Jamie A. Grant makes an alternative claim that an imprecation as in Psalm 137 is "somehow base, vile and vicious," as though its main use for Christian readers is to reject its violence in its demonstration of an ethos out of step with the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount.[30] Instead, Grant points to the imprecation in 137 in its poetic style, highlighting its historical context. Grant writes, "These prayers are grounded in the *lex talionis*.[31] They *respond* to the evils experienced by the community of faith by asking

---

[30] Jamie A. Grant, "Crisis, Cursing and the Christian: Reading Imprecatory Psalms in the Twenty-First Century," *Foundations* 74 (May 2018): 8.

[31] The *lex talionis* in the Old Testament is understood as the "law of exact retribution," an eye-for-an-eye justice system coming from YHWH, the exactor of all justice. For further information, see L. Sutton's work in the following article: "A Position of Honour Or Shame? YHWH as a Armour Bearer in Psalm 35:1–3," *Acta Theologica* 38, no. 1 (2018): 268–85, doi: 10.18820/23099089/actat.sup26.16.

God to revisit *similar and proportionate* experiences upon those who committed the injustices in the first place."[32] Historical record indicates that following the Babylonian invasion, the Babylonian armies "hurled the children of survivors from the Temple Mount to be dashed on the rocks below."[33] While Grant argues that Psalm 137 is not a "visceral, bile-laden outpouring of rage" and simply a request for God to deal proportionately with the psalmist's enemies, Psalm 137 can be seen as both a visceral outpouring of rage and a drawing on the *lex talionis*. In this way, the capability of the psalms of imprecation to express emotion is significant, for then "the psalms become a vehicle for emotional expression leading to catharsis. Expressing feelings such as anger and resentment can lead to the restoration of relationships and spiritual health," so the imprecatory psalms must be understood as vehicles for restoration and healing.[34]

Though the psalms of lament demonstrate the necessity of honest emotional expression before God, there is evidence that the Church has frequently edited the psalms in order to scale back the gravity of the vengeful requests. Eugene Peterson refers to this removal of uncomfortable texts as "psalmectomies."[35] Psalm 139 as the "fearfully and wonderfully made" text, oft-quoted in church contexts is also often missing its ending: "Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!" (verse 19). While the absence of these passages of lament is telling of the discomfort with the

---

[32] Grant, 7.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Dominick D. Hankle, "The Therapeutic Implications of the Imprecatory Psalms in the Christian Counseling Setting," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 276.

[35] Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 98.

idea that God would enact violence on behalf of God's people, wrestling with the purpose of these psalms and their integration in worship has been problematic for some time.

In Britain during World War I, the psalms of lament highlighted a controversy in the Church of England. Suddenly the national crisis of war presented an opportunity for the psalms of lament to be put to good use as propaganda by the British people who were experiencing the barbaric nature of air raids by the Germans. For the first time in modern history, innocent civilians were the targets of war, and women and children comprised the body count of numerous air raids. Because of the savage nature of these bombings, the British people called for a reciprocal response by the air arm of the British Army. Andrew Mein writes, "There was a strong popular desire for revenge, and a vigorous debate about the need for so-called 'reprisals.'"[36] Suddenly the voice of the psalmist emerged from the Old Testament, validating the desire for reciprocated violence and legitimizing hatred of the enemy. In 1917, Old Testament scholar, John McFadyen released an essay, "The Psalter and the Present Distress," describing the relevance of imprecatory Psalms at the time:

> We used to shudder at the imprecatory psalms, and let us hope we shudder still… but we, who have seen in these latter days what antecedently we could never have believed of the horrors and the inhumanities of war, are able to understand these Psalms as they have seldom been understood since the flaming words leaped from torn and bleeding hearts. We could not take their dreadful prayers upon our lips; we could not ask God to feast our eyes upon our foes, or to grant that our feet might be washed in the blood of the wicked. But too well we understand to-day the mood from which such prayer can spring.[37]

Suddenly the imprecatory psalms were brought to bear on reality. Whereas before the war their role in worship was unnecessary, now the conditions of the world would lend

[36] Andrew Mein, "Bishops, Baby-Killers and Broken Teeth: Psalm 58 and the Air War," *J Bible Recept* 4, no. 2 (2017): 210, https://doi.org/10.1515/jbr-2017-0008.

[37] Ibid., 209.

themselves to the use of the psalms of imprecation. Suffering had come to the doorstep of the British people, and the psalms of lament became a ready host for reprisal action.

As a result of the use of the imprecatory Psalms in British propaganda to legitimize and thus attempt to mobilize reprisals, the Church of England put an official ban on a large majority of the imprecatory verses in the Psalms and banned Psalm 58 completely from being used in worship. Andrew Mein extends the Archdeacon of Sudbury at the time, who observed that "by removing 'all the Psalms which gave expression to righteous indignation' the Church 'would get more and more out of touch with the feeling of the country' and risk a 'national disaster.'"[38] Though the Archdeacon's reflection is insightful, its greatest implication is that removal or avoidance or denial of the imprecatory psalms, whether in times of national crisis or not, removes the Church from the "feeling of the country."[39] Therefore, imprecatory psalms are not at the disposal of the Church to pragmatically impose or dispose when it interprets the suffering of its people as worthy enough to warrant an imprecation. By implication, the Archdeacon's insights reflect an awareness that as an "expression of righteous indignation," the use of the psalms in public worship keep the Church in touch with the people.[40]

The history of the ban of certain psalms because of their ability to stir emotion in those who are suffering is noteworthy, whether in the Church of England or in any other dominant culture context, because it is an episode like this in the dominant church culture's history that reminds the suffering who ultimately holds the power. The

---

[38] Mein, 212.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

uninhibited expression of cursing that goes beyond expression of sadness, is a polarizing action. People either fear its power, interpreting its violence as sin that God came to eradicate, or people are fueled by the anger of cursing and become entangled in rage. The cursing psalms, as Psalm 137 above demonstrates, ties humanity to its sadness and its anger, but its unresolved nature is uncomfortable, as prayers for the harm of enemies is complicated in light of New Testament texts.[41]

The Uncensored Voice

In the tension of this paradox, the anger of the lamenter is revealed. As Westermann noted, here in the psalms of lament "verbs of anger predominate,"[42] thus communicating the welcome of unhinged emotion before God. In his article, "Reading Psalms, and Other Urban Poems, in a Fractured City," Stephan de Beer writes that lament poems "allow for everything to be brought to speech; they lead us away from civil and decent temple worship to a place of uttering the unspeakable, the unthinkable; they utter language that is uncensored and ask questions that are politically incorrect, inviting a just and gracious God to participate with us in our suffering."[43] That the psalms of lament include the unthinkable, the unutterable, and the uncensored is both right and necessary.[44] Throughout the psalms of lament there is a recurring petition for God to vindicate the speaker through retaliation toward the lamenter's enemies.

---

[41] See Matthew 5:43–44: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'"

[42] Westermann, 177.

[43] Stephan de Beer, "Reading Psalms, and Other Urban Poems, in a Fractured City," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 9, doi: 10.4102/ve.v36i1.1472.

[44] Psalm 137:8–9.

These psalms of lament are difficult to read, particularly in their request for violence against the enemy. Their petitions for vindication fly in the face of Jesus' great commandment in Mark 12:28–34 to "love your neighbor as yourself."[45] There is nothing loving about the request for the death of an enemy. The psalms of lament "tread that thin line between reproach and judgment," both in their accusatory tone to God and in their demands for the redistribution of power through violent means.[46] Of the wicked man in Psalm 109, the psalmist writes, "May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit!"[47] The evil-for-evil nature of the lamenter's request is difficult for several reasons. It disquiets and discomforts us as modern readers; these are not prayers Euro-American church-going hearers resonate with. As Brueggemann reflects, one might say in response to these psalms, "This psalm does not concern me, because I have never been that angry."[48] The reflection on that reality is the point in and of itself in majority-culture churches: "I have never been that angry, because I have never had the need to be that angry; I have never had the need to be that angry, because I have not been the recipient of such grievous forms of injustice that I have needed a prayer like this."

Suffering and injustice occur in many forms and touches every part of humanity; it is no respecter of persons. However, there is a form of suffering that is experienced by the marginalized and the vulnerable that is systemic, totalizing, and thus impossible to fully understand the gravity of from the outside looking in. It is in response to this kind of

---

[45] Mark 12:31.

[46] Westermann, 177.

[47] Psalm 109:9–10.

[48] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 87.

injustice, this kind of powerlessness to change the narrative or the situation that the imprecatory psalms must speak. It is through these psalms that the fullest range of human emotion is discovered, where anger is not cast into the shadow as a shamed emotion but fully embraced. For the one who laments, Brueggemann writes,

> There is nothing out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate. Everything properly belongs in this conversation of the heart. To withhold parts of life from that conversation is in fact to withhold part of life from the sovereignty of God. Thus these psalms make the important connection: everything must be *brought to speech*, and everything brought to speech must be *addressed to God*, who is the final reference for all of life.[49]

Further, the unresolved nature of Psalm 88 stands as an example of the complex relationship between the lamenter and God, as the one lamenting finds God responsible for his or her current state. The psalmist writes, "You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves."[50] Whether the psalmist sees God as the originator of his or her suffering or as implicated by God's lack of action in the midst of suffering, Psalm 88 demonstrates an openness of the psalmist to bring everything before God: accusation, pain, anger, rage, fear, sadness, confusion, distress and an undiminished emotion. In Psalm 88 there is an implied wrath of God that the psalmist believes has something to do with his or her experience of suffering. In *Praying Curses: The Therapeutic and Preaching Value of Imprecatory Psalms*, Nehrbass writes of the psalms as an opportunity for reconciliation. His work highlights thirteen ways in which the Psalms are often

---

[49] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 52.

[50] Psalm 88:6–7.

interpreted, landing on an approach of dependence in which the cursing psalms are read through a lens of dependence upon God to enact justice on behalf of the psalmist.[51]

Inherent in Nehrbass's dependence theory is an expectation that through the full-throttle emotional expression of the psalmist, emotional catharsis leads to reconciliation. He contends that hatred is a necessary step in the reconciliation process:

> To refuse to hate means that we remain in denial, and cannot move toward reconciliation. Refusal to hate diminishes one or both of the parties involved. If I refuse to hate it may be that I do not have the self-respect to see that what someone else has done to me is wrong. Or if I refuse to hate it may be that I do not respect the other person enough to see that his actions are worthy of my contemplation and response. In either case, hatred provides the necessary differentiation to respect both parties.[52]

To suggest that hate is somehow a step in the process toward reconciliation sounds like a contradiction of the command of Jesus and other New Testament writers.[53] The words of Jesus certainly demonstrate a narrow way, but they do not discount or discredit the voice of the psalmist and the role of lamentation. Is it possible to be truly reconciled without the expression of anger? Recalling Anselm's penal substitution theory, Jesus' death satisfies the wrath of God, but if one finds the unleashing of God's wrath upon Godself problematic, further questions about God's wrath abound as the connection between human anger and divine anger comes into focus.

---

[51] Daniel Michael Nehrbass, *Praying Curses: The Therapeutic and Preaching Value of the Imprecatory Psalms* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 46.

[52] Nehrbass, 67.

[53] 1 John 2:9: "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness," and Matthew 5:21–22 reflects how Jesus thinks about anger: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

Out of the Shadow: The *IRA DEI*

While lament in its most maddened state of mourning may not move God to obliterate an enemy, the point is that the most vulnerable and desperate cry to God—one that is needed so acutely that it moves beyond whispered prayers and into the full embodiment of rage—is how the suffering are healed and the imprisoned freed. Through lament, those who are suffering can bring into congruence with their lives their pain and sadness, their anger at injustice, their fear of being trapped with no way out. Through that congruence, they experience the release of their situation to God, out of the darkness and into the light. It is through the uncensored voice that the Spirit speaks a prophetic word to the lamenter. On the cross Jesus laments, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" echoing Psalm 22, and shortly thereafter Jesus "yielded up his spirit."[54] Perhaps it was the lament on the cross that led to his yielding.

In Matthew 23:37, Jesus calls out another lament for his people: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Time and again throughout Scripture, the lamenters become the prophets. Prophecy is vital to human suffering, because it is lamentation that moves the concern and compassion of God to action. As Heschel writes, "Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world.…God is raging in the prophet's words."[55] Heschel expresses how the "wrath of God is a lamentation," and, whereas a common understanding and experience

---

[54] Matthew 27:46, 50.

[55] Heschel, 5–6.

of human wrath and anger is weighted with the connotations of sin, Heschel argues that God's anger is actually God's concern for God's people.[56] In this sense, "Anger and mercy are not opposites but correlatives."[57]

Without lament, without an ability to get to the anger buried beneath the numbness, masked by the *ego*, humans cannot access the anger of God that is correlative to God's mercy.[58] Without that anger and mercy, humanity only experiences its own numb and neutral indifference. Anger is meant to end indifference. Humanity needs anger embodied through lament in order to end indifference and the indifference of others, to access the mercy of God. The divine righteousness and freedom of God is experienced most acutely through God's anger because through the anger of God humans see most fully God's righteous indignation when God's people are in want of liberation. Habakkuk 3:2 provides a window into the correlative nature of God's anger and concern: "In wrath remember mercy." These two, wrath and mercy, were by design intended to inform one another, as the text demonstrates.

A Pause: Emotions as Vehicle

At this juncture it is necessary to give pause to the voice of caution. C. S. Lewis wrote at length about the psalms of imprecation, interpreting them on the basis of their

---

[56] Heschel, 365.

[57] Ibid., 364.

