



*Black History Reader*

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FEBRUARY 2021

# BLACK CHRISTIAN LEADERS YOU SHOULD READ

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February is generally regarded as Black History Month. At Grace+Peace, we think it is very helpful to have special seasons to focus on particular aspects of the Christian life and faith. During this season, I want to introduce you to a few Black Christian leaders that you could really benefit from. One of the results of generations of racial discrimination in America is that there are many wonderful pastors and writers that many Christians have never heard of! This brief reader may just interest you to read one of the authors more deeply!

This list is not exhaustive, I couldn't possibly include all the voices I would want here. So, in addition to those listed below, you should read or watch modern preachers such as H.B. Charles, Charlie Dates, Jarvis Williams, Robert Smith Jr., and E.K. Bailey. Perhaps in future years, we'll discover more wonderful authors and preachers together! For more resources on race that we love, check out the G+P Cares page on our website (<https://www.gracepeacechurch.org/gp-cares>).

## THE READING LIST

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<b>"Meet Francis Grimke, Faithful Minister of Grace"</b> (2018) Sean Michael Lucas .....	2
<b>"Sermon During the Spanish Flu Epidemic"</b> (1918) Francis Grimke .....	4
<b>"Dr. John Perkins - After an Election, Reconciliation?"</b> (2020) Marvin Olasky .....	9
<b>"Prejudice Against the Colored Man"</b> (1837) Theodore S. Wright .....	13
<b>"An Address to the Slaves of the USA"</b> (1848) Henry Highland Garnett .....	15
<b>"Meet Phyllis Wheatley"</b> (2017) K.A. Ellis .....	19
<b>"Poem on the Death of a Young Lady of Five Years of Age"</b> (1773) Phyllis Wheatley .....	21
<b>"Once Upon A Time..."</b> (2020) Vincent Bacote .....	22
<b>From Heal Us Emmanuel: A Call for Racial Reconciliation, Representation, and Unity in the Church</b> (2017)	
• <b>"Foreword"</b> - Rev. Dr. Carl Ellis, Jr. ....	26
• <b>"Reconciliation or Bust"</b> - Rev. Dr. Inwin Ince .....	28
• <b>"Moving Forward"</b> - Rev. Russ Whitfield .....	34

## ADDITIONAL READING

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*(Not included, but you should consider reading)*

- Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass** (1845)
- Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery** (1901)
- W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk** (1903)
- Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow** (2010)
- Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy** (2015)
- John M. Perkins, One Blood** (2018)
- Easu McCaulley, Reading While Black** (2020)

# MEET FRANCIS GRIMKE, FAITHFUL MINISTER OF GRACE

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by: Sean Michael Lucas (from The Gospel Coalition)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/francis-grimke/>

That question, which Francis Grimké asked toward the end of a nearly 50-year ministry at 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C., is central to his understanding of pastoral work. Whether preaching or praying, doing pastoral care or prophetic confrontation, Grimké's main burden was to draw attention to Jesus Christ as a Savior for sinners and a Lord for life.

## Early Life

Francis Grimké was born on November 4, 1850, to a white plantation owner and his mixed-race slave. Formerly a lawyer, Henry Grimké had moved his household to Caneacres Plantation outside of Charleston after his wife died in 1843. His slave, Nancy Weston, served in his household as a nurse to his children. After a few years at Caneacres, she would be carrying their first child, Archibald, who was born on August 17, 1849. Francis would come 15 months later.

In 1852, as Nancy carried her third child by Henry, yellow fever spread through the Low Country. On September 28, 1852, Henry Grimké died as part of the epidemic. Months before, he had bequeathed Nancy and her children—including John, who would be born at the end of the year—to his son Montague. His intention was that Montague would allow Nancy's family to remain free under his nominal oversight.

That didn't happen quite as Henry intended. Initially, Montague Grimké allowed Nancy and her sons their essential freedom as they boarded in their own house in the free black section of Charleston. However, in 1860, Montague married Julia Catherine Bridges, who demanded additional servants. To fill that need, Montague required Nancy send him his half-brothers to be personal servants for the family. The three boys rebelled against this treatment, eventually landing Francis in an apprenticeship to a harsh master who starved and beat him.

All of this was interrupted by the Civil War. In the winter of 1862, Union troops showed up in Charleston. Both Archibald and Francis used the distraction of the Federal siege to make their escape from Montague's service: Archibald by hiding with a free black family, Francis by going across to the Union side and serving as a personal servant to two different Union lieutenants. At the conclusion of the war, Francis and his brother rejoiced in their personal liberation.

## Education

But liberation didn't mean idleness; it meant education. The Freedman's Bureau and the American Missionary Association came South to establish schools for the newly emancipated blacks. Francis entered the Morris Street School in Jasper Court with his brother; there they came under the tutelage of Frances Pillsbury, an early leader in black education. She saw the ability of the two Grimké boys and worked to place them with families in the North where they could get a more thorough education.

Eventually, they made their way to Lincoln University outside of Philadelphia. Chartered by abolitionist Presbyterians in 1854, the school's post-war mission was to train a new generation of African American leaders. Here Francis Grimké came to profess his faith in Christ and commit to Presbyterian doctrines.

The influence of John B. Reeve, pastor of Central Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, was significant in shaping Grimké's interest in pastoral ministry. While Francis wrestled with his sense of calling, for a time considering law as a career, Reeve steered him toward ministry. Francis would become a member of Central Church and be recommended to the Philadelphia Presbytery as a candidate for ministry on the same day. He then matriculated at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he studied for three years, completing his studies in 1878.

Grimké's seminary work exposed him to all the luminaries of the school: W. H. Green and his courses on the Pentateuch and Psalms, Caspar Hodge on Gospels, and especially Charles Hodge's systematic theology classes. While at the seminary, he embraced a high view of Scripture: "When we speak of the Bible as the Word of God, we mean that the men who wrote it were supernaturally guided in what they wrote; they were used as agents by the Holy Spirit to communicate truth and to record facts for the guidance of humanity. What they wrote, therefore, is to be received, as true, on the authority of the Holy Spirit."

### **Ministry**

Grimké first made contact with 15th Street Presbyterian Church the summer prior to his senior year when he preached at the church as a summer student supply. It was one of the great historic black Presbyterian churches. Organized in 1841 by John F. Cook to serve African Americans in Northwest Washington D.C., the church would later be served by the famed Presbyterian abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet. By the time Grimké arrived, the church numbered around 150 communicant members who were part of the city's affluent black community.

Besides a four-year hiatus in Jacksonville, Florida—where his wife, Charlotte, attempted to recover her health—Grimké's ministry would center on 15th Street from 1878 until his retirement in 1928. His influence, however, would extend far beyond the walls of his church. He ministered to people in his city, founding the American Negro Academy and serving as a trustee of the Colored Settlement House, the public schools of the District of Columbia, and Howard University.

The secret to Grimké's long-term, faithful, and successful ministry was his understanding of his role and his dogged commitment to it. He prided himself that he met the Presbyterian ideal of an "educated minister." But far more important was to be counted among ministers "who believe firmly in the Scriptures as the Word of God, and who faithfully preach the truth therein contained, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to give efficacy to the truth."