[58] *Ego* is defined broadly as that which is conscious. It is distinguished from *shadow* in that one's shadow—individual or collective—is that which lies below the level of conscious thought or decision-making. *Shadow* is defined as that which we hide, repress, or deny about ourselves, as our *ego* has determined what is socially acceptable or appropriate. In this example, the expression of anger may be experienced as socially or spiritually unacceptable, so casting anger into our *shadow* is how our *ego* manages that which we experience at the level of conscious thought. The practice of lament comes as an opportunity to experience our shadowed anger, bringing it into congruence with our lived experience. See chapter 5 for further discussion.

use to Christians. He argued that the psalms of imprecation have this mirroring capacity that results in helping us to "recognize something we have met in ourselves. We are, after all, blood-brothers to these ferocious, self-pitying, barbaric men."[59] In this way the imprecatory psalms help only to discover one's own inner baseness in order to grow by reflecting on the sub-Christian ethos displayed throughout. According to Lewis, the psalms of imprecation offer Christians a mirror into which one can gaze to reflect on the worst of humanity. He argued that the hatred and anger in the psalms of imprecation help to turn humans inward to reflect on where we can locate hatred or anger in our own hearts. He writes, "The hatred is there—festering, gloating, undisguised—and also we should be wicked if we in any way condoned or approved it."[60] Lewis' perspective is that the hatred found in the human heart is meant for condemnation only, and that the purpose of its discovery is only purgation.

Viewing the psalms of imprecation as contemptible, however, refuses to hold the original sin of humanity in tension with its original goodness. What if the emotional expression of anger before God is not just a purge of barbarism but an attempt to bring into congruence the experience of suffering with the emotions of anger, fear and sadness—the gifts of emotion that were given by God that make us human? What if the imprecatory psalms have the capacity to teach that even emotions can lead a person to God? Or that hard emotions, like the "least of these" inside of us, are strangers in need of welcome, are worthy of offering a cup of water to drink, or are a prisoner worth the visit,

---

[59] C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harper Collins, 1958), 24.

[60] Ibid., 22.

or the naked body in need of clothing?[61] The *Ira Dei* is best understood as lament; understanding the form, function, and purpose of the imprecatory psalms requires an understanding of anger itself, along with fear and sadness, as these are the emotional movements of imprecation. Recovering emotion as a vehicle to move through experiences of suffering honors the *imago Dei*, since emotions find their source in the Divine, but so rarely are emotions considered to hold weight or significance in the life of the Christian. Jean Vanier quotes Carl Jung in reflecting,

> I admire Christians, because when you see someone who is hungry or thirsty, you see Jesus. When you welcome a stranger, someone who is "strange," you welcome Jesus. When you clothe someone who is naked, you clothe Jesus. What I do not understand, however, is that Christians never seem to recognize Jesus in their own poverty. You always want to do good to the poor outside you, and at the same time you deny the poor person living inside you. Why can't you see Jesus in your own poverty, in your own hunger and thirst? In all that is "strange" inside you" in the violence and the anguish that are beyond your control? You are called to welcome all this, not to deny its existence, but to accept that it is there and to meet Jesus there.[62]

Perhaps a reclaiming of emotion through what is found in the psalter may have something to teach about one's own humanity, and in recovering humanity one also recovers the humanity of others, if the transitive property of being human holds true in the *imago Dei*.

Yet, how can a majority-culture church-goer lament a suffering he or she has never experienced? It is not possible to give full vent to an embodied rage if a person has nothing to be enraged about, and furthermore, to superficially "lament" something one has never experienced cheapens the actual experience of the one suffering. Hinze affirms that simply growing in understanding of the lament found in Scripture, or merely practicing a liturgical exercise may only "contribute to escalating frustration, anger, and

---

[61] See Matthew 25:35–40.

[62] Jean Vanier, *Befriending the Stranger* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 63.

cynicism" on the part of the church body, which results in further removing the worshiper from those who are suffering "with no clear vision of a future worth inhabiting."[63] Brueggemann argues that the "linguistic function of these [lament] psalms is that the psalm may *evoke reality* for someone who has engaged in self-deception and still imagines and pretends life is well-ordered, when in fact it is not.…The harsh and abrasive speech of a statement of disorientation may penetrate the deception and say, 'No, this is how it really is.'"[64] The evoking of reality for majority-culture church-goers is the point; lament wakes a person up to life as it is being experienced by a brother or sister in suffering, and it moves him or her into empathy simply by virtue of being spoken aloud. Leaders of majority-culture churches, particularly in the FMC who have a liberation narrative to draw from, must give their people a vision "worth inhabiting."[65]

Some may suggest that interpreting the wrath of God as correlative to God's compassion is dangerous and has the potential to cause great harm if understood poorly. Those in church who have spent most of their lives on the run from the anger of God need a new category for understanding God's anger as "an instrument rather than a force."[66] Many injustices have been committed at the hands of those in church who claimed to wield the anger of God as a moral necessity. The judgment and fear so closely associated with the anger of God are two places of caution when it comes to introducing God's anger as a prophetic lament. Proper exegesis is required to inform people about the true nature of God's character as it pertains to anger.

---

[63] Hinze, 490–491.

[64] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 53.

[65] Hinze, 491.

[66] Heschel, 363.

Finally, there may be some who suggest that the Euro-American church must strike a balance when it comes to social awareness and engagement: is the only option to be angry all the time? How often should the church lament? Every Sunday morning it would seem there would be something to acknowledge before the Lord. How should a church filter this or prioritize their weight of importance on any given Sunday? Without a liturgy of lament it is difficult to answer these questions about timing and balance, but—returning to the first step toward reconciliation—it is necessary to tell the truth. It is the role of the pastor in his or her care for the church body to demonstrate how to hold on to the hope of the eschaton in the middle of much sorrow.

Conclusion

In recent years a recovery of the practice of lament has found its way into the academic writing of many Christians who understand its necessity and urgency in our time. The psalms of lament have the capacity to help engage suffering, and the ability to speak in an uncensored manner before God is significant in any healing process. There is no question, based on recent Christian scholarship, that the practice of collective lament in US-American churches is necessary; however, the persistent question is why, after all that has been written on the subject in recent scholarship, is there still a gap between the academic writing and the practical application in majority-culture churches? What is missing? Even in liturgical settings where Prayers of the People are a part of the structure of the service, the presence of lament is still strangely absent. On both a collective and individual scale, the shaming of anger, sadness and fear has been the cause of the sideways understanding of lament in US-American majority-culture churches.

Returning to the original question, what does it look like for majority-culture churchgoers to take responsibility for their role in racial justice? If Free Methodist Churches have the foundational theology of John Wesley and the historical grounding in the abolitionist movement, what keeps the identity narrative in FMC contexts so insulated? The step before lament is acceptance of one's own identity and emotion. The "I hate the me I see in you" is the framework in need of deconstruction for white people. The inability to claim one's own cultural identity means that when a person experiences the cultural identity of another person, he or she rejects it. The rejection of the self, particularly including harder emotions like anger, sadness, and fear, results in the rejection of those emotions in others. So when a woman of color is suffering, for example, and she is angry, as the psalmist appropriately demonstrates she ought to be, if a majority-culture person has rejected the emotion of anger in himself, he will negatively project that emotion onto the woman who is suffering, even if she has the right to be angry in her suffering. We cannot accept in others what we reject in ourselves. This is the work of spiritual formation for majority-culture Christians. The practice of self-acceptance so that we have a self in order to engage in reconciliation is the step that comes before any practice or possibility of collective lament in the Church.

CHAPTER 5:

SHADOW-WORK: THE GIFT OF CONGRUENCE

A Constructive Hate

The imprecatory Psalms demonstrate how emotions such as anger and sadness are integral to the human experience and to the act of lamenting. While scholars argue about the role of cursing psalms and their use in the Church, the fact remains that in situations of suffering, the psalms of imprecation have the ability to locate reality for those who are experiencing affliction. The efficacy of the words of the psalmist to act as a balm to the sufferer is significant, for calling down the wrath of God against the unjust is a call for fairness through violence, an end to the posture of indifference, and the drawing on a *lex talionis* keeping of the Law to achieve justice. These movements are not immoral; they are a cry for fairness, the expression of desperation and trust in the Divine.

The expression of the psalmist is more than a rant before God; lament and cursing is a call for God to act with faithfulness toward God's covenant with God's people. For the psalmist, a positive enemy-ethic is uncovered through the expression of anger to God, since for God to be the recipient of the psalmist's rage means that the psalmist is entrusting God to enact justice instead of taking justice into his or her own hands. In this way, Jesus' command in the Sermon on the Mount is congruent with the psalmist's cry for justice; their anguish calls on God whom they entrust to intervene, and the expression of that anguish heals something in the lamenter. Perhaps Jesus' call to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"[1] must be framed within the boundaries of

[1] Matthew 5:44.

trust and healing. To love an enemy may mean to express hatred—or anger, if *hate* feels too strong a word—to God about him in order to release the temptation to enact vengeance; to love an enemy means to die to oneself, to the part of the psalmist that longs for violence in his or her heart toward another person.[2] To "love your enemies" simply by not acknowledging the truth of experienced suffering is not actually love—it is merely the appearance of life where there is death, like the whitewashed tomb Jesus describes in Matthew 23.[3] To appear to love an enemy is not Jesus' command in Matthew 5:44; it is to love, oftentimes despite the injustice experienced.

In his work on reconciliation, *Hate-Work: Working Through the Pain and Pleasures of Hate*, David Augsburger writes, "Just hatred, in its profound commitment to the good, is virtually synonymous with love."[4] Nehrbass explains Augsburger on this point, "Just hatred has similar qualities to the love described in 1 Corinthians 13: it is not self-seeking, it always hopes, always endures, is not proud, etc. To refuse to hate means that we remain in denial, and cannot move toward reconciliation."[5] True justice moves a sufferer out of the cycles of violence in returning an eye for an eye and into "the possibility of a kind of justice that protects both parties' eyes."[6] In this way, the synthesis of love and hate results in a paradox where those who are suffering are enabled to both

---

[2] See Romans 8:13: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

[3] See Matthew 23:27–28 in Jesus' word to the Pharisees: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

[4] David W. Augsburger, *Hate-Work: Working Through the Pain and Pleasures of Hate* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 16.

[5] Daniel Michael Nehrbass*, Praying Curses: The Therapeutic and Preaching Value of the Imprecatory Psalms* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 67.

[6] Augsburger, 17.

"love the surrounding world *and* to feel contempt for its injustices and its threatening presence; to love humanity *and* to feel contempt for inhumanity."[7] To return to DeRay Mckesson's talk, "On the Other Side of Freedom," "Truth must come before reconciliation."[8] In the case of injustice, truths are often angry truths, for they are violations of boundaries and of humanity's most basic rights. If liberation theology has taught anything, it is that the need for liberation is not just of soul, but it is also of body, and the Gospel interpretation of its expected timeline is right now.

A Case for Anger

The role of anger is paramount to the work of justice; it locates reality, confesses trust in the Divine, and works to heal the person expressing the anger through its cathartic movements and possibilities. Anger, though, is often shamed by Christians, as Scriptural texts are interpreted to mean that anger is sinful and the response of an immature or evil person. For example, if a person lets "the sun go down" on her anger, she has given an "opportunity to the devil," or if she does not "overlook an offense" she is without glory.[9] If she is slow to anger, it means she has good sense, because "anger does not produce the righteousness of God."[10] In other places in Scripture, wisdom and foolishness are ascribed to those who are slow and quick to anger respectively, and that anger has the power to

---

[7] Augsburger, 16.

[8] DeRay Mckesson, "On the Other Side of Freedom Tour" (lecture, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland, OR, September 20, 2018.

[9] Ephesians 4:26–27; Proverbs 19:11.

[10] James 4:26–27; James 1:20.

"lodge in the heart of fools."[11] Most importantly, as it pertains to other passages in the Sermon on the Mount that are included above, in Matthew 5:22 Jesus says, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." Jesus' directness regarding anger in this passage is often interpreted as much more than a warning sign or a caution toward anger; it is interpreted often as condemnation—a threat leading to punishment.

Adding to the spiritual layers of anger, the cultural shame around anger also informs interpretation. In her writing about the positive sides of negative emotion, Ursula Hess highlights the interpretation of anger based on other words that are often tied to anger; she writes, "In many ways anger is the prototypical negative emotion. A look into Webster's *Thesaurus* provides a list of related words, which includes *animosity*, *antagonism*, *embitterment*, *enmity*, *hostility*, *malevolence*, and *virulence*, all of which refer to strife and destruction."[12] These synonyms often used to interpret anger help to illuminate its negative connotations, particularly as they might be associated with the definition and synonyms for *hate*. Thus it is not difficult to see that anger is an emotion that is not highly praised or accepted in society.

Hess also quotes the philosopher Seneca in his essay *De Ira* from 41 C.E.: "Certain wise men, therefore, have claimed that anger is temporary madness. For it is equally devoid of self-control, forgetful of decency, unmindful of ties, persistent and diligent in whatever it begins, closed to reason and counsel, excited by trifling causes,

---

[11] Ecclesiastes 7:9.

[12] Ursula Hess, "Anger is a Positive Emotion," in *The Positive Side of Negative Emotions*, ed. W. Gerrod Parrott (New York: Guilford Press, 2014), 55.

unfit to discern the right and true—the very counterpart of a ruin that shattered in pieces where it overwhelms."[13] From the time of Seneca's writing, it is apparent that anger is viewed by its abuses. While there are some positive notes about anger in describing it as "persistent and diligent," the overwhelming sentiment is negative.[14]

It is not difficult to see why anger is interpreted so negatively; both Scripture and culture have much to say about how quickly anger can go off the rails. Any attempt to redeem anger must take its proclivities into account. Anger is not in and of itself evil; the apostle Paul says, "Be angry and do not sin."[15] As fire has the properties to warm or burn, and as water has the ability to quench or drown, so also anger has the capacity to lend itself as a force for good if harnessed properly, or for evil if used destructively.

Throughout the Old Testament, the wrath of God becomes the engine for God's justice, as it is intrinsically tied to God's love. As Abraham J. Heschel notes, "Anger and mercy are not opposites but correlatives."[16] This is demonstrated profoundly in Psalm 8 as David cries out to God for help: "In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry."[17] David goes on to describes how God was angry on his behalf and came to his rescue. Oftentimes the expression of anger comes as a protective voice for someone we love who is being harmed. God demonstrates in the words of the

---

[13] Hess, 55.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ephesians 4:26.

[16] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 1962), 364.

[17] Psalm 8:6–7.

psalmist what it looks like to be an ally and to come to the defense of another person. In this way, advocacy for a person or group must involve anger.

On this idea of anger as advocacy, Aristotle wrote of anger as a sign of strength, as a reflection of the willingness to stand up for oneself and one's friends. He writes,

> Those who do not get angry at things at which it is right to be angry are considered foolish, and so are those who do not get angry in the right manner, at the right time, and with the right people. It is thought that they do not feel or resent an injury, and that if a man is never angry he will not stand up for himself; and it is considered servile to put up with an insult to oneself or suffer one's friends to be insulted.[18]

Interestingly, Aristotle uses *foolish* to describe those who do not get angry when it is right for them to do so. Aristotle's interpretation of anger is as a boundary setting emotion. Its energy is drawn when a violation occurs. For Seneca, writing much later than Aristotle, the out-of-bounds nature of anger results in foolishness, as Proverbs 29:11 teaches: "A fool always loses his temper," whereas a person with wisdom exhibits self-control and decency.[19] Conversely, Aristotle highlights the foolishness exhibited by a person who is not rightly angered over an injury, using *servile* to describe the accommodating nature of one who allows himself to be mistreated by another without challenge.

While some may consider this servile approach as taking the place of a servant and denying oneself as Jesus commands, Aristotle is right in suggesting that if a person "will not stand up for himself," then he also will "suffer one's friends to be insulted."[20] In

---

[18] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV.5, accessed November 27, 2019, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.mb.txt.

[19] Proverbs 29:11 (NASB). Interestingly, the Hebrew word *ruwach* is used here in this passage; while it is often translated as "rage, anger, temper," it is most frequently translated as "spirit" or "wind." Discussions of proper exegesis versus eisegesis are significant here, because in the case of anger cultural understandings bleed into the interpretation of the text.

[20] Aristotle.

this sense, if it is helpful for Christians to understand anger as an appropriate and necessary tool for the advocacy of another person, then perhaps that is a starting point. The problem with this starting point is that the direction of its flow is external to internal. Whereas Luke 6:45 describes the proper flow—"out of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaks"—it essentially means that if I cannot stand up for myself, then I cannot stand up for you. If a person cannot, for example, express her own anger when someone violates a boundary, then she also cannot properly advocate for her friend when a violation of a boundary occurs. When anger is dislocated from the self, its result is a negative projection onto another person even when anger is an appropriate response to a situation. Carl Jung describes this movement in his work on understanding the human shadow.

The Human Shadow

The shadow can be described as the parts of the self that are hidden, repressed or denied, or as "the location for the hidden or repressed aspects of the self."[21] Humans put into the shadow anything perceived to be out of step with what is expected socially, whether by culture, by families of origin, or even by the collective unconscious of society. The shadow is not inherently evil, but it is, as Jung has described, "simply the whole unconscious."[22] Robert Bly describes the human shadow as "the long bag we drag

---

[21] Kenneth M. Reeves, "Racism and Projection of the Shadow," *Psychotherapy* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 81.

[22] Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams, "Introduction: The Shadow Side of Everyday Life," *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed. Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 6.

behind us."[23] Following this image, Bly describes how children at a young age learn instinctively what to put into their shadow: "Behind us we have an invisible bag and the parts of us our parents don't like, we, to keep our parents' love, put in the bag."[24] For example, a child may learn early on that his tears are upsetting for his parents, so he stuffs his tears or his sadness into the bag, and he learns to communicate his feelings as thoughts because his tears are not welcome. Or, for example, a young girl may learn that her sexuality is seen as inappropriate or unacceptable, so she stuffs her sexuality into the bag, instinctively hiding, repressing, or denying it from herself in order to maintain what she believes to be acceptable or appropriate. This results in a growing of her shadow, and those parts of her sink beneath the level of her conscious thought.

Bly contends, "We spend our life until we're twenty deciding what parts of ourself to put into the bag, and we spend the rest of our lives trying to get them out again."[25] To be sure, what gets put into the long bag is not necessarily a morally reprehensible part of the self; a child could perceive that a parent or a teacher, in desiring calm or peace in the environment, communicates that it is unacceptable to have problems or to make noise, because problems and noise complicate things and increase stress. However, sadness, sexuality, making noise, or having problems, for example, are not inherently wrong. They are a part of what it means to be human. The human shadow is full of all sorts of these things, depending on one's culture, family, and society.

The problem with the shadow is not in having one, for "everything with substance casts a shadow," but that what gets put into the bag does not remain there neutral but

---

[23] Robert Bly, *The Little Book on the Human Shadow* (New York: HaperCollins, 1988), 16.

[24] Ibid., 17.

[25] Ibid., 18.

regresses and devolves.[26] Robert Bly writes, "Every part of our personality that we do not love will become hostile to us."[27] A boy who, for example, gets angry and hears from his parent, "Good boys don't get angry," subconsciously stuffs his anger into the bag, but by the time he is in his late forties, his anger has regressed and devolved in the dark sealed up bag dragging invisibly behind him. When he turns to open the bag later in life, the place for a healthy expression of anger becomes inaccessible to him. Instead, the anger is vengeful and destructive, so instead it must come out sideways through road rage, or it must find a more socially appropriate outlet like passive aggressive communication.

This phenomenon of the parts of the self regressing in the bag results in negatively projecting those parts of the self onto others. In his poetic and profound work, *Nobody Knows My Name*, James Baldwin writes, "One can only face in others what one can face in oneself."[28] To carry on with the example of anger as it pertains to the larger discussion, an inability to face anger in oneself means that when a person sees it in another, he or she finds that anger shameful, violent, inappropriate, un-Christian, damnable, and foolish. Going back to the role of empathy, it is impossible to sit with another person in a place of suffering, or in a place of deep sadness, or in a place where a violation has occurred and anger is an appropriate response, if a person cannot face in him or herself those very emotions.

Ken Wilber writes that humans "learn slowly, inexorably, that the key lies in the dark, that if we could embrace that very thing we most despise in ourselves or others, it

---

[26] Zweig and Abrams, "Introduction," 3.

[27] Ibid., 8.

[28] James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), xiv.

might make us whole."[29] This process of embracing that which we despise most is how we learn, as Wilber writes, to "re-own our projections."[30] Shadow-work is essentially the work of taking back the traits and characteristics humans have negatively—and sometimes positively—projected onto others and taking responsibility for them as our own, as belonging to us. In *A Little Book on the Human Shadow*, Bly writes about this process of taking back these disowned parts of the self as "eating the shadow," because shadow-work requires not just identifying the parts of the disowned self, but a creative integration of those parts that move toward wholeness.[31] Perhaps disowning anger may explain, for example, our discomfort with imprecatory psalms, since disowning anger results in negatively projecting it onto the psalmist, viewing his or her cursings as foolish, violent, and distrustful of the Divine.

When Shadow Meets Race

The human shadow is not simply the result of one individual hiding, repressing or denying parts of him or herself; humanity also has a collective shadow, and perhaps for the purposes of this work, a national shadow. In this way, racism is understood as United States' long shadow, and the parts of the collective self that have been put into the long bag dragging behind us result in racism. As Reeves writes, racism "is a form of shadow projection, in which a dominant segment of society refuses to see a disowned aspect of its own nature," so it "sees [the disowned aspect of the self] in a racial or cultural minority"

---

[29] Ken Wilber, "Taking Responsibility for Your Shadow," in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed. Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 272.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Bly, 38.

instead.[32] While Augsburger suggests that reconciliation comes through hate, as in, hate is a necessary step toward moving out of denial by acknowledging the truth, perhaps *hate* must be reframed as *anger*. In order for Christians to embrace the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and the trust in the Divine demonstrated through the imprecatory psalms, Augsburger's hate must be understood as the requisite expression of anger that leads to healing. Most uncomfortably, anger toward the self for the perpetuation of racism's dehumanization is also an opportunity for reconciliation.

Unpacking the United States' long bag of racism is not unlike "unpacking the invisible knapsack" of white privilege, for in Peggy McIntosh's work, the invisible knapsack carried by the majority culture is filled with the ingredients of shadowed humanity.[33] In the knapsack one can find power, access, mobility, an ability to improve one's situation, common humanity with others, and a basic trust from others. These elements carried unbeknownst to the majority culture are shadowed, essentially part of the collective unconscious of dominant society.

Racism, the systematic oppression of one race to the advantage of another, is understood best through Ibram X. Kendi's more nuanced approach in *How to be an Antiracist*. He writes, "Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequalities."[34] This understanding takes into account the institutionalized nature of racism, but it also extends the understanding that racism is made up of policies and ideas, de-moralizing the often false-binary understanding of

---

[32] Reeves, 82.

[33] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Racial Equity Tools, accessed November 18, 2019, https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf.

[34] Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist* (New York: Random House, 2019), 17–18.

racism. It is this binary either/or approach to racism that so often keeps people, and particularly Christians, from acknowledging their own racism. Because racism is viewed through the lens of morality—i.e. "Racism is immoral; I am a moral person, so I cannot be racist"—people distance themselves further from their own role, participation, and benefit from the racist policies that further perpetuate inequality and racist ideas. In order to maintain the hierarchy that racism affords, the dominant society implements policies to maintain access to the powerful to the exclusion of those in non-dominant society who do not have the same access or power.

As an example, the "cotton had become king" economic reality in the United States resulted in the implementation of policies that dehumanized those who labored to harvest cotton.[35] If slaves were seen as less than human, than the policies that kept slavery legalized were not seen as immoral. These policies led to hierarchy of race and segregation, leading to a hatred of African Americans—the "inferior" race. What was cast into the shadow then, was humanity and personhood. Humans were valued for the labor they could produce, a functional shadowing of the *imago Dei*. The interconnectedness of humanity means that a devaluing of one race results in a devaluing of the self. To echo James Baldwin again, "One can only face in others what one can face in oneself," or perhaps, one can only accept in others what one can accept in oneself.[36]

Sylvia Brinton Perera writes about this pattern as *scapegoating*: "In Jungian terms, scapegoating is a form of denying the shadow;" for Perera, it "means finding the one or ones who can be identified with evil or wrong-doing, blamed for it, cast out from

---

[35] James Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation in the Black Religious Tradition," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981), 241.

[36] Baldwin, xiv.

the community in order to leave the remaining members with a feeling of guiltlessness, atoned (at-one) with the collective standards of behavior."[37] Examples of collective scapegoating, particularly from a racial perspective, are glaringly evident, yet they hide in plain sight. The mass incarceration of black men in the United States is a clear example of scapegoating. By sheer numbers, the racial disparity in US prisons is indicative of a shadowed humanity. The Equal Justice Initiative reflects,

> African Americans make up about 13 percent of the nation's population, but constitute 27 percent of all arrests, 33 percent of those incarcerated in jails and prisons, and 42 percent of the population on death row. African Americans are arrested at rates 2.5 times higher than whites; Native Americans at 1.5 times the rate for whites.… Black men are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men, and Latinos are three times as likely.… One of every three black boys, and one of six Latino boys, born in 2001 will go to jail or prison if current trends continue.[38]

These disproportionate numbers reflect a large-scale problem, a collective scapegoating of entire races in the United States, the ramifications of which are damning, dehumanizing, and debilitating to recover from.

To find further evidence of the reality of racial scapegoating, one can look quickly at the racist policies that target African Americans and other groups of color in the United States, including the "war on drugs," life-without-parole sentencing, and the Three Strikes law. If 33 percent of prisons in the United States are made up of African Americans while only 13 percent of the United States' population is African American, the disproportionate numbers indicate something necessary to consider. On the one hand, a white person reflecting on these numbers might say, for example, "The disproportionate

---

[37] Sylvia Brinton Perera, *The Scapegoat Complex: Toward a Mythology of Shadow and Guilt* (Toronto, Canada: Inner City Books, 1986), 9.

[38] "Racial Justice: Presumption of Guilt," Equal Justice Initiative, accessed November 27, 2019, https://eji.org/racial-justice/presumption-guilt, 11/10/19.

number of African Americans in US prisons is a reflection of how much more evil and trouble-making African Americans are than white people." This reflection is definitionally scapegoating. Perhaps white majority culture has forced African Americans to carry the parts of itself that it refuses to accept, namely its anger, violence and vulnerability. In short, the collectively shadowed humanity that allowed for slave owners to brutally beat their slaves has evolved into a new form of scapegoating in mass incarceration. This scapegoating can be seen with every racial group in the United States from the exiling of the Indigenous population to the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II to the deportation of Latino families.