For his faithful determination to preach the Word of God, we count Francis Grimké a dear father in the faith.

## A SERMON DURING THE SPANISH FLU EPIDEMIC

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The following sermon was delivered by Francis J. Grimke on Sunday, November 3, 1918 at the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D. C. after the outbreak of the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic.

<https://www.9marks.org/article/some-reflections-growing-out-of-the-recent-epidemic-of-influenza-that-afflicted-our-city/>

*“So Jehovah sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even unto the time appointed; and there died of the people from Dan even unto Beersheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel stretched forth his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, Jehovah repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough ; now stay thy hand.” - 2 SAMUEL 24:15-16*

We know now, perhaps, as we have never known before the meaning of the terms pestilence, plague, epidemic, since we have been passing through this terrible scourge of Spanish influenza, with its enormous death rate and its consequent wretchedness and misery. Every part of the land has felt its deadly touch—North, South, East, and West—in the Army, in the Navy, among civilians, among all classes and conditions, rich and poor, high and low, white and black. Over the whole land it has thrown a gloom, and has stricken down such large numbers that it has been difficult to care for them properly, overcrowding all of our hospitals—and it has proven fatal in so many causes that it has been difficult at times to get coffins enough in which to place the dead, and men enough to dig graves fast enough in which to bury them. Our own beautiful city has suffered terribly from it, making it necessary, as a precautionary measure, to close the schools, theaters, churches, and to forbid all public gathering within doors as well as outdoors. At last, however, the scourge has been stayed, and we are permitted again to resume the public worship of God, and to open again the schools of our city.

Now that the worst is over, I have been thinking, as doubtless you have all been, of these calamitous weeks through which we have been passing—thinking of the large numbers that have been sick—the large numbers that have died, the many, many homes that have been made desolate—the many, many bleeding, sorrowing hearts that have been left behind, and I have been asking myself the question, what is the meaning of it all? What ought it to mean to us? Is it to come and go and we be no wiser, or better for it? Surely God had a purpose in it, and it is our duty to find out, as far as we may, what that purpose is, and try to profit by it.

Among the things which stand out in my own mind, as I have been thinking the whole matter over, are these:

**(1)** I have been impressed with the ease with which large portions of the population may be wiped out in spite of the skill of man, of all the resources of science. Suddenly this epidemic came upon our city and country, and though every physician has been employed and every available nurse has been at work day and night, thousands have died, the awful death toll continued. Through all history we find populations thinned out in this way, not in ordinary, but in extraordinary ways. One night in Egypt death found its way into every Egyptian home. In Numbers 16:49, we read of a plague that broke out among the people in which 14,700 perished. In 2 Samuel 24:15, we also read of another plague that broke out in the reign of David in which, during three days, 70,000 perished. Thousands also have perished suddenly as the result of volcanic eruptions or earthquake shocks. How easy it would be for God to wipe out the whole human race, in this way, if he wanted to; for these terrible epidemics, plagues, the mighty forces of nature, all are at his command, all are his agents. At any moment, if he willed it, in this way, vast populations or portions of populations could be destroyed.

**(2)** I have had also this question come into my mind, why of those who took the disease some recovered and others did not? The reason may be found, in one sense, in purely natural causes— some were physically better prepared to resist the disease, were stronger in vital power, and so pulled through. Others, not having sufficient vitality, went down under the strain; but I believe there is also another reason, and

is to be found in the will of God. For some, the time of their departure had come, the limit of their earthly existence had been reached, and this was God's way of removing them out of this world into the next. Some day we have all got to go, but how, or when, or where, we do not know; that is with God alone. In Job 12:10, we read: In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. And in Psalms 104:29: Thou takest their breath, they die. And elsewhere we are told, "not a sparrow falls to the ground without his notice," i.e., without his consent or approval. We speak of accidental deaths, at times, but there are no accidents with God. All things are within the scope of his providence. Some did not recover because it was not the will of God that they should.

**(3)** Another question similar to the above kept also constantly going through my mind, why are some taken with the disease and others not? As I went up and down these streets, and as I saw people and came in contact with them, I felt that at any moment any one of us might be attacked. It was like an army going into battle, no one knew who would be hit. The point to which I am calling attention is that some were not hit—some did not get the disease, and the question that I am asking is, why not? As I was thinking of this question the ninety-first Psalm came into my mind, which perhaps you will recall, and which seems to have just such distressing circumstances in view as those through which we have been passing:

*"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will sing of Jehovah, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in whom I trust. For He will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, And from the deadly pestilence. He will cover thee with His pinions, And under His wings shalt thou take refuge: His truth is a shield and a buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, Nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness, Nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, And ten thousand at thy right hand; But it shall not come nigh thee." - PSALM 91*

Here there seems to be the promise of immunity in the midst of plagues and pestilences. What this means I do not know. How far we may expect immunity under such circumstances, I do not know. These words cannot mean that all good people will escape, and that only the bad will be smitten: for, as a matter of fact, we know that during every epidemic some very good people are smitten, and some, not very good people, escape. And, therefore, I say, I do not know what is meant by the promise contained in this ninety-first Psalm. It refers to those who "dwell in the secret place of the Most High." But who are they? How shall we know them? How shall we discriminate between them and all others? It won't do to say, all who are smitten are excluded, or that all who escape are included, because we know that such is not the case. It is one of those inscrutable things that we cannot explain; we know the fact and that is all. The ultimate explanation must be found in the sovereign will of God. It must be because He wills it.

**(4)** Another thing that has impressed me, in connection with this epidemic, is the fact that conditions may arise in a community which justify the extraordinary exercise of powers that would not be tolerated under ordinary circumstances. This extraordinary exercise of power was resorted to by the Commissioners in closing up the theaters, schools, churches, in forbidding all gatherings of any considerable number of people indoors and outdoors, and in restricting the numbers who should be present even at funerals. The ground of the exercise of this extraordinary power was found in the imperative duty of the officials to safeguard, as far as possible, the health of the community by preventing the spread of the disease from which we were suffering.

There has been considerable grumbling, I know, on the part of some, particularly in regard to the closing of the churches. It seems to me, however, in a matter like this it is always wise to submit to such restrictions for the time being. If, as a matter of fact, it was dangerous to meet in theaters and in the schools, it certainly was no less dangerous to meet in churches. The fact that the churches were places of religious gathering, and the others not, would not affect in the least the health question involved. If avoiding crowds lessens the danger of being infected, it was wise to take the precaution and not needlessly run in danger, and expect God to protect us.

And so, anxious as I have been to resume work, I have waited patiently until the order was lifted. I started to worry at first, as it seemed to upset all of our plans for the fall work; but I soon recovered my composure. I said to myself, why worry? God knows what He is doing. His work is not going to suffer. It will rather be a help to it in the end. Out of it, I believe, great good is coming. All the churches, as well as the community at large, are going to be the stronger and better for this season of distress through which we have been passing.