Giving other examples of the ways in which shadow projection evidences itself racially, Reeves offers the example of "laziness" in the African American population. Although all humans can bear the characteristic of laziness, white people stereotype African Americans as lazy, and in so doing deny their own laziness by projecting it onto a minority so they do not have to own it as a characteristic white people embody themselves. Then African Americans are penalized for this stereotype and denied "access to social benefits."[39]

As another example particularly related to emotion, the stereotype of the "angry black person" functions similarly in holding the negative projections of white people who have disowned their own anger. Reeves writes,

> The dominant White society can view African Americans as having hostile emotions. White people might then avoid young African American men, fearing their supposed hostility. Seeing hostility in these others allows the dominant group to overlook its own hostility. This hostility gains expression through

---

[39] Reeves, 83.

> racism, as the dominant group denies African American men access to the social benefits of employment and imprisons a large proportion of them.[40]

This pattern of resulting racism based on negative projections helps explain how the most extreme brutality against slaves was wrought by preachers and pastors in the South. How is that Christian slave owners were widely known for being the most violent to their slaves, given all that Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount? The anger the slave owner experienced toward himself through the dehumanizing acts he committed against his slaves only perpetuated itself by negatively projecting his anger onto his slaves.

Mrs. Joseph Smith, an ex-slave, recalls that the harshest masters were Christians: "The Christians will oppress you more…I would rather be with a card-player or sportsman, by half, than a Christian."[41] The disowning of anger results in violence and aggression, as though something slipped out of the long bag but came out sideways toward the recipients of negative projection. While anger is not an evil trait or characteristic, the dehumanization of slaves resulted in an inability to accept anger in the self because it was so enrapt with shame. Anger experienced by victims of racism is not the same as anger experienced by the majority culture. Whereas anger for victims has to do with the violation of a boundary, the anger experienced by the majority culture is a result of shame for dehumanizing another.

Interestingly, not all projections are negative, but all projections, positive and negative alike, are destructive. In the opening story above in chapter 1, the guest worship leader invited the congregation to participate in musical worship by "let[ting] out [their]

---

[40] Reeves, 82.

[41] Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Random House, 2000), 166.

inner black person" through clapping, dancing, and moving their bodies. This is a positive projection; the guest worship leader, and perhaps his perception of the congregation, could not own his own ability to dance freely or be embodied through musical worship, so he cast that disowned part of himself onto an entire people group. This is also destructive; it paints with a broad brushstroke by stereotyping all black people and it functionally uses a known piece of unique cultural identity to achieve its own end. If a disowned part of the white self is embodiment, for example, then it becomes too humiliating to simply invite people to move freely in worship. Instead an ethnic pillaging occurs, repeating the generational cycle of cultural plundering that is found on the rap sheet of white American history.

All kinds of injustices and atrocities are committed when nations are unaware of their collective shadow. In *Carl Jung and Christian Spirituality*, Robert L. Moore writes, "The shadow is most dangerous and destructive when it is expressed at a collective level. Racial and religious conflict, repressive totalitarian regimes, organized systems of torture and imprisonment all embody collective shadow behavior in which individuals have lost any individual discrimination of values and become identified with the collective values of the group."[42] One can cite the treatment of Jews during World War II, apartheid in South Africa, incidents of police brutality in the United States, the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, mass incarceration of black men in the United States, and the list goes on and on. The point of understanding the shadow is not to eliminate it, but to bring it to the level of awareness so that it remains in the periphery of one's consciousness to manage its destructive tendencies, as opposed to lingering beneath the level of conscious

---

[42] Robert L. Moore, *Carl Jung and Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 176–177.

thought, having the power to control one's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors without conscious consent.

In her work, "White Fragility," a journal article preceding the release of her book by the same title, Robin DiAngelo writes, "White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people."[43] While partnering in the work of racial reconciliation is paramount to the healing process, DiAngelo speaks to the intensified responsibility of white people. Oftentimes it is the majority culture that waits to be educated by minority groups, and people of color end up absorbing the learning curve. DiAngelo writes about the "burden for interrupting it," not the power to rescue, but the actual jarring it open, autopsying it, damning up the flow of the river, stepping off the moving escalator that is racism—this burden rests on the shoulders of dominant society.[44] If this is not true, then what responsibility do majority-culture churches that have zero representation of people of color have in the work of racial justice? Perhaps once majority-culture churches have been able to interrupt white racism by naming their collective shadow, one of the great and vulnerable asks majority-culture Christians can make of their brothers and sisters of color is to invite them to return the traits that have been both positively and negatively projected onto them. The practical application of this movement, the return of the shadow projection, is involved and a long-term commitment resulting in genuine relationship and ultimately reparation between groups within the context of the church.

---

[43] Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 66.

[44] Ibid.

The Collective Shadow: How Ice Cube Moved into the Living Room

As a case study of more recent collective shadow projection and scapegoating, over the course of two decades, Ice Cube, the rapper turned actor-producer, made his way from the urban spotlight of gangsta rap to the suburban living rooms of white America through his family-friendly sitcoms and movies. This movement of Ice Cube's acceptance among mainstream white culture is fascinating and can be seen as an example of the scapegoating of the collective unconscious of white society onto a minority group.

Beginning with his hip-hop music career, Ice Cube was a part of the group Niggaz Wit Attitude (NWA), writing about the African American experience in Los Angeles, California. The release of NWA's album *Straight Outta Compton* in 1988 was an explicit description and critique of the social realities of South Central Los Angeles. With song titles like "F--- Tha Police," *Straight Outta Compton* was not featured on radio stations, and when the group filmed a music video for one of the tracks on the album, MTV refused to feature it. Their lyrics were about drugs, sex, and violence, not unlike the gratuitous violence of the movie *Pulp Fiction*, which was nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards in 1994, but the violence in NWA's lyrics did not enjoy the same reception. The FBI responded to the explicit nature of NWA's album by "send[ing] a letter to Priority [record label], accusing the label of selling a record ("F---Tha Police") that encouraged 'violence against and disrespect for the law-enforcement officer.'"[45] While NWA was banned from touring in certain locations in the US and with "no radio,

[45] Terry McDermott, "Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 2002, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-apr-14-tm-37890-story.

no television, and no publicity," *Straight Outta Compton* sold 3 million copies and NWA earned the nickname "world's most dangerous [music] group."[46]

By 1989 Ice Cube left NWA, starting his solo career, becoming "a screenwriter, actor and movie producer, a virtual corporation unto himself."[47] He continued to write politically charged lyrics in keeping with NWA's *Straight Outta Compton* album. Reflecting the experience of African Americans at the time, "F--- Tha Police" includes the following critique: "A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown / And not the other color so police think / They have the authority to kill a minority."[48] These NWA lyrics are not unlike Ice Cube's reflections in his solo album *Amerikkka's Most Wanted*, released in 1990: "I'm a nigga, gotta live by the trigger / How the f--- do you figure? / That I can say peace and the gunshots will cease? / Every cop killer goes ignored / They just send another nigga to the morgue / A point scored."[49] By 1992, the result of these lyrics, and in particular the track "No Vaseline" earned him an official ban by the state of Oregon, "making it illegal to display Ice Cube's image inside its stores."[50] Additionally, because of his response in "Black Korea" to the killing of LaTasha Harlins in 1991 by a Korean grocery store merchant, Ice Cube's reputation for exacerbating racial tensions is widely known. Ice Cube's lyrics around the time of the beating of Rodney King and the Los

---

[46] McDermott.

[47] Ibid.

[48] NWA., "Fuck Tha Police," by Ice Cube and Mc Ren, track 2 on *Straight Outta Compton*, Priority Records, 1988, cassette tape.

[49] Ice Cube featuring Chuck D., "Endangered Species (Tales from the Darkside)," by The Bob Squad, Ice Cube, and Sir Jinx, track 8 on *Amerikkka's Most Wanted*, Priority Records, May 1990, cassette tape.

[50] David. J. Leonard, "Ice Cube," in *Icons of Hip-Hop: An Encyclopedia of the Movement, Music, and Culture*, vol. 2., ed. Mickey Hess (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 304.

Angeles race riots in 1992 places him as a prominent figure, providing a real-time critique of the social realities of the time.

Around the same time of the release of these wrathful gangsta rap albums, Ice Cube was entering the Hollywood acting scene. From 1991 to 2001, Ice Cube starred in *Boyz n the Hood*, *Friday*, *Next Friday*, and *Friday After Next*, kicking off his acting career. By 2005 and 2007, Ice Cube showed up as a "likable suburban dad" in *Are We There Yet?* and *Are We Done Yet?*[51] His success in mainstream media, considering his ban from certain media platforms and tour locations, is striking. Despite NWA's lack of platform via radio and television, the 3 million copies of *Straight Outta Compton* indicates that Ice Cube has enjoyed much success throughout his career, and yet his persona shifted to the extent that those watching *Are We There Yet?* would be blindsided by his lyrics in *Death Certificate* fourteen years earlier. What accounts for this gap in Ice Cube's public persona? Has he softened as a person, or did mainstream media simply forget about the lyrics of his solo albums? In his review of Ice Cube's acceptance into mainstream media culture, Brent A. Strawn suggests, "[Ice] Cube's reception is in truth an adoption: that he has been received not in spite of his gangsta rap, nor even despite it, but precisely because of it."[52]

Exploring this concept of Ice Cube's adoption into mainstream culture further, Strawn points to the ways in which gangsta rap is primarily consumed in the suburbs, "far from the mean inner-city streets" and from the locations that best understand the realities

---

[51] Brent A. Strawn, "Sanctified and Commercially Successful Curses: On Gangsta Rap and the Canonization of the Imprecatory Psalms," *Theology Today* 69, no. 4 (2013): 407, doi: 10.1177/0040573612463028.

[52] Ibid., 409.

communicated through the lyrics.[53] The tendency to make a spectacle of suffering has a long history, and in the case of Ice Cube, Strawn suggests that these adopters of gangsta rap are not so much "purveyors so much as voyeurs—peeping toms on the other side of the tracks."[54] In this way, Ice Cube's reception can be seen as an integration of the "collective consumer unconscious," meaning that the white suburban supporter of Ice Cube's gangsta rap gets to experience his shadowed humanity in Ice Cube's lyrics. In this way, Ice Cube is the scapegoat for the majority culture's shadow; to accept Ice Cube "may be one way one participates in the mystery of vengeance, hatred, and personhood" without actually embracing it oneself.[55] This participation in "the mystery of vengeance, hatred, and personhood" by experiencing it through Ice Cube's lyrics instead of in one's own life is a way of playing with the shadow. Through Ice Cube, a person can experience a part of their shadow without having to become fully congruent with it him or herself. In this sense, Ice Cube carries the collective unconscious of those majority-culture listeners who have no way of relating to his lyrics contextually; instead, they relate to his lyrics in shadow play.

> Connecting back to the psalms of imprecation, Brueggemann writes,
>
> > Vengeance is here, among us and within us and with power. It is not only there in the Psalms but it is here in the human heart and the human community.… The real theological problem...is not that vengeance is there in the Psalms, but that it is here in our midst.…The capacity for hatred belongs to the mystery of personhood.[56]

---

[53] Strawn.

[54] Ibid., 409.

[55] Ibid., 410.

[56] Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 64–65.

The capacity for hatred is part of what it means to be human, but this part of the self cannot be accepted and must be scapegoated somewhere in culture. Juxtaposing the rejection of the imprecatory psalms in the Church over time with the reception of Ice Cube's critique of racial realities over time, it is not difficult to see how acceptance of the psalms of imprecation may have the same result of experiencing the shadow as adopting Ice Cube as a prophetic figure. Yet by choosing Ice Cube as a scapegoat, the majority culture both gets to experience its shadow through his lyrics as well as to blame him for his vengeful attitude when through with using him for its own means. This racial scapegoating happens everyday with every racial minority in a thousand different ways, as subtle as the majority culture's admiration of Ice Cube.

Exaggerating Projections

It is not difficult to see how the experiencing of one's shadow in an artist like Ice Cube is a benign avenue for the expression of hatred or vengeance; one could even argue that the expression of rage through gangsta rap, for example, is a healthy or neutral way to dissipate feelings of aggression. The problem with this racial scapegoating, however, lies in the complexity of power. While the tendency to project the unwelcome parts of oneself onto another is common to humanity and is not tied to any particular race, shadow-projection on the part of the majority culture has serious implications for minorities and recipients of the majority culture's projections. The majority culture has the power to define other groups in light of those projections versus the reality of who they are, thereby rewriting the narrative of identity. Stereotypes become solidified and unquestioned, and racist policies are made to uphold projections leading to hierarchy and discrimination, which ultimately leads to hatred, both on the part of the victims of racism

as well as of the perpetrators. In order to work back up the chain, victims and perpetrators of racism alike must go through hatred or anger to get to healing.

Retracing the steps back through hatred or anger, an opportunity exists to find healing through the wound of racism and not in spite of it. Racism's victims are found on both sides; the problem of power for the majority culture is that the victimization of racism is difficult to acknowledge and identify. Privilege insulates the majority culture from experiencing how destructive racist policies and ideas really are because the majority culture is the perpetrator and therefore beneficiary of its construction. The interconnectedness of life in God means that when we are perpetrators of racism, whether by direct action or complicity with racist systems, we end up becoming victims of our own doing. Retracing the steps by moving through racist policies through racist ideas through anger is getting out by going through. This process addresses the symptoms of racism in order to get to the root cause that sends the whole system into orbit. While it can be argued that beginning with the symptoms does not address the heart issue that undergirds racism, it is the symptoms of racism that are the result of racist policies, leading to racist ideas—i.e. hierarchy of race—leading to hate or anger.

As Ken Wilber writes, "as long as you fight a symptom, it will get worse. Deliberate change never works, for it excludes the shadow."[57] He continues,

> The problem is *not* to get rid of any symptom, but rather to deliberately and consciously try to increase that symptom, to deliberately and consciously experience it fully!…When you…consciously throw every bit of yourself into actively and deliberately trying to produce your present symptoms, you have in effect…re-discovered your shadow.[58]

---

[57] Wilber, 277.