**(5)** Another thing that has impressed me in connection with this epidemic is how completely it has shattered the theory, so dear to the heart of the white man in this country, that a white skin entitles its possessor to better treatment than one who possesses a dark skin. I once heard Mr. Tillman from the floor of the Senate say, He believed that God made the white man, and that means the meanest, the lowest, the most ignorant and degraded white man, out of a little better clay than he made the black man. Poor fool! He knows differently now. Death knocked the scales from his eyes. He found himself, the moment the breath left his body, in the presence of a Being with whom the color of his skin counted for nothing. He lived, unfortunately, under that delusion; and it is the delusion under which the white man in all this broad land is living today. But during this epidemic scourge, if he gave any thought to the matter, if a particle of sense remained in him, he must have seen the folly of counting upon a white skin. Did the whiteness of his skin protect him? Did the epidemic pause to see whether his skin was white or black before smiting him? Of what value has a white skin been during these weeks of suffering and death? What possible advantage has accrued to any one because of the whiteness of his skin?

During these terrible weeks, while the epidemic raged, God has been trying in a very pronouncedly conspicuously and vigorous way, to beat a little sense into the white man's head; has been trying to show him the folly of the empty conceit of his vaunted race superiority, by dealing with him just as he dealt with the peoples of darker hue. For once a white skin counted for nothing in the way of securing better treatment—in the way of obtaining for its possessor considerations denied to those of darker hue. And, not only in epidemics, in scourges, but also in the great convulsions of nature—in earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, in disasters on sea and land, the same great lesson is taught. Under such circumstances of what avail is the color of a man's skin, or his race identity? What does the lightning, the thunderbolt, the burning lava, the sea, care about color or race? White and black alike are dealt with indiscriminately; the one is smitten as readily as the other; the one is swallowed up as readily as the other. And that is the lesson which God is teaching everywhere through the operation of natural laws. And it is the great lesson which He also teaches in His inspired word; and which Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the light of the world. He that followeth after Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life," sought constantly to emphasize both by percept and example.

In this terrible epidemic, which has afflicted not only this city but the whole country, there is a great lesson for the white man to learn. It is the folly of his stupid color prejudice. It calls attention to the fact that he is acting on a principle that God utterly repudiates, as he has shown during this epidemic scourge, and, as he will show him when He comes to deal with him in the judgment of the great day of solemn account. The lesson taught is clear and distinct, but will he learn it, will he lay it to heart, will he profit by it and seek to mend his evil ways? He may, but I have grave doubts as to whether he will or not. The probabilities are that he will still go on in his evil ways—will still go on believing that a white skin entitles its possessor to better treatment than a dark skin; will still go on practicing his infamous discriminations against colored people, in departments of the general government, and all over the country. One thing he may be sure of, however—he may continue to live under that delusion, but there will be a rude awakening some day—it may be when it is too late. The dark skin which he despises and seeks in every possible way to belittle, to depreciate, may be the millstone about his neck that will sink him to perdition. For this awful race prejudice, this colorphobia, out of which so much that is evil has come, so much suffering, so much heart-burnings to those who are the victims of it, but which is regarded so lightly by the white man—so lightly that it never brings him any compunction of conscience—so lightly that even in revivals of religion it is never included by him among the sins to be repented of—is not the little thing that he thinks it is, for it is an offense against the great law of Love—against the great law of human Brotherhood, as well as against the great law of Righteousness, of Justice.

Jesus said, "The first and great commandment is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.' And the second is like unto it, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Race prejudice, colorphobia, runs directly counter to both of these great commandments. And, therefore, never mind what the white man may think of it. We see clearly what God thinks of it, and it is the estimate that he puts upon it that is to determine its character.

Let us hope, therefore, not only for the sake of people of color, but also for the sake of the white people themselves that the great lesson as to the folly of race prejudice—of assuming that a white skin entitles one to better treatment than a dark skin, which this epidemic has so strikingly taught, may not be lost upon them. It is a lesson which for their own sake it is well for them to learn. It will be better for them here, and it will be better for them hereafter, if they learn it, and learn it well. And, of course, it will be better for us as a race in this country. It will remove out of the way some very serious obstacles to our progress, and will relieve us of many of the disagreeable things that we are at present forced to endure, though not without protest.

**(6)** Another thing has impressed me during this epidemic. It has brought out in a way that is very gratifying, the high estimation in which the Christian church is held in the community—the large place which it really occupies in the thought of the people. The fact that for several weeks we have been shut out from the privileges of the sanctuary has brought home to us as never before what the church has really meant to us. We hadn't thought, perhaps, very much of the privilege while it lasted, but the moment it was taken away we saw at once how much it meant to us.

One of the gratifying things to me, during this scourge, has been the sincere regrets that I have heard expressed all over the city by numbers of people at the closing of the churches. The theater goers, of course, have regretted the closing of the theaters. I do not know whether the children or the teachers have regretted the closing of the schools or not; I have heard no regrets expressed, but I do know that large numbers of people have regretted the closing of the churches. I hope that now that they are opened again, that we will all show our appreciation of their value by attending regularly upon their services. It would be a great calamity to any community to be without the public ministrations of the sanctuary. There is no single influence in a community that counts for more than the Christian church. It is one of the institutions, particularly, that ought to be strongly supported; that ought to be largely attended, and that ought to have the hearty endorsement and well-wishes of every right-thinking man and woman within it. It is a great mistake for anyone to stand aloof from the Christian church. Everybody in the community ought to have a church home, and ought to be found in that church home Sabbath after Sabbath.

**(7)** There is another thing connected with this epidemic that is also worthy of note. While it lasted, it kept the thought of death and of eternity constantly before the people. As the papers came out, day after day, among the first things that everyone looked for, or asked about, was as to the number of deaths. And so the thought of death was never allowed to stay very long out of the consciousness of the living. And with the thought of death, the great thought also of eternity, for it is through death that the gates of eternity swing open. We don't as a general thing think very much about either death or eternity. They are not pleasant things to think about, and so we avoid thinking of them as much as possible. It is only when we are forced to that we give them any consideration, and even then only for the moment. They are both subjects of vital importance, however, involving the most momentous consequences. For after death is always the judgment. The grim messenger is God's summons to us to render up our account. That there is an account to be rendered up we are inclined to lose sight of, to forget; but it is to be rendered all the same. The books are to be opened, and we are to be judged out of the books. During the weeks of this epidemic—in the long list of deaths, in the large number of new-made graves, in the unusual number of funeral processions along our streets, God has been reminding us of this account which we must soon render up; He has been projecting before us in a way to startle us, the thought of eternity.

You who are not Christians, who have not yet repented of your sins, who have not yet surrendered yourselves to the guidance of Jesus Christ, if you allow these repeated warnings that you have had, day

by day, week by week, to go unheeded—if you still go on in your sins, should God suddenly cut you off in your sins, you will have no one to blame but yourselves. It won't be God's fault if you are lost, if eternity finds you unprepared. God has opened the way for your salvation, through the gift of His only begotten Son, who died that you might have the opportunity of making your peace with God—the opportunity of having your sins forgiven, and of laying hold of life, spiritual and eternal; and he has notified you not only of the consequences of sin, but of what provision he has graciously made for your escape, if you desire to escape. This is all he can do; this is all that he is going to do. Your fate is in your own hands. If you choose life, it will be life; if you choose death, it will be death. My earnest appeal to you is, let it be life and not death; and let the choice be made at once. Before you go out of this house make up your minds to do the right thing—the wise thing—the only sensible thing. You have come out of this epidemic alive, while thousands have perished. Are you going to spend the rest of your days in the service of sin and Satan, or in the service of God? You know what you ought to do; you know what you will do, if you consult your best interest—if you do the right thing.