[58] Wilber, 277.

Through experiencing a symptom fully by bringing it out of the shadow and into congruence with the self, one can be delivered from the symptom experienced and its underlying root.

This phenomenon means that if a majority-culture person were to give full vent to the symptom—for example, of anger or of fear—he would re-discover his shadow and find that he himself is the recipient of the very symptom he projects. "In the very first step of playing your opposites," Wilber writes, "you will come to see that what you love or despise in others are only the qualities of your own shadow. It is not an affair between you and others but between you and you."[59] Racism ultimately is about the self; the lack of ability to see where it begins and ends comes from a shadowed personhood, and that shadowed personhood shows up in systems, policies, and hierarchies for the preservation of the self. This is precisely why the imprecatory psalms were canonized for instruction; they teach something about the self as the self is found in covenantal relationship with God.

Conclusion

While many Christians have interpreted the role of the imprecatory psalms as an example of the worst of humanity, it can be argued that the cursing psalms have more to teach about how to be truly human. As Brueggemann puts it, "The capacity and willingness to voice trouble in the presence of God (and in the midst of the community) is

[59] Ibid., 279.

a major mark of faithful humanness."[60] The fear that leaning into the cursings will only lead to excused violence is an understandable concern, but that concern must be held in tension with the reality that those who are unwilling to own their own shadow are the greatest participants in racism. It is blind complicity to their lack of humanity that keeps the whole operation passively and conveniently afloat. Instead, shadow-work indicates that in exaggerating projections, pulling them out on the carpet and giving them freedom and voice to say the most hateful and rage-filled things, actually gets the hiddenness of self onto the table where a person can look at it more clearly and where it can be illuminated by the Spirit of God and confessed before him and before others.

This distilling of understanding of the human shadow as it pertains to psalms of imprecation may result in a reader's digest version of application: adding a liturgy of lament on a Sunday morning and sprinkling in Psalm 88 and 137 every now and then when another occurrence of police brutality pops up to see how people respond will cover it. This would be a gross generalization and a commodification of pain. In a sense, it would not be very far removed from leaning in to Ice Cube's lyrics to see what it might stir. A movement from asking how to use the imprecatory psalms on a Sunday morning to achieve a theology of suffering to asking what they actually mean for humanity results in a slow-steep in Scripture.

Often, particularly in a consumer-driven ministry context, Scripture is stripped of its meaning and boiled down to its fast-food digestible size. It lacks a prophetic voice and protest. If, for example, a pastor preached on an occurrence of police brutality on a

---

[60] Walter Brueggemann, "On 'Being Human' in the Psalms," *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199783335.013.035.

Sunday morning, citing the pain and suffering and the ripple throughout the community as well as what it means for a white Christian to respond, it would not only rock the boat but the boat might very well capsize. Perhaps in a politically charged culture such as the current US-American reality, the boat might need to capsize in order for the searing pain of people of color to reach our ears. Let it capsize. Keeping people in the boat and rocking it with an embraced liturgy of lament is not enough for the majority culture to re-discover and re-own its shadow. This is why, despite the writings of Brueggemann and Rah, the theories around lament in the Church in the West have not yet landed; they are far too easy to dismiss.

Instead, the application of shadow-work may follow the capsizing. Through weekend retreats and spiritual direction where people are invited to get their projections out on the carpet, healing can come. As it now exists, many majority-culture churches in the US are not safe places for shadow-work; however, in local bodies of believers, outside four walls, shadow-work is already taking place and allowing for healing to come. How this kind of work applies to race is significant and unexplored. One can imagine a scenario wherein a white person, after getting her positive and negative racial projections out on the table, has an opportunity to get clear with a person of color by speaking her projections into the mirror and seeing herself instead. The end of this kind of work would result in the white person humbly and vulnerably asking for her projections back from the person of color, re-owning the disowned self. She could ask for her anger back from the black woman she projected it onto, forcing her to carry something that was not hers to carry because she was not human enough to carry it for herself. This would be a vulnerable and healing ask of people of color, and it would give

them the opportunity to access the power that has been theirs all along in handing these traits back to the majority-culture people who projected them.

It is important to note that the focal point at this stage in the work is on white people doing their own inner work in order to take responsibility for their part in racial justice, but perhaps the focal point on white work is a necessary preliminary step. In some ways the emptying of power for the majority culture means there is a long way to fall from the height of privilege. Recalling DiAngelo's words, "White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people."[61] While shadow-work is a human endeavor, perhaps its role in the Church is the work of interruption. Though shadow-work may not be able to go the full-distance that racial justice requires, it certainly has the potential to awaken the humanness required to even begin.

[61] DiAngelo, "White Fragility," 66.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

A Changing Population

As population projections indicate, the United States is on a trajectory to becoming majority non-white by 2045.[1] While the country's population is shifting, many mainline Protestant churches are not, particularly in places where the surrounding demographic is shifting at a much slower rate than other parts of the country. In contrast, some mainline churches are making great effort to reflect the multiethnic population surrounding, but they are unable to keep pace with the rate of change as they "quickly discover that such diversity is easy to conceive but hard to execute."[2] Pastors attempting to shift their congregation to a multiethnic community often report "clashes over politics, musical tastes, whether children should be shushed during services, how best to talk about race and even how to address pastors."[3] These examples are symptoms of a deeper and unaddressed issue. Though many churches are reorienting their praxis in order to welcome the changing population, the barriers to change are extensive.

While the 2014 Religious Landscape Study indicates that mainline churches are moving toward multiethnic communities, the reality is that the majority culture's

---

[1] Stef W. Kight, "United States Is on the Way to Becoming a Non-White Majority by 2045," *Business Insider*, May 1, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.com/america-non-white-majority-future-by-2045-2019-5.

[2] Laura Meckler, "How Churches Are Slowly Becoming Less Segregated," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 13, 2014, https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-church-of-many-colors-the-most-segregated-hour-in-america-gets-less-so-1413253801.

[3] Ibid.

priorities, polices, and preferences remain center-fold.[4] According to *Business Insider*, "Non-white Americans are now the majority of the population in four states, as well as in the most prosperous and powerful U.S. cities."[5] Stef W. Kight writes, "The country faces two possible futures: A thriving nation that embraces its new demographic makeup, or an escalation of fighting, racism and xenophobia."[6] While Kight's reflections emerge from the perspective of the nation, "church" could be easily be substituted into his statement.

For some churches, "embrac[ing] its new demographic makeup" means choosing the path of greatest resistance, for the slow-drip rate of change in some parts of the country means that some churches currently do not have to change. Instead, the option to enjoy the 80 percent majority-white makeup of their congregations without the challenge of all that inclusion entails becomes the default, an unintended but often welcomed outcome of privilege.[7] For example, although the Latino population in the state of Oregon has grown significantly over the last twenty years, the white population still makes up 78 percent of all people living in Oregon.[8] Logically, the composition of many churches in Oregon reflects that reality. It is not difficult to see how many majority-culture churches

---

[4] Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups," Pew Research Center, July 27, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/. See Appendix. Although the Free Methodist Church is not represented on this table due to its size, the Wesleyan theological traditions represented are noteworthy. While the Pew Research Center has much to offer by way of longitudinal research on other mainline denominations, the meager information on Free Methodist churches is symbolic. A perusal of the Free Methodist Website offers no information or resources about what efforts are being made toward racial justice; the "Embrace All Conference" tab leads to an error page. With twenty-five conference superintendents, two of which are co-superintendents, they are two women represented and three people of color. Of the three bishops leading the denomination, the first female bishop was elected in 2019. The other two bishops are white males.

[5] Kight.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ryan Kost, "Census 2010: More on Oregon's Racial and Ethnic Composition," *Oregon Live*, updated on January 10, 2019, accessed October 14, 2019, https://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/2011/02/census_2010_more_on_oregons_racial_and_ethnic_diversity.html.

in areas where the surrounding population is majority culture may need a new pathway in order to view their role in the racial justice process.

A Challenge and Invitation

More specifically, Journey Church, a Free Methodist Church in the state of Oregon, is situated in a majority-white town of 19,000 residents, and in 2017, 86 percent identified as Euro-American, 7 percent as Hispanic or Latino, 3 percent as Asian, and a total of 13 residents identified as Black or African American Alone on the census.[9] This church in Oregon is not unlike other churches in the United States whose role in racial justice is unclear because of its distance from the rapidly changing demographic of the country. The problem of race is not brought to bear for majority-culture people in this church community in the same way that it is in urban churches where racial tension is more actively felt because of the proximity of differing races in urban contexts. While the biblical mandate for diversity, equity, and inclusion is beyond the scope of this study, it is an assumption of this research that God's intention for God's kingdom is to reflect "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages."[10]

While much has been written about what practical steps might be taken in churches that are moving toward multiethnic communities, what hope can be offered to a church like Journey? Its surrounding makeup is not unlike many rural or suburban churches; what role, if any, does Journey have to play in the movement of God's justice in this world, in this country, in this community? Because Journey Church often enjoys

---

[9] "Diversity," Data USA, accessed June 4, 2019, https://datausa.io/profile/geo/sherwood-or/#demographics.

[10] Revelation 7:9.

the insulated nature of its majority-culture population, Sunday mornings are not opportunities for pain to be expressed. Their social media content is largely comfort driven: "We'd love to see you at our 10am service today! We have warm coffee, great music, and connection for people of all ages" (@journeysherwood, November 10, 2019). While one could somehow argue that not all churches are required to take up the mantle of justice, with the impending population changes coming in the next season in the life of the Church, what channels might Journey Church begin digging in the sand in anticipation of the water to come?

One can think of the cycles of reformation in the Church; perhaps the Church is sitting on the edge of another wave of necessary change. What does it look like for white people to do their work in a majority-culture church surrounded by majority-culture communities? Soong-Chan Rah has written extensively regarding the role of lament in the Church. He writes, "What is needed is a corporate lament—a corporate acknowledgement of the reality of suffering and pain from which many of us in the United States have benefitted."[11] Rah's reflections emerge from a place of assumed empathy, that people know how to compassionately respond to distress because they have the ability to feel what another person may be feeling.

The call to lament in the Church is more than a call to change a few components of Sunday morning worship. It involves transformation of the whole person; to step into an attempt at lament without the inner work necessary for its embodiment is to do further harm to those who are hurting. What steps come before lament in a majority-culture church? As Dr. MaryKate Morse reflected in her lecture with Portland Seminary, "You

---

[11] Soong-Chan Rah, "The American Church's Absence of Lament," *Sojourners*, October 24, 2013, https://sojo.net/articles/12-years-slave/american-churchs-absence-lament.

cannot lead someone where you have not been."[12] How might the Church apply this to what it means to lament? What work must be done foundationally in order for lament to be a possibility in a congregation like Journey Church? This question turns to a historical and theological one, as Journey Church is denominationally Free Methodist.

Free Methodism's Roots

The Free Methodist Church was birthed out of the abolitionist movement; its adherents praxeologically embodied the teachings of their spiritual father, John Wesley, whose theology was social in nature. Wesley's legacy is reflected in his statement, "Christianity is essentially a social religion, and…to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it."[13] He understood salvation not primarily as a private matter for an individual but as evidenced in a person's public life through virtue, justice, and works of mercy. While contemporaries of Wesley began to take a softened approach toward social matters outside the church, Wesley expected his followers to deal decisively with those who accommodated culture, particularly as it pertained to the system of slavery.

Both the doctrine of entire sanctification and of prevenient grace undergirded Wesley's anti-slavery position through their movements toward the restoration of the *Imago Dei* and the way in which prevenient grace ultimately "lights up the whole sphere of ethics," drawing individuals to respond to the work of the Spirit with the hope of

---

[12] MaryKate Morse, "Principles and Processes of Transformation," (Lecture, Portland Seminary, Cannon Beach, OR, October 30, 2018).

[13] James H. Cone, "Sanctification and Liberation in the Black Religious Tradition," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981), 188.

justice for all.[14] While other preachers took a gradual view toward slavery's abolition, John Wesley expected that his followers would embody the ultraist view, regarding slaveholding as a sin against God and humanity, and those who participated "had no further rights to fellowship in the believing community."[15] Wesley's approach to salvation included the whole person—body included.

US-American Methodism's accommodation of slavery would eventually lead to a dualistic approach to life in God, dividing the soul from the body. Francis Asbury, who heavily influenced the US-American Methodist movement, was caught in a difficult time in history. There was an either/or approach for churches during this time in regards to slavery. Like many others, Asbury began his work with the ultraist view and eventually yielded that position, citing that emancipation of the soul of slaves was more important than the emancipation of their bodies. This was a problematic position to take in light of Asbury's ordination of Richard Allen, the first black Methodist pastor, in 1799. This body/soul split in US-American Methodism explains the accommodation of culture and B. T. Roberts' accidental schism with the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), forming the Free Methodist denomination.

B. T. Roberts and others leading the Free Methodist movement were addressing what they believed to be a backslidden MEC at the time, but they in effect were challenging the body/soul split in the church, seeking to repair the divorce between the physical and spiritual that was evidenced most clearly through slaveholding practices. Howard Snyder writes,

---

[14] David Field, "The Unrealised Ethical Potential of the Methodist Theology of Prevenient Grace," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71, no. 1 (January 2015): 2.

[15] James Arnold Reinhard, "Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church: 1852–1860" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1971), 102.