**(8)** There is only one other thought that has come to me in connection with this epidemic; it is of the blessedness of religion, of the sense of security which a true, living, working faith in the Lord Jesus Christ gives one in the midst of life's perils. I felt, as doubtless you all felt, who are Christians, the blessedness of a firm grip upon Jesus Christ—the blessedness of a realizing sense of being anchored in God and in His precious promises. While the plague was raging, while thousands were dying, what a comfort it was to feel that we were in the hands of a loving Father who was looking out for us, who had given us the great assurance that all things should work together for our good. And, therefore, that come what would—whether we were smitten with the epidemic or not, or whether being smitten, we survived or perished, we knew it would be well with us, that there was no reason to be alarmed. Even if death came, we knew it was all right. The apostle says, "it is gain for me to die." Death had no terrors for him. He says, "the hour of my departure is at hand: I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of glory which the Lord the righteous judge shall give at that day. And not to me only but to all them that loveth his appearing." And it was this same apostle who flung in the face of death the defiance, "'O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?'" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the presence of such a faith, in the realization of God's love, as revealed in Jesus Christ, in the consciousness of fellowship with him, what are epidemics, what are scourges, what are all of life's trials, sufferings, disappointments? They only tend to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. But, of course, if faith is to help us; if it is to put its great strong arms under us; if we are to feel its sustaining power under such distressing circumstances, it must be a real, living faith in God—it must be the genuine article—a faith that works, that works by love, and that purifies the heart. Any other faith is of absolutely no value to us in the midst of the great crises of life. And I said to myself while the epidemic was on, and while I was examining my own heart to see how far my religion was helping me to be calm, self-possessed. It is a good time for those of us who are Christians to examine ourselves to see exactly how it is with us, whether the foundation upon which we are building is a rock foundation—whether our faith is really resting upon Christ, the solid Rock, or not. And I still feel that one important function of this epidemic will be lost if it fails to have that effect upon us, if it does not lead to careful heart-searching on our part.

If, as the result of such examination, we find that we did not get out of our religion very much help, in bracing us up under the strain through which we have been passing, then we know that there is something wrong either we have no faith at all, or it is very weak, and therefore that we need to give a little more attention to our spiritual condition than we have been giving. It shows that we are running down spiritually. Or, if we find that we were helped, that our fears were allayed as we thought of our relations to God and to his Son Jesus Christ, then we have an additional reason why we should cling all the closer to him, and why we should be all the more earnest in our efforts to serve him. We ought to come put of this epidemic more determined than ever to run with patience the race that is set before us; more determined than ever to make heaven our home. And this I trust is the purpose, the determination of us all. Let us all draw near to God in simple faith. Let us re-consecrate ourselves, all of us, to him; let us all make up our minds to be better Christians.

## DR. JOHN PERKINS AFTER AN ELECTION, RECONCILIATION?

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by: Marvin Olasky, WORLD MAGAZINE (2020)

[https://world.wng.org/2020/11/after\\_an\\_election\\_reconciliation](https://world.wng.org/2020/11/after_an_election_reconciliation)

This is WORLD's 23rd year of choosing a Daniel of the Year, which began as a way to honor someone very different from the power-graspers Time used to celebrate as Man of the Year (now Person of the Year). Our honorees have included persecuted Christians in China and Syria, 21 Christians martyred by ISIS on a Libyan beach, and American teen believers forced to consider a question: "What would you say if someone put a gun to your head and asked, 'Do you believe in God?'"

Sometimes Daniels lead quiet lives and find themselves thrust into danger. That's what happened to Andrew Brunson, a peaceful missionary in Turkey suddenly arrested on false charges of espionage and terrorism. Facing death charges in Turkish courts, he proclaimed his innocence and said, "I know why I am here. I am here to suffer in Jesus' name." Thousands mobilized in congregations as far removed as Brazil, Israel, and China to pray for Brunson's freedom. He became our Daniel of the Year in 2018, a month after his dramatic release.

Other Daniels, like our 2004 honoree, Baroness Caroline Cox, fly into danger. She could have stayed in aristocratic drawing rooms but has instead made at least 86 humanitarian trips to the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. That hyphenated region, home to many Christian Armenians, is in the news once again because it's mostly inside Muslim Azerbaijan. Now in her 80s, Cox in September spoke of "widespread concern that Azerbaijan is committed to war and cruelty rather than the promotion of cross-border dialogue and a truly just settlement." Mindy Belz in 2004 described Cox as possessing "guts enough to supply a platoon of Marines."

I could say the same about John Perkins, who was 39 years old in 1970 when Brandon, Miss., deputy sheriffs and highway patrolmen almost killed him. They stuck a fork up his nose and down his throat. They beat him to the floor, then kept on kicking him in the head, ribs, stomach, and groin. Eventually two-thirds of his stomach had to be removed.

Nevertheless, unlike George Floyd who died at age 46 with a knee on his neck, Perkins has lived to be 90. He has shown his Christian guts by remembering his assailants only as a person touched by Jesus would: "When I saw what hate had done to them, I couldn't hate back. I could only pity them. I didn't ever want hate to do to me what it had already done to those men."

John Perkins is our 2020 Daniel of the Year because police killings, riotous responses, and a bruising presidential campaign have made his refusal to hate more important to civil peace than at any time since the Civil War. We may have a COVID-19 vaccine next year, but a political antidote is still far off. A problem in black and white—and red and blue—is that, as Perkins says, "Both sides are yelling too loudly to listen to one another."

Perkins, born in Mississippi in 1930, had plenty of reason to hate his home state, and white citizens within it: "I was 16 when a white deputy sheriff shot and killed my 25-year-old brother, Clyde, in New Hebron, Mississippi." Clyde Perkins had recently returned home from fighting in World War II. He and his girlfriend were waiting in a line at the movie theater ticket booth. The deputy sheriff, asserting dictatorial authority, told everyone to shut up. When Clyde and his girlfriend chatted some more, the officer clubbed him over the head. Clyde grabbed the blackjack. The lawman took two steps back, pulled his gun, and fatally shot Clyde twice in the stomach.

Perkins also had reason to hate because of economic exploitation. At age 12 he worked all day hauling hay and expected to be paid \$1.50 or \$2.00, typical pay for a day. Instead, a white man paid him 15 cents: "I took a long look at what had just happened to me and really began thinking about economics."

Perkins escaped to California five years later, in 1947. In 1957, his son Spencer, at age 3 or 4, came home from Bible classes singing “Jesus Loves the Little Children”—red and yellow, black and white—and Perkins began studying how that could be so. He professed faith in Christ.