> "Free" specifically meant freedom from slaveholding and, by implication, freedom for slaves and the end of slavery, as well as freedom from the spiritually numbing influence slavery had in the church. Thus it is accurate historically to say that the "Free" in Free Methodist signifies freedom from slavery, oppression, and racial discrimination, as well as free seats and freedom of the Spirit.[16]

Although Roberts and his cohort actively worked to mend this gap between the physical and spiritual by expelling anyone from their fellowship who participated in slaveholding practices, as Reinhard writes, "there is little evidence to prove that in subsequent years Roberts and his followers showed continuing creative concern for blacks."[17] As the Free Methodist Church moved from a grassroots movement to a mainline fixture in the US-American Church, an embourgeoisement occurred, shifting its priorities, and those in leadership exercised their power according to those shifted priorities. By the times of the civil rights movement, the Free Methodist *Discipline* "affirm[ed] the equal worth of all persons" and pledged "a determined effort to eliminate the unchristian practice of racial discrimination and injustice," but the Free Methodist Church was largely silent and inactive in the movement from a praxeological standpoint.

The betrayal experienced by black Methodists first through Asbury's removal of the issue of slavery from *The Discipline* in 1804 can be pulled like a thread through white US-American Methodism. The inaction, apathy, and inability to continue making difficult decisions about the church's role in social matters has resulted in betrayal and indifference. While those who bear Free Methodist heritage claim John Wesley as a spiritual father, Roberts and his followers did not carry his fierce opposition to slavery. In an effort to account for the gap between Free Methodism's genesis and its present reality

---

[16] Howard Snyder, *Populist Saints: B. T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 486.

[17] Reinhard, 104.

today, the body/soul divide and the accommodation of culture are important pieces in the conversation. What lies in the gap between inception and present reality is a dualistic approach to life in God and a paralyzing indecisiveness as it pertains to the difficult decisions culture forces the church to make about social issues. What the white US-American Methodist church was missing then was a theology of liberation that had the capacity to hold in tension the physical and spiritual as well as the demands of culture.

Church with a Body: A Theology of Liberation in the West

James H. Cone, the father of Black Liberation Theology, credits the rise of Black Theology to Richard Allen and others who, in their refusal to accept the racist white theology in the church at the time, departed from it and began their own denominations, not unlike the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) under Allen's leadership. Cone's interpretation of Allen's motivation was that leaders in the church at the time failed to "relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society."[18] The establishment of the AME and the rise of Black Theology was birthed out of a need for the Church to respond to the suffering that black people were experiencing in their bodies by the hands of white people in this country. Black Theology is essentially a theology of the oppressed. It demonstrates awareness of power, the human condition, and all that liberation was intended to mean—beyond simply the salvation of the soul to the liberation of the body as well.

The compatibility of US-American theology with racism is epidemic. There are few places in the US-American church where the sin of indifference is not brought to

---

[18] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1970), 23.

bear, and those places are primarily where the oppressed have a voice, for example Church of God in Christ, National Baptist Convention, and AME. The distinction between US-American theology and liberation theology can be identified by its prioritizing a theology of celebration and a theology of suffering, respectively. Understanding liberation theology requires a theology of suffering that moves toward celebration—an embrace of the cross of Jesus and a move toward his resurrection.

While liberation theology seeks to "confront reality as it is," white US-American theology was meant to set people free in their explanation of the truth in a post-Enlightenment world.[19] While US-American theology has at its core apologetics and a theologizing in order to prove God's existence, liberation theology has a body, and its main concern is for those bodies—whether they are fed and safe and given voice and opportunity. As Jon Sobrino writes, "European [American] theology is trying (admittedly in goodwill) to reconcile the wretched state of the real world at the level of theological thought, but it is not trying to liberate the real world from its wretched state."[20] This distinction is damning, for liberation theology's aims can be measured by looking around at bodies. Are they free? Are there some bodies more free than other bodies? Is power distributed equitably?

Liberation theology supposes that Jesus had a "preferential option for the poor," as evidenced throughout the Gospels.[21] Bringing the corporate and corporeal dimensions of theology into focus, Gustavo Gutiérrez expresses, "spiritual redemption is not enough;

---

[19]Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 16.

[20] Ibid., 18.

[21] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 129.

a spiritual salvation does not challenge the order in which we live."[22] Oscar Romero continues, "The salvation Christ brings is a salvation from every bondage that oppresses human beings."[23] From the perspective of liberation theology, salvation is both spiritual and physical. Any form of oppression is considered to be sin; God's intention is for all people to experience liberation fully, and God's preference is for the poor who are defined not by who they are but by what they do not have.

The problem with the Western individual view of liberation theology is that it does not yet understand its own role in the systems of oppression that exist. Because it does not know its role, the temptation is to have a savior complex, to move into the position of liberator instead of ally, further disempowering the oppressed. On the flipside, the assumed extremes of liberation theology and its political agenda in particular can also result in a demonizing of liberation theology, fearing its perceived coup-like nature.

An embrace of liberation theology in the West means that where there is sin in the system, people are oppressed, and Christ came to free oppressed and oppressor alike. Liberation theology, in its bringing back together what white US-American theology has separated—the body and the soul—liberates the oppressor by prophetically calling out sin within people and within systems in order for those who benefit from the systems of racism to become allies in the movement toward liberation for all. A theology of liberation in the West means not that white US-American theology co-ops the theology of the oppressed for its own purposes, but that a theology of liberation gives a way forward together. A theology of liberation weds the physical and the spiritual back together in a

---

[22] James B. Nickloff and Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Essential Writings: The Making of Modern Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 144–145.

[23] Nickloff and Gutiérrez, 163.

union of justice. Awakening the white US-American church from the apathy of indifference results in an urgency of liberation in the here and now and not simply at the end of history.

The oppressed Christian and the oppressor Christian both read from the same Scriptures. Jesus came to "proclaim good news to the poor…to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," and somehow these words apply to all Christians alike.[24] While all Christians alike can find themselves in this text, perhaps some do so figuratively and spiritually while the others believe Jesus to mean that He has come to liberate them quite literally and physically. One interpretation of liberation is a past endeavor; Jesus has completed the task of liberation through his death and resurrection. The other interpretation is an ongoing present action or a hoped-for event in the future. The first interpretation emerges from a place of orientation and symmetry: "God has liberated me; I am free." The second emerges from a place of disorientation and "unrelieved asymmetry": "God may still deliver me, but I am not free."[25]

The Psalms Teach Us How and Why

The Psalms of lament and cursing have something to offer in the disorientation, and although 40 percent of the psalms are made up of imprecatory psalms, rarely does a

---

[24] Luke 4:18.

[25] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 51.

majority-culture church engage with them on a Sunday morning.[26] As Brueggemann writes, "A church that goes on singing 'happy songs' in the face of raw reality is doing something very different from what the Bible itself does."[27] The psalms of imprecation keep in view the suffering experienced by the people of God. Here the distinction between white American evangelical theology and Latin American theology is brought to bear; liberation theology's emphasis on salvation here and now means that it cannot lose sight of suffering, as it is the lens through which the world is viewed. Amnesia, or perhaps a numbing indifference to pain, cannot be a possibility with a theology of liberation because of the urgency of its claims.

The theology of the majority culture, however, is at risk of losing sight of a theology of suffering, choosing to live in a world of symmetry, coherence, and orientation, despite the suffering of the world around it. The psalms of lament give opportunity to maintain connection with the reality of a suffering world. These psalms highlight two significant questions for the people of God: "Why?" and "How long?" While these two questions come as an accusation at God, Claus Westermann emphasizes that accusations are at "the heart of the lament of the people in ancient Israel. There are no laments of the people in which they are totally absent."[28] The request of the one lamenting has to do with a redistribution of power, petitioning God to maintain God's agreement with God's people based on their covenant relationship.

---

[26] Glenn Pemberton, *Hurting with God: Learning to Lament with the Psalms* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2012), 32.

[27] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 52.

[28] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 177–178.

The cursing psalms often employ requests for vengeance through violent means. For reasons often based on interpretations of Jesus in the Gospels, the psalmist's request for vengeance can be seen perhaps as spiritually immature or evil, and the cursing psalms become an image of humanity at its worst instead of an integral part of humanity. Demonstrating the necessity of honest emotional expression before God, the psalms locate reality for the people of God. The absence of the psalms of lament in majority-culture worship is both an indicator and an indictment, as the response of majority-culture churchgoers is often, "This psalm does not concern me, because I have never been that angry."[29] The inability of majority-culture churchgoers to connect with this level of anger is reflective of a privilege that shields a person from the hopelessness and powerlessness experienced by those outside of majority-culture contexts. The cursing psalms teach the people of God how human emotion becomes a vehicle for healing, both for oppressed and oppressor alike.

The logical conclusion might be to simply include psalms of lament in Sunday morning worship in order to give opportunity for the expression of pain and the locating of reality. While this is not a wrong conclusion to draw, the temptation is to limit the psalms of lament to a functional and superficial embrace instead of an embodied practice. For a majority-culture churchgoer, simply including cursing psalms on a Sunday morning keeps the psalms of lament at the level of thought and curious consideration. This is in keeping with a white American evangelical perspective, which continues to keep theologizing at the level of thought rather than to ask how bodies are impacted by its theology. A step beyond superficial inclusion on a Sunday morning might cause one to

---

[29] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 87.

consider why it is that these psalms have been included in the canon of Scripture. Why are they here? Are the vengeful requests analogous, or do they have literal meaning for our lives?

The psalms of lament become a model for reconciliation, for the expression of anger and hate is requisite for the healing process, as Nehrbass writes, "To refuse to hate means that we remain in denial, and cannot move toward reconciliation." While Christians are quick to reject this in light of the ethic of Jesus in the New Testament, the cursing psalms in particular have something to teach majority-culture churchgoers about their own discomfort with emotional expression. A reclaiming of emotional expression through what the psalter models helps us recover our humanness and the humanness of others, if the transitive property of being human holds true in the *imago Dei*.

The Need for Shadow-Work in the White US-American Church

The presence of the Psalms of imprecation in the canon of Scripture helps to shed light on the necessity of an emotion like anger in processing pain before God. Further, the presence of emotion in the Psalms also helps to illuminate how frequently emotion is shamed by Christians, oftentimes through the interpretation of other Scriptures which are used to invalidate or move a person quickly out of anger. The Psalms prove the necessity of emotional expression for the people of God as well as God's own expression of anger or wrath toward injustice.[30] As Abraham J. Heschel writes, "Anger and mercy are not opposites but correlatives," and in this way anger can be seen as the engine for God's

[30] Psalm 8.

justice birthed out of God's love.[31] Aristotle's treatment of anger is also brought to bear, as his view emphasizes anger as a sign of strength, as a reflection of the willingness to stand up for oneself and one's friends.[32]

The majority-culture church, in shaming an emotion like anger, whether by way of interpreting Jesus as condemning it, or by way of an absence of cursing Psalms, or by way of an avoidance of pain and denial of suffering, effectively shadows anger. The human shadow is comprised of whatever humans hide, repress, or deny; it is "the location for the hidden or repressed aspects of the self."[33] A shadowed anger regresses; individuals who are socially shamed out of expressing anger in a healthy way will put it into their shadow where it regresses into rage, passive aggressive communication, and projection onto others. And as James Baldwin writes, "One can only face in others what one can face in oneself," meaning that if a person cannot accept and healthfully experience her own anger, she will not be able to accept anger in another person and will in turn judge it, condemn it, and discriminate against that person accordingly.[34]

The human shadow is not limited to individuals, for humanity also has a collective shadow. Racism can be understood as the United States' long shadow, and the parts of the collective self that the majority culture puts into "the long bag we drag behind us" has resulted in racism.[35] While dismantling racist policies and hierarchies is an

---

[31] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 1962), 364.

[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV.5, accessed November 27, 2019, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.mb.txt.

[33] Kenneth M. Reeves, "Racism and Projection of the Shadow," *Psychotherapy* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 81.

[34] James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), xiv.

[35] Robert Bly, *The Little Book on the Human Shadow* (New York: HaperCollins, 1988), 16.

enormous undertaking beyond the scope of this study, one slice of this dismantling requires shadow-work, or a re-owning of the parts of the self that have been projected and scapegoated onto others in an effort to not have to face the self. Shadow-work means retracing the steps back through our emotional charges to uncover what lies beneath so that we can re-own these parts of the self that have been projected onto others. If an acknowledging of the truth must come before confession, and an understanding of anger must come before lament, the white US-American church has a long way to go in owning the parts of the self that have been shadowed and projected onto minority cultures in the United States.

The psalms of imprecation demonstrate the necessity of honest emotional expression, that everything must be "brought to speech" before God, and an embodiment of that truth bridges the body/soul and physical/spiritual divide, liberating the whole person in the same spirit of abolition that began with good intentions but devolved into self-preservation over time.[36] There is much of the human self to be recovered for oppressor and oppressed alike. What it means for white people to do their work in majority-culture churches requires honesty with self and with others, emotional expression through embodied practices, and a vulnerable ask of people of color to give back to majority-culture people our projections so that we can humbly re-own and accept these disowned parts of the self and move toward healing.

---

[36] Stephan de Beer, "Reading Psalms, and Other Urban Poems, in a Fractured City," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 9, doi: 10.4102/ve.v36i1.1472.

Implications for Ministry

The opening story about the guest worship leader at Journey Church is again brought to bear. What could I have done differently when I heard the worship leader invite the congregation to "let out [their] inner black person"? What could I have done differently in my conversation with my friend of color afterward? What could we as a church have done differently in response? Through the process of this research I have humbly had to own the ways in which I am quick to dismiss a white person as being ignorant in a racially charged situation, and because I count them as ignorant, I become complicit with their behavior by not addressing it. I am too afraid to acknowledge my own ignorance in other racial situations, and so I subconsciously excuse another person's ignorance by shadowing my own anger at myself for lacking compassion and awareness of another person's pain.

What happened on stage that Sunday morning was a projection onto black people the shadowed embodiment that white people experience. White people do not understand our own culture because we are taught by systems of privilege that we do not have one. Because we do not understand our own culture, white people often borrow and functionally use what we know of someone else's culture to help us experience what we cannot experience on our own. This effectively invalidates and caricaturizes an element of black culture that has so much meaning historically and relationally. The worship leader's invitation was a result of scapegoating the part of the white self that white people do not know how to embrace. While I have had many reflections on how I could have responded differently in that moment, differently to my friend, and certainly differently in my lack of confrontation with the church leadership, this story is simply one situation

among many that have occurred at Journey Church wherein the tendency has been to lean away from conflict and to avoid the pain present in any given moment. As a member of that community I am complicit in the avoidance and the resulting indifference.

Journey Church lacks a vehicle and avenue to address its own pain in its own community. In a handful of months, I watched as the few families of color that attended Journey slowly and eventually chose other places to worship—I can easily rattle off fifteen names. Perhaps their departure was not directly tied to this one experience but to the compiling of these kinds of experiences over time; these families also may have left as a result of completely unrelated factors, but part of the problem is that there is no record of conversation with the church staff or closure before moving on to be able to know. Because Journey Church is Free Methodist by denomination, the tendency to walk on eggshells in regards to social issues makes clear that there is amnesia of its history and anemia toward its founding theology. There is no abolition spirit at Journey Church; most of its attendees on a Sunday morning are unaware of its historical and theological heritage. This is both an invitation and a challenge to the leadership to become educators and remember-ers of its heritage.

Practical Steps

It would be a mistake to assume that introducing imprecatory psalms into the worship set on a Sunday morning would assist in this shadow-work process, or that simply remembering B. T. Roberts' mission would inform our way forward by remembering how we began. This work is deeper and more extensive than a Sunday morning liturgical element could accomplish. What we need are brave spaces for people to unearth their own shadowed selves. This cannot happen in our casual small-group-

over-dinner settings or half-time of Monday night football gatherings. Shadow-work must be engaged through spiritual direction and through intensive weekend retreats that are specifically designed and oriented to help people move into embodiment in order to face the disowned parts of the self. This begins first with church leadership, and as leaders receive spiritual direction emphasizing shadow-work and engage in shadow-work weekend retreats, they can learn how to help others do the same and orient their worship services and church programming accordingly. The implementing of this kind of work requires longitudinal change; shadow-work is an extensive and ongoing process, and creating brave spaces is paramount for participants to re-own the disowned parts of the self. While the church leadership does not currently recognize that there is a need for the church to engage in racial justice, the impact of spiritual direction and shadow-work weekends will inevitably result in leading from a place of being more fully human, which is a necessary starting point.

Offering these two suggestions, spiritual direction and weekend retreats to host shadow-work, has been my best attempt to give some hope for the present reality in many consumer-oriented majority-culture churches like Journey. The truth is that the change needed must come from an outside voice, from a non-profit organization that specializes in hosting weekend retreats, or from a list of spiritual directors that the church can employ to help make room for what God is doing in terms of God's movement toward justice in this world. Soong-Chan Rah suggests,

> The diseased theological imagination of the US evangelical church requires a challenge that cannot arise from within its own community. In the same way that evangelicals believe that individual salvation requires redemption to come from an external source, redemption for a diseased theological imagination will also require an external source. The interaction with an otherness that challenges the

> status quo would be a necessary precondition to the salvation of the soul of evangelicalism.[37]

While I believe ideally that outside voice would be a non-majority-culture narrative, the fragility of many white evangelicals means the starting place needs to come from a ministry related non-profit in order to ease the process of change in the Church.

As an elder millennial, I have taken a seat at this table of racial justice, a conversation that was started long before I was born and will continue long after I get up from the table. I have sought to present the opportunities and limitations of this research as I have uncovered it at my particular place in history. With the hopefulness of the coming generation to prophetically speak into the sleepy realities of many majority-culture churches and the memory of my own denominational stream to inform our way forward as a church, I have not lost hope in the church's mission as God's primary means of grace in this world. So often I have watched my contemporaries throw stones at the evangelical church in the United States with no suggestions for moving forward. While I often agree with the indictments about how out of touch the church in the United States has become with the social realities outside of its walls, I care deeply about the local church and want to be a part of its challenge, its growth, and its transformation. I believe this work begins with the leadership's willingness to engage shadow-work and address the disowned parts of the self in order to move toward a recovery of the full self, an embodied liberation of the whole person so that a church can become a safe place for all people to engage the work of justice in all aspects of life.

---

[37] Soong-Chan Rah, "Evangelical Theologies of Liberation," in *Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice*, ed. Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 50.

A Free Methodist Church context has the theological and historical foundations to become a host for anti-racist work by engaging its role in the work of justice through shadow-work as a model for the recovery and liberation of the whole person. Shadow-work is simply another way to think about discipleship, for the process of becoming more fully and faithfully human like Jesus is recalling all that God intended by making humans in God's image.

Areas of Further Research

This research stands on the shoulders of many who have so thoroughly searched out the Scriptures to define clearly what God has intended in order to biblically defend what diversity, equity, and justice ought to look like in this world. The limitations of this study were such that I assumed a certain theological position throughout, namely that diversity in the local church is a biblical imperative. I would like to expand my research to see how majority-culture churches outside of the Protestant stream have sought to embody that biblical imperative. There is also a need to research the ways in which the homogeneous unit principle (HUP) has impacted the North American church over time, and what other local bodies have attempted in addressing the subconscious theology that crept in on account of HUP's period of acceptance.[38] Although many question HUP's ethical nature, I cannot help but sense its continued impact on local churches.

---

[38] The homogenous unit principle (HUP) asserts that churches grow faster when as many barriers to its growth are removed, particularly in relationship to race, socio-economic status, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The HUP was an accepted trend in church growth models in the latter half of the 20th century. Its impact is still felt and ongoing in many churches in the United States today. On page 90 of *The Next Evangelicalism*, Soong-Chan Rah writes of the HUP, "The homogenous unit principle allowed the white church to further propogate a system of white privilege by creating a system of de facto segregation. Segregation justified by a desire for church growth allows affluent white churches to remain separate." For further discussion on the HUP, see chapter 4 of Soong-Chan Rah's *The Next Evangelicalism*.

Lament is a liturgical practice on Sunday mornings for some streams of the church. Further research requires a study of the models urban churches utilize in order to give expression to pain and suffering. Researching how an established liturgy of lament on a Sunday morning has impacted race relations would be deeply insightful. Further, there are several non-profit organizations that lead Shadow-Work weekends, such as Deep Water, Soul Beauty, Mankind Project, The Crucible Project, and Woman Revealed. Further research into how race has impacted their weekend retreats would be extremely beneficial. I am personally aware of two particular occurrences in which a person of color and a white person have been able to engage one another on these weekend retreats. I would be interested in pursuing their personal experiences in that reconciling work and how it has impacted them long-term. Further, as spiritual direction comes into focus as an opportunity for people to be pastored where there are, outside of the walls of the church and even perhaps outside of the believing community, research on the acceptance of spiritual direction into mainstream culture would be a helpful place of research as well.

Finally, the scope of this study may limit the ability to have a cross-generational conversation about shadow-work. Further research is required to understand how shadow-work would be interpreted and received across the span of generations. I would also like to research the ways in which the younger generations who will be leading the church might engage their "culture of protest" within the walls of the church. As protests and social activism are on the up-swing with younger generations, the US-American culture laments in the streets through protests and marches and yet sits quietly through Sunday morning services. Is there any overlap between those who take part in protests and those who are still committed to attending church on Sunday morning, are these

groups mutually exclusive, and what does that mean for the future of the church? Further research around how each generation has managed its own pain would be a helpful piece of the conversation as that is brought to bear—or not—on Sunday mornings.

APPENDIX:

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

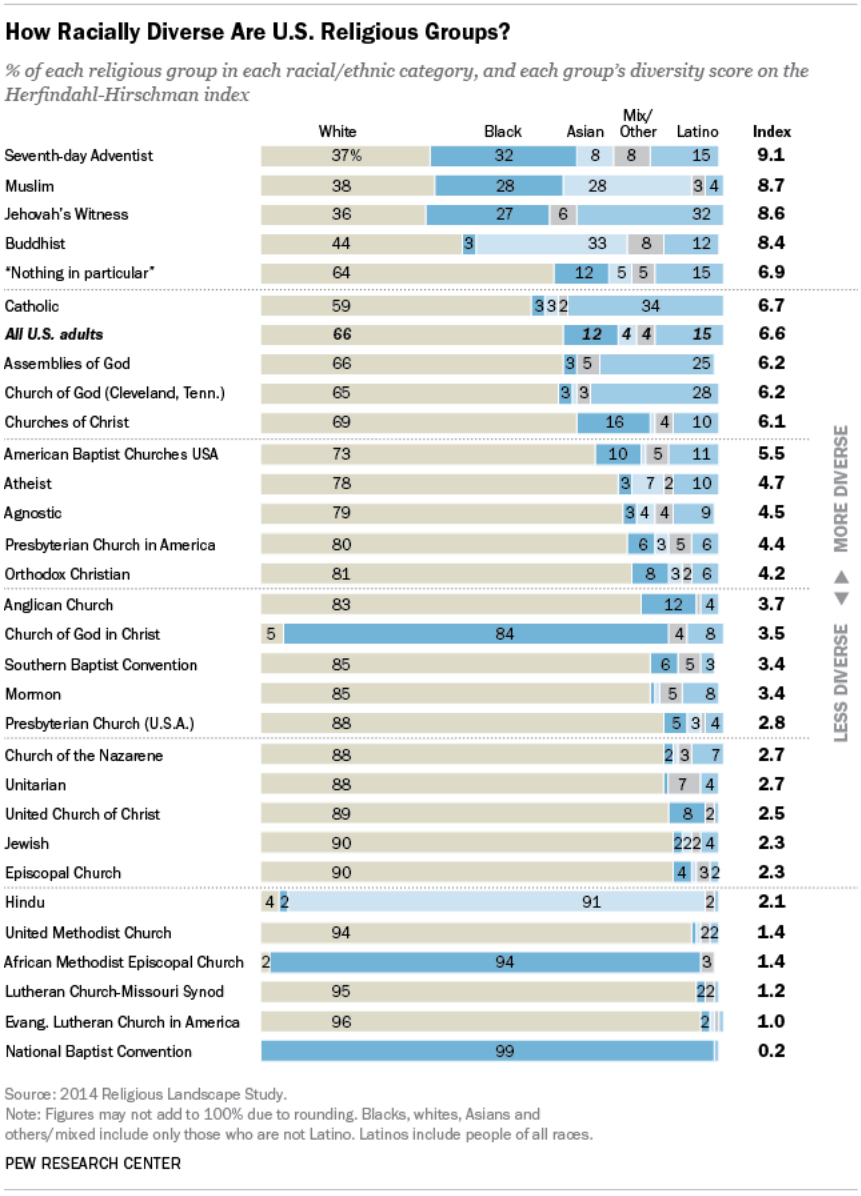

Table 1. How racially diverse are U.S. religious groups?[1]

[1] Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups," Pew Research, July 27, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/.

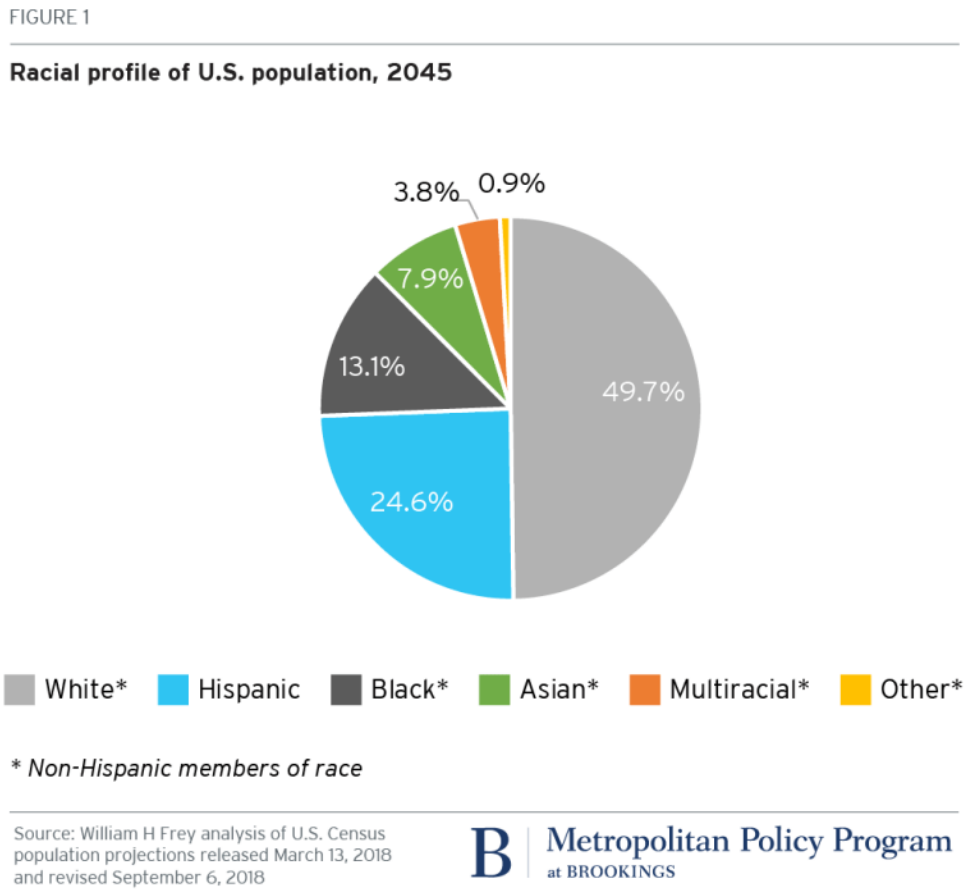

Figure 1. Racial profile of U.S. populations, 2045[2]

[2] Frey, "US Will Become."