Perkins in 1960 felt called to move back to Mississippi with his wife, Vera Mae, and their five children. He became a civil rights leader over the next decade, supporting voter registration efforts in 1965 and school desegregation in 1967. In 1969 he led an economic boycott of white-owned stores in Mendenhall, Miss., that welcomed black customers but not black employees—and the same was true in city government and other companies.

Lawless officers in 1970 beat him because of those efforts, but they hated him all the more because he believed what they should have. Perkins writes in *One Blood* (2018), “The most terrible thing about the situation in the South was that so many of the folks who were either violently racist or who participated in discrimination and enslavement through unfair and unlawful business practices called themselves Christians.” They knew deep down they were wrong, and that sometimes made them even more brutal.

Perkins says nonviolence didn’t come to him easily: “I had learned to hate all the white people in Mississippi. I hated their control over our lives. ... If I had not met Jesus I would have died carrying that heavy burden of hate to my grave. But He began to strip it away, layer by layer.” Perkins learned that “non-violence takes more strength than violence—and it takes more than just human strength. It takes God’s strength working in human beings to produce self-control, gentleness, and other fruit of the Holy Spirit.”

Perkins says “God’s power comes in our weakness and brokenness”—and he was broken early. His mother died when he was 7 months old. His father disappeared. In *Let Justice Roll Down* (1976) Perkins writes that his father came back four years later: “He arrived late one Friday night. ... He woke me up, and I saw him in the glow of the lamp. ... He hugged me in strong arms. And he talked to me. My daddy! ... The joy of belonging, of being loved, was almost more than my heart could hold.” The next afternoon, “when he said he would be going ... there was only one thing on my mind: I would go with him. ... I saw he was heading toward town and started following him.”

Then came disaster. Daddy Perkins “turned and saw me following. ‘Go back. Go back.’ The way he ordered me back sounded strange, like he was confused somewhat. ... I followed, but at a careful distance behind. ... He came back ... and whipped me with a switch from a tree. ... ‘Please, Daddy! Take me with you. Don’t leave me alone again.’ ... That strange, sad look was still on his face. I reached toward him and wanted to run to him. But I was afraid. He still held that switch in his hand. I could only stand there and cry.”

John “still didn’t turn back. So once more he came back and whipped me a last time. Just then my Auntie came up. ... She took me by the hand and dragged me away. ... I looked back once but Daddy was already gone. And with him went my newfound joy in belonging, in being loved, in being somebody for just a little while. Years would pass before I would know this joy again.” Perkins writes, “That need for relationship was a weight I carried, a need that remained unmet for me much of the rest of my life”—until he realized that God the Father, instead of yelling “Go back,” came running toward him, as in the parable of the prodigal son.

Suffering led to compassion: “I know what it feels like to be at the low end of the totem pole. I know what it feels like when ‘good’ people look down their noses at you. Something on the inside dies over and over again. I love it that Jesus comes after those kinds of folks. ... If God Himself loves and wants the outcasts, why don’t we?” To help the outcasts, Perkins founded Voice of Calvary and Mendenhall Ministries, which developed health clinics, theology classes, a housing cooperative, and thrift stores. During the 1980s Perkins created institutions to help other outcasts: the Harambee Christian Family Center, the John and Vera Mae Perkins Foundation, and the Christian Community Development Association.

His Christian emphasis on nonviolence and loving enemies is a message America and the world desperately need: “The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. ... It’s pretty hard to find this quality on display today. Our

culture applauds people who are brash and arrogant. The self-promoter gets the most attention and the most encouragement. But God intends for His friends to be marked by gentleness.”

This year especially the question is in the air: Gentleness, sure, but how does that translate into racial reconciliation and socioeconomic change?

The first part of Perkins’ answer sounds surprising: “There is no black race—and there is no white race. So the idea of ‘racial reconciliation’ is a false idea. It’s a lie. It implies that there is more than one race.” We are all members of the human race: “Every human being is 99.9 percent identical in genetic makeup. ... The concept of the black race and the white race originated with the Enemy himself.” Perkins crosses up Satan by insisting: “All people, all kindred, all nations, all tongues. One blood.”

Perkins wants us to talk about “multiethnic” or “Biblical” reconciliation rather than fixating on race. That sounds abstract, but he says “in America it’s pretty safe to say that blacks and whites and the other ethnic groups represented have all sinned against one another. So all parties need to repent, and all parties need to forgive. This is the only way out of the hostility and division we have long accommodated in many different kinds of churches.”

Perkins also uses another R, redistribution, in an uncommon way: Not reparations or government grab, since “America’s current welfare system creates dependency and entitlement.” No, he wants those economically blessed to “help create an alternative system. ... To provide job opportunities and fund nonprofits that can offer training schools for those who have never worked before. This is real redistribution: the people with the most skills and opportunities sharing with those who don’t have them.”

When I saw what hate had done to them, I couldn’t hate back. I could only pity them. I didn’t ever want hate to do to me what it had already done to those men. Out of context, Perkins sometimes seems on the political left and sometimes on the political right. He’s far from a socialist understanding: “When people have ownership over something, if they help pay for it or build it, they are much more likely to take care of it.” He’s also far from Ayn Rand’s conclusion in *Atlas Shrugged* that we should substitute the dollar sign for the cross. Perkins says “the Church needs to come alongside the business community to provide moral training and familial love,” with an emphasis on investing “in a way that has the best eternal return, for the highest dividend we can receive is discipleship that leads to Christian character development.”

Perkins sees sin crossing racial lines: “Whites need to take some responsibility for centuries of imperialism and failure to repent, but blacks also need to take some responsibility for the breakdown of our families.” He wants “to bring attention to the problem of violence against black people. But what about the epidemic of violence within our own African American community—African Americans killing one another? That too needs to be addressed. We the Church are called to be the light that shines in these dark places.”

His birth in 1930 places him closer to the Civil War than to the 21st century, so Perkins brings an awareness of history to current discussions: “The breakup of the family, ... redlining in housing development, and so many other lasting effects of segregation make it so much easier for a black man to rob or hurt an innocent white person without much thought because of the damage that has been done. On the other side, the damage done to white people from centuries of racism makes it easier for them to avoid living in black neighborhoods, fear black people walking the streets, or even commit vicious hate crimes against blacks.”

Perkins notes how Christ has healed wounds, but the scars are still evident in the irresponsibility of men who “have let down our women, children, and communities. Fatherlessness is an epidemic today, and my heart is broken for the women, and especially the children, who have been abandoned, so I plead with men to take responsibility and love their families.”

Characteristically, Perkins doesn’t leave anyone off the hook: “Women ask me what they can do to confront this failure in our men and strengthen our families and communities. I tell my sisters that, as hurt

and disappointed as they may be, the way to bring our men back is to show them deep love as human beings created by God in His image and with inherent dignity. I understand that this is not an easy thing to do, but God calls us to love the people who have hurt us."