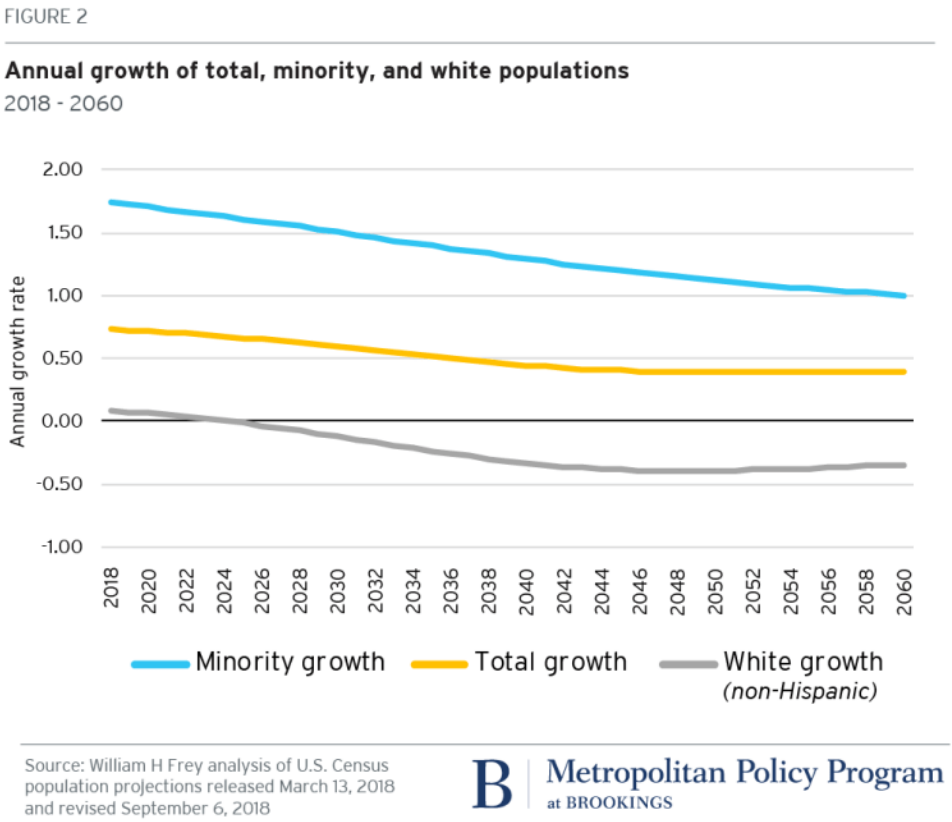

Figure 2. Annual growth of total, minority, and white populations[3]

[3] Frey, "US Will Become."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Book IV. N.D. Accessed November 27, 2019. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.4.iv.html.

Augsburger, David W. *Hate-Work: Working Through the Pain and Pleasures of Hate*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Baldwin, James. *Nobody Knows My Name*. New York: Dial Press, 1961.

Behr, Thomas C. "Luigi Taparelli and Social Justice: Rediscovering the Origins of a 'Hollowed' Concept," *Social Justice in Context* 1 (2005): 3-16.

Bly, Robert. *The Little Book on the Human Shadow*. New York: HarperCollins, 1988.

Brendlinger, Irv A. *Social Justice Through the Eyes of Wesley: John Wesley's Theological Challenge to Slavery*. Peterborough, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2006.

Brinton Perera, Sylvia. *The Scapegoat Complex: Toward a Mythology of Shadow and Guilt*. Toronto, Canada: Inner City Books, 1986.

Brockman, James R., and Óscar A. Romero. *The Violence of Love*. Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1998.

Brown, Robert McAfee. *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Living Toward a Vision*. Philadelphia, PA: United Church Press, 1976.

———. "On 'Being Human' in the Psalms." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*. Edited by William P. Brown. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 1–15. Doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199783335.013.035.

———. *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007.

———. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.

Cannon, Mae Elise and Andrea Smith, eds. *Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.

"Chasm Exists Between Pope, Liberation Theology." *Catholic News Agency*, May 16, 2013. https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/chasm-exists-between-pope-liberation-theology.

Cone, James H. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1970.

———. "Sanctification and Liberation in the Black Religious Tradition." In *Sanctification and Liberation*. Edited by Theodore Runyon. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981.

Cunningham, Lawrence. *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master: Essential Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1992.

de Beer, Stephan. "Reading Psalms, and Other Urban Poems, in a Fractured City." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 1–8. Doi:10.4102/ve.v36i1.1472.

DiAngelo, Robin. "White Fragility." *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 54–70.

Douglass, Frederick, and Harriet Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York: Random House, 2000.

Emerson, Michael O., and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Field, David. "The Unrealised Ethical Potential of the Methodist Theology of Prevenient Grace." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71, no. 1 (January 2015): 1–8.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. 30th ed. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005.

Frey, William H. "The US Will Become 'Minority White' in 2045, Census Projects: Youthful Minorities are the Engine of Future Growth." *The Avenue*, March 14, 2018. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/.

Gorman, James L. "Evangelical Revivalism and Race Relations in the Early National Era." *Slavery's Long Shadow: Race and Reconciliation in American History.* James L. Gorman, Jeff W. Childers, and Mark W. Hamilton eds, 21–38.

Gorman, James L., Jeff W. Childers, and Mark W. Hamilton, eds. *Slavery's Long Shadow: Race and Reconciliation in American Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2019.

Grant, Jamie A. “Crisis, Cursing and the Christian: Reading Imprecatory Psalms in the Twenty First Century.” *Foundations* 74 (May 2018): 4–13.

Gravely, William B. “African American Methodism.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*. Edited by James E. Kirby and William J. Abraham, 1-16. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Hankle, Dominick D. “The Therapeutic Implications of the Imprecatory Psalms in the Christian Counseling Setting.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 275–80.

Hartnett, Daniel. “Remembering the Poor: An Interview with Gustavo Gutierrez.” *America: The Jesuit Review*, February 3, 2003. https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2003/02/03/remembering-poor-interview-gustavo-gutierrez.

Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. New York: HarperCollins, 1962.

Hess, Ursula. “Anger is a Positive Emotion.” In *The Positive Side of Negative Emotions*. Edited by W. Gerrod Parrott. New York: The Guilford Press, 2014.

Hinze, Bradford E. “Ecclesial Impasse: What Can We Learn From Our Laments?” *Theological Studies* 72, no. 3 (2011): 470–495.

Ice Cube featuring Chuck D., “Endangered Species (Tales from the Darkside).” Released May 1990. Track 8 on *Amerikkka’s Most Wanted*. Composed by The Bomb Squad, Ice Cube, and Sir Jinx. Priority Records, 1990, cassette tape.

Jagessar, Michael. “Review Article: Critical Reflections on John Wesley, Thoughts Upon Slavery.” *Black Theology* 5, no. 2 (2007): 250–55. Doi 10.1558/blth2007v5i2.250.

Jameson, Beverley. “Permission to Rant.” *Theology* 119, no. 5 (2016): 342–47. Doi: 10.1177/0040571X16647864.

Jung, C. G. “Psychology and Religion: West and East.” In *Collected Works.* Vol. 11. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958.

Katongole, Emmanuel, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Mirror to the Church: Resurrection Faith After Genocide in Rwanda*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

Kendi, Ibram X. *How to be an Antiracist*. New York: Random House, 2019.

Kight, Stef W. “United States is on the Way to Becoming a Non-White Majority by 2045.” *Business Insider*, May 1, 2019. https://www.businessinsider.com/america-non-white-majority-future-by-2045-2019-5.

Kost, Ryan. “Census 2010: More on Oregon’s Racial and Ethnic Composition.” *Oregon Live*. Last modified on January 10, 2019. https://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/2011/02/census_2010_more_on_oregons_racial_and_ethnic_diversity.

Leonard, David. J. “Ice Cube.” *Icons of Hip-Hop: An Encyclopedia of the Movement, Music, and Culture.* Vol. 2. Edited by Mickey Hess. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007.

Lewis, C. S. *Reflections on the Psalms*. New York: Harper Collins, 1958.

———. *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses*. New York: HarperCollins, 1949.

Lipka, Michael. “The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups.” Pew Research Center. July 27, 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/.

Marx, Karl. “Critique of the Gotha Programme.” Marx and Engels Internet Archive. Lawrence and Wishart. 1989. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. “The Communist Manifesto—Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.” *The Manifesto of the Communists* (International Publishing Company, 1886), used by permission the British Library Board. http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/21cc/utopia/methods1/bourgeoisie1/bourgeisie.

McDermott, Terry. “Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics.” *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 2002. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-apr-14-tm37890-story.

Mckesson, DeRay. “On the Other Side of Freedom Tour.” Lecture, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland, OR, September 20, 2018.

McLaren, Peter. *Pedagogy of Insurrection: From Resurrection to Revolution*. New York: Peter Lang, 2015.

Meckler, Laura. “How Churches Are Slowly Becoming Less Segregated.” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 13, 2014. https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-church-of-many-colors-the-most-segregated-hourin-america-gets-less-so-1413253801.

Mein, Andrew. “Bishops, Baby-Killers and Broken Teeth: Psalm 58 and the Air War.” *J Bible Recept* 4, no. 2 (2017): 207–23. https://doi.org/10.1515/jbr-2017-0008.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

Moore, Robert L. *Carl Jung and Christian Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

Morse, MaryKate. “Principles and Processes of Transformation.” Lecture, Portland Seminary, Cannon Beach, OR, October 30, 2018.

Nehrbass, Daniel Michael. *Praying Curses: The Therapeutic and Preaching Value of the Imprecatory Psalms*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013.

Nickloff, James B., and Gustavo Gutiérrez. *Essential Writings: The Making of Modern Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.

N.W.A., “Fuck Tha Police.” Released August 1988. Track 2 on *Straight Outta Compton*. Composed by Ice Cube and MC Ren. Priority Records, 1988, cassette tape.

Pemberton, Glenn. *Hurting with God: Learning to Lament with the Psalms.* Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2012.

Peterson, Eugene. *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper, 1990.

Pineda-Madrid, Nancy. *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011.

Pope-Levison, Priscilla. “Allen, Richard (1760–1831).” Black Past. October 18, 2007. Accessed June 20, 2018. http://www.blackpast.org/aah/allen-richard-pennsylvania-1760-1831.

Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Rah, Soong-Chan. “Evangelical Theologies of Liberation.” In *Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice*, edited by Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith, 30-52.Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.

———. *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

———. “The American Church’s Absence of Lament.” *Sojourners*, October 24, 2013. https://sojo.net/articles/12-years-slave/american-churchs-absence-lament.

———. *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Reeves, Kenneth M. "Racism and Projection of the Shadow." *Psychotherapy* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 80–88.

Reinhard, James Arnold. "Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church: 1852-1860." PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1971.

Romero, Robert Chao. "Toward a Perspective of 'Brown Theology.'" In *Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice*, edited by Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith, 75-95. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power*. New York: Paulist Press, 1972.

Runyon, Theodore. "Introduction: Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation." In *Sanctification and Liberation*. Edited by Theodore Runyon. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981.

Siker, Jeffrey S. *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth Century Portraits.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Snyder, Howard. Populist Saints: B. T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006.

Sobrino, Jon. *The True Church and the Poor*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984.

Stebbins, Samuel, and Evan Comen. "The Worst Cities for Black Americans." *24/7 Wall St.*, November 9, 2018. https://247wallst.com/special-report/2018/11/09/the-worst-cities-for-black-americans4/4/.

Strawn, Brent A. "Sanctified and Commercially Successful Curses: On Gangsta Rap and the Canonization of the Imprecatory Psalms." *Theology Today* 69, no. 4 (2013): 403–17. Doi: 10.1177/0040573612463028.

Thompson, Andrew C. "From Societies to Society: The Shift from Holiness to Justice in the Wesleyan Tradition," *Methodist Review* 3 (2011): 141-172.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976.

Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019.

Tomkins, Stephen. *William Wilberforce: A Biography*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007.

Vanier, Jean. *Befriending the Stranger*. New York: Paulist Press, 2010.

Wall, Robert Walter. "The Embourgeoisement of the Free Methodist Ethos: A Content Analysis of the Free Methodist Discipline's Idea of the 'Christian Life.'" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 25 (1990): 117–29.

Wesley, John. Preface of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. London: John Wesley and Charles Wesley, 1739. In Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Ann Arbor, MI: Text Creation Partnership, 2011 Accessed July 18, 2018. http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004800840.0001.000.

———. "Thoughts Upon Slavery." Evans Early American Imprint Collection. London: Warburton, William, Bp. of Gloucester, 1774. http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N10870.0001.001.

———. "The Use of Money." Wesley Center Online. Accessed April 20, 2018. http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872edition/sermon-50-the-use-of-money/.

Westermann, Claus. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms.* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981.

Wilber, Ken. "Taking Responsibility for Your Shadow." *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human* Nature. Zweig and Abrams eds., 271–79.

Worthington, Everett L. Jr. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application*. New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006.

Zweig, Connie, and Jeremiah Abrams, eds. *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*. New York: Penguin Group, 1991.