Perkins has received some admiration in recent years. He may be the person with the lowest ratio of formal education—third grade—to honorary doctorates: 16, from Christian colleges including Belhaven (which did not desegregate until 1967), Covenant, Geneva, and Wheaton. Historian Charles Marsh called Perkins "the most influential African American Christian leader since Dr. King." But in conversation Perkins emphasizes not how he has made a difference but how Christ has: "If we are going to help others understand who Jesus is, our own lives must reflect His character and love." Perkins says that's why we must love political opponents and others: "It is at this precise moment that the watching world gets a glimpse of Him."

## THEODORE S. WRIGHT Prejudice Against the Colored Man (1837)

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<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1837-theodore-s-wright-prejudice-against-colored-man/>

Rev. Theodore S. Wright, (1797-1847) was born to free parents in Providence, Rhode Island. By the 1830s Wright was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in New York City and a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Wright, a dedicated abolitionist, attended the New York State Anti-Slavery Society convention held in Utica, on September 20, 1837. However he also recognized the growing racial prejudice directed against free blacks in the North. In the speech below Wright supported a resolution introduced into the convention which said anti-black prejudice was "nefarious and wicked and should be practically reprobated and discountenanced." His speech appears below.

Mr. President, with much feeling do I rise to address the society on this resolution, and I should hardly have been induced to have done it had I not been requested. I confess I am personally interested in this resolution. But were it not for the fact that none can feel the lash but those who have it upon them, that none know where the chain galls but those who wear it, I would not address you.

This is a serious business, sir. The prejudice which exists against the colored man, the free man is like the atmosphere, everywhere felt by him. It is true that in these United States and in this State, there are men, like myself, colored with the skin like my own, who are not subjected to the lash, who are not liable to have their wives and their infants torn from them; from whose hand the Bible is not taken. It is true that we may walk abroad; we may enjoy our domestic comforts, our families; retire to the closet; visit the sanctuary, and may be permitted to urge on our children and our neighbors in well doing. But sir, still we are slaves—every where we feel the chain galling us. It is by that prejudice which the resolution condemns, the spirit of slavery, the law which has been enacted here, by a corrupt public sentiment, through the influence of slavery which treats moral agents different from the rule of God, which treats them irrespective of their morals or intellectual cultivation. This spirit is withering all our hopes, and oftentimes causes the colored parent as he looks upon his child, to wish he had never been born. Often is the heart of the colored mother, as she presses her child to her bosom, filled with sorrow to think that, by reason of this prejudice, it is cut off from all hopes of usefulness in this land. Sir, this prejudice is wicked.

If the nation and church understood this matter, I would not speak a word about that killing influence that destroys the colored man's reputation. This influence cuts us off from everything; it follows us up from childhood to manhood; it excludes us from all stations of profit, usefulness and honor; takes away from us all motive for pressing forward in enterprises, useful and important to the world and to ourselves.

In the first place, it cuts us off from the advantages of the mechanic arts almost entirely. A colored man can hardly learn a trade, and if he does it is difficult for him to find any one who will employ him to work at that trade, in any part of the State. In most of our large cities there are associations of mechanics who legislate out of their society colored men. And in many cases where our young men have learned trades, they have had to come to low employments for want of encouragement in those trades.

It must be a matter of rejoicing to know that in this vicinity colored fathers and mothers have the privileges of education. It must be a matter of rejoicing that in this vicinity colored parents can have their children trained up in schools. At present, we find the colleges barred against them.

I will say nothing about the inconvenience which I have experienced myself, and which every man of color experiences, though made in the image of God. I will say nothing about the inconvenience of traveling; how we are frowned upon and despised. No matter how we may demean ourselves, we find embarrassments everywhere.

But sir, this prejudice goes further. It debars men from heaven. While sir, slavery cuts off the colored portion of the community from religious privileges, men are made infidels. What, they demand, is your Christianity? How do you regard your brethren? How do you treat them at the Lord's table? Where is

your consistency in talking about the heathen, transversing the ocean to circulate the Bible everywhere, while you frown upon them at the door? These things meet us and weigh down our spirits.

And, sir, the constitution of society, molded by this prejudice, destroys souls. I have known extensively, that in revivals which have been blessed and enjoyed in this part of the country, the colored population were overlooked. I recollect an instance. The Lord God was pouring out His Spirit. He was entering every house, and sinners were converted. I asked, Where is the colored man? who is weeping for them? who is endeavoring to pull them out of the fire? No reply was made.—I was asked to go round with one of the elders and visit them. We went and they humbled themselves. The Church commenced efficient efforts, and God blessed them as soon as they began to act for these people as though they had souls.

And sir, the manner in which our churches are regulated destroys souls. Whilst the church is thrown open to everybody, and one says come, come in and share the blessings of the sanctuary, this is the gate of heaven—he says to the colored man, be careful where you take your stand. I know an efficient church in this State, where a respectable colored man went to the house of God, and was going to take a seat in the gallery, and one of the officers contended with him, and said, “you cannot go there, sir.”

In one place the people had come together to the house of the Lord. The sermon was preached—the emblems were about to be administered—and all at once the person who managed the church thought the value of the pews would be diminished if the colored people sat in them. They objected to their sitting there, and the colored people left and went into the gallery, and that, too, when they were thinking of handling the memorials of the broken body and shed blood of the Savior! And, sir, this prejudice follows the colored man everywhere, and depresses his spirits.

Thanks be to God, there is a buoyant principle which elevates the poor down-trodden colored man above all this: It is that there is society which regards man according to his worth; it is the fact, that when he looks up to Heaven he knows that God treats him like a moral agent, irrespective of caste or the circumstances in which he may be placed. Amid the embarrassments which he has to meet, and the scorn and contempt that is heaped upon him, he is cheered by the hope that he will be disenthralled, and soon, like a bird set forth from its cage, wing his flight to Jesus, where he can be happy, and look down with pity on the man who despises the poor slave for being what God made him, and who despises him because he is identified with the poor slave. Blessed be God for the principles of the Gospel. Were it not for these, and for the fact that a better day is dawning, I would not wish to live.—Blessed be God for the antislavery movement. Blessed be God there is a war waging with slavery, that the granite rock is about to be rolled from its base. But as long as the colored man is to be looked upon as an inferior caste, so long will they disregard his cries, his groans, his shrieks.

I rejoice, sir, in this Society; and I deem the day when I joined this Society as one of the proudest days of my life. And I know I can die better, in more peace to-day, to know there are men who will plead the cause of my children.

Let me, through you, sir, request this delegation to take hold of this subject. This will silence the slave holder, when he says where is your love for the slave? Where is your love for the colored man who is crushed at your feet? Talking to us about emancipating our slaves when you are enslaving them by your feelings, and doing more violence to them by your prejudice, than we are to our slaves by our treatment. They call on us to evince our love for the slave, by treating man as man, the colored man as a man, according to his worth.

## HENRY HIGHLAND GARNETT

### An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America (1843)

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<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1007&context=etas>

*This speech was given at the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Troy, New York in April of 1843. This convention was an annual meeting to coordinate and further the various abolitionist movements in the United States. This sermon is significant because it was opposed in the meeting by Fredrick Douglass. Douglass and Garnet were thought to be two of the great Black thought-leaders of the time. As you will read, Garnet was a fantastic writer, but his words were thought to be too violent and dangerous at that time, and perhaps even now.*

Your brethren of the north, east, and west have been accustomed to meet together in National Conventions, to sympathize with each other, and to weep over your unhappy condition. In these meetings we have addressed all classes of the free, but we have never until this time, sent a word of consolation and advice to you. We have been contented in sitting still and mourning over your sorrows, earnestly hoping that before this day, your sacred liberties would have been restored. But, we have hoped in vain. Years have rolled on, and tens of thousands have been borne on streams of blood, and tears, to the shores of eternity. While you have been oppressed, we have also been partakers with you; nor can we be free while you are enslaved. We therefore write to you as being bound with you. Many of you are bound to us, not only by the ties of a common humanity, but we are connected by the more tender relations of parents, wives, husbands, children, brothers, and sisters, and friends. As such we most affectionately address you.

Slavery has fixed a deep gulf between you and us, and while it shuts out from you the relief and consolation which your friends would willingly render, it afflicts and persecutes you with a fierceness which we might not expect to see in the fiends of hell. But still the Almighty Father of Mercies has left to us a glimmering ray of hope, which shines out like a lone star in a cloudy sky. Mankind are becoming wiser, and better—the oppressor's power is fading, and you, every day, are becoming better informed, and more numerous. Your grievances, brethren, are many. We shall not attempt, in this short address, to present to the world, all the dark catalogue of this nation's sins, which have been committed upon an innocent people. Nor is it indeed, necessary, for you feel them from day to day, and all the civilized world look upon them with amazement.

Two hundred and twenty-seven years ago, the first of our injured race were brought to the shores of America. They came not with glad spirits to select their homes, in the New World. They came not with their own consent, to find an unmolested enjoyment of the blessings of this fruitful soil. The first dealings which they had with men calling themselves Christians, exhibited to them the worst features of corrupt and sordid hearts; and convinced them that no cruelty is too great, no villainy and no robbery too abhorrent for even enlightened men to perform, when influenced by avarice, and lust. Neither did they come flying upon the wings of Liberty, to a land of freedom. But, they came with broken hearts, from their beloved native land, and were doomed to unrequited toil, and deep degradation. Nor did the evil of their bondage end at their emancipation by death. Succeeding generations inherited their chains, and millions have come from eternity into time, and have returned again to the world of spirits, cursed, and ruined by American Slavery.

The propagators of the system, or their immediate ancestors very soon discovered its growing evil, and its tremendous wickedness and secret promises were made to destroy it. The gross inconsistency of a people holding slaves, who had themselves "ferried o'er the wave" for freedom's sake, was too apparent to be entirely overlooked. The voice of Freedom cried, "Emancipate your Slaves." Humanity supplicated with tears for the deliverance of the children of Africa. Wisdom urged her solemn plea. The bleeding captive plead his innocence, and pointed to Christianity who stood weeping at the cross. Jehovah frowned upon the nefarious institution, and thunderbolts, red with vengeance, struggled to leap forth to blast the guilty wretches who maintained it. But all was vain. Slavery had stretched its dark wings of death over the land, the Church stood silently by—the priests prophesied falsely, and the people loved to

have it so. Its throne is established, and now it reigns triumphantly.

Nearly three millions of your fellow-citizens, are prohibited by law, and public opinion, (which in this country is stronger than law), from reading the Book of Life. Your intellect has been destroyed as much as possible, and every ray of light they have attempted to shut out from your minds. The oppressors themselves have become involved in the ruin. They have become weak, sensual, and rapacious. They have cursed you—they have cursed themselves—they have cursed the earth which they have trod. In the language of a Southern statesman, we can truly say, "even the wolf, driven back long since by the approach of man, now returns after the lapse of a hundred years, and howls amid the desolations of slavery."

The colonists threw the blame upon England. They said that the mother country entailed the evil upon them, and that they would rid themselves of it if they could. The world thought they were sincere, and the philanthropic pitied them. But time soon tested their sincerity. In a few years, the colonists grew strong and severed themselves from the British Government. Their Independence was declared, and they took their station among the sovereign powers of the earth. The declaration was a glorious document. Sages admired it, and the patriotic of every nation revered the Godlike sentiments which it contained. When the power of Government returned to their hands, did they emancipate the slaves? No ; they rather added new links to our chains.

Were they ignorant of the principles of Liberty? Certainly they were not. The sentiments of their revolutionary orators fell in burning eloquence upon their hearts, and with one voice they cried, Liberty or Death. O, what a sentence was that ! It ran from soul to soul like electric fire, and nerved the arm of thousands to fight in the holy cause of Freedom. Among the diversity of opinions that are entertained in regard to physical resistance, there are but a few found to gainsay that stern declaration. We are among those who do not.

Slavery! How much misery is comprehended in that single word. What mind is there that does not shrink from its direful effects? Unless the image of God is obliterated from the soul, all men cherish the love of Liberty. The nice discerning political economist does not regard the sacred right, more than the untutored African who roams in the wilds of Congo. Nor has the one more right to the full enjoyment of his freedom than the other. In every man's mind the good seeds of liberty are planted, and he who brings his fellow down so low, as to make him contented with a condition of slavery, commits the highest crime against God and man. Brethren, your oppressors aim to do this. They endeavor to make you as much like brutes as possible. When they have blinded the eyes of your mind—when they have embittered the sweet waters of life—when they have shut out the light which shines from the word of God—then, and not till then has American slavery done its perfect work.

To such degradation it is sinful in the extreme for you to make voluntary submission. The divine commandments, you are in duty bound to reverence, and obey. If you do not obey them you will surely meet with the displeasure of the Almighty. He requires you to love him supremely, and your neighbor as yourself—to keep the Sabbath day holy—to search the Scriptures—and bring up your children with respect for his laws, and to worship no other God but him. But slavery sets all these at naught, and hurls defiance in the face of Jehovah. The forlorn condition in which you are placed does not destroy your moral obligation to God. You are not certain of Heaven, because you suffer yourselves to remain in a state of slavery, where you cannot obey the commandments of the Sovereign of the universe. If the ignorance of slavery is a passport to heaven, then it is a blessing, and no curse, and you should rather desire its perpetuity than its abolition. God will not receive slavery, nor ignorance, nor any other state of mind, for love and obedience to him. Your condition does not absolve you from your moral obligation. The diabolical injustice by which your liberties are cloven down, neither God, nor angels, or just men, command you to suffer for a single moment. Therefore it is your solemn and imperative duty to use every means, both moral, intellectual, and physical that promise success. If a band of heathen men should attempt to enslave a race of Christians, and to place their children under the influence of some false religion, surely, heaven would frown upon the men who would not resist such aggression, even to death. If, on the other hand, a band of Christians should attempt to enslave a race of heathen men and to entail slavery upon them, and to

keep them in heathenism in the midst of Christianity, the God of heaven would smile upon every effort which the injured might make to disenthral themselves.

Brethren, it is as wrong for your lordly oppressors to keep you in slavery, as it was for the man thief to steal our ancestors from the coast of Africa. You should therefore now use the same manner of resistance, as would have been just in our ancestors, when the bloody foot prints of the first remorseless soul thief was placed upon the shores of our fatherland. The humblest peasant is as free in the sight of God, as the proudest monarch that ever swayed a sceptre. Liberty is a spirit sent out from God, and like its great Author, is no respecter of persons.

Brethren, the time has come when you must act for yourselves. It is an old and true saying, that "if hereditary bondmen would be free, they must themselves strike the blow." You can plead your own cause, and do the work of emancipation better than any others. The nations of the old world are moving in the great cause of universal freedom, and some of them at least, will ere long, do you justice. The combined powers of Europe have placed their broad seal of disapprobation upon the African slave trade. But in the slave holding parts of the United States, the trade is as brisk as ever. They buy and sell you as though you were brute beasts. The North has done much—her opinion of slavery in the abstract is known. But in regard to the South, we adopt the opinion of the New York Evangelist—"We have advanced so far, that the cause apparently waits for a more effectual door to be thrown open than has been yet." We are about to point you to that more effectual door. Look around you, and behold the bosoms of your loving wives, heaving with untold agonies! Hear the cries of your poor children! Remember the stripes your fathers bore. Think of the torture and disgrace of your noble mothers. Think of your wretched sisters, loving virtue and purity, as they are driven into concubinage, and are exposed to the unbridled lusts of incarnate devils. Think of the undying glory that hangs around the ancient name of Africa and forget not that you are native-born American citizens, and as such, you are justly entitled to all the rights that are granted to the freest. Think how many tears you have poured out upon the soil which you have cultivated with unrequited toil, and enriched with your blood ; and then go to your lordly enslavers, and tell them plainly, that you are determined to be free.

Appeal to their sense of justice, and tell them that they have no more right to oppress you, than you have to enslave them. Entreat them to remove the grievous burdens which they have imposed upon you, and to remunerate you for your labor. Promise them renewed diligence in the cultivation of the soil, if they will render to you an equivalent for your services. Point them to the increase of happiness and prosperity in the British West Indies since the act of Emancipation. Tell them in language which they cannot misunderstand, of the exceeding sinfulness of slavery, and of a future judgment, and of the righteous retributions of an indignant God. Inform them that all you desire, is Freedom, and that nothing else will suffice. Do this, and for ever after cease to toil for the heartless tyrants, who give you no other reward but stripes and abuse. If they then commence the work of death, they, and not you, will be responsible for the consequences. You had far better all die—die immediately, than live slaves, and entail your wretchedness upon your posterity. If you would be free in this generation, here is your only hope. However much you and all of us may desire it, there is not much hope of Redemption without the shedding of blood. If you must bleed, let it all come at once—rather, die freemen, than live to be slaves. It is impossible, like the children of Israel, to make a grand Exodus from the land of bondage. The Pharaohs are on both sides of the blood-red waters ! You cannot remove en masse, to the dominions of the British Queen—nor can you pass through Florida, and overrun Texas, and at last find peace in Mexico. The propagators of American slavery are spending their blood and treasure, that they may plant the black flag in the heart of Mexico, and riot in the halls of the Montezumas. In the language of the Rev. Robert Hall, when addressing the volunteers of Bristol, who were rushing forth to repel the invasion of Napoleon, who threatened to lay waste the fair homes of England, "Religion is too much interested in your behalf, not to shed over you her most gracious influences."

You will not be compelled to spend much time in order to become inured to hardships. From the first moment that you breathed the air of heaven, you have been accustomed to nothing else but hardships. The heroes of the American Revolution were never put upon harder fare, than a peck of corn, and a few herrings per week. You have not become enervated by the luxuries of life. Your sternest energies have

been beaten out upon the anvil of severe trial. Slavery has done this, to make you subservient to its own purposes ; but it has done more than this, it has prepared you for any emergency. If you receive good treatment, it is what you could hardly expect ; if you meet with pain, sorrow, and even death, these are the common lot of the slaves. Fellow-men! patient sufferers! behold your dearest rights crushed to the earth! See your sons murdered, and your wives, mothers, and sisters doomed to prostitution! In the name of the merciful God! and by all that life is worth, let it no longer be a debatable question, whether it is better to choose LIBERTY or DEATH.

In 1822, Denmark Veazie, of South Carolina, formed a plan for the liberation of his fellow men. In the whole history of human efforts to overthrow slavery, a more complicated and tremendous plan was never formed. He was betrayed by the treachery of his own people, and died a martyr to freedom. Many a brave hero fell, but History, faithful to her high trust, will transcribe his name on the same monument with Moses, Hampden, Tell, Bruce, and Wallace, Toussaint L'Overteur, Lafayette and Washington. That tremendous movement shook the whole empire of slavery. The guilty soul thieves were overwhelmed with fear. It is a matter of fact, that at that time, and in consequence of the threatened revolution, the slave states talked strongly of emancipation. But they blew but one blast of the trumpet of freedom, and then laid it aside. As these men became quiet, the slaveholders ceased to talk about emancipation : and now behold your condition to-day ! Angels sigh over it, and humanity has long since exhausted her tears in weeping on your account!

The patriotic Nathaniel Turner followed Denmark Veazie. He was goaded to desperation by wrong and injustice. By Despotism, his name has been recorded on the list of infamy, and future generations will number him among the noble and brave. Next arose the immortal Joseph Cinque, the hero of the Amistad. He was a native African, and by the help of God he emancipated a whole ship-load of his fellow-men on the high seas. And he now sings of liberty on the sunny hills of Africa, and beneath his native palm trees, where he hears the lion roar, and feels himself as free as that king of the forest. Next arose Madison Washington, that bright star of freedom, and took his station in the constellation of freedom. He was a slave on board the brig Creole, of Richmond, bound to New Orleans, that great slave mart, with a hundred and four others. Nineteen struck for liberty or death. But one life was taken, and the whole were emancipated, and the vessel was carried into Nassau, New Providence. Noble men! Those who have fallen in freedom's conflict, their memories will be cherished by the true-hearted and the God-fearing, in all future generations ; those who are living, their names are surrounded by a halo of glory.

We do not advise you to attempt a revolution with the sword, because it would be inexpedient. Your numbers are too small, and moreover the rising spirit of the age, and the spirit of the gospel, are opposed to war and bloodshed. But from this moment cease to labor for tyrants who will not remunerate you. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been—you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Rather die freemen than live to be slaves. Remember that you are THREE MILLIONS!

It is in your power so to torment the God-cursed slaveholders, that they will be glad to let you go free. If the scale was turned, and black men were the masters, and white men the slaves, every destructive agent and element would be employed to lay the oppressor low. Danger and death would hang over their heads day and night. Yes, the tyrants would meet with plagues more terrible than those of Pharaoh. But you are a patient people. You act as though you were made for the special use of these devils. You act as though your daughters were born to pamper the lusts of your masters and overseers. And worse than all, you tamely submit, while your lords tear your wives from your embraces, and defile them before your eyes. In the name of God we ask, are you men? Where is the blood of your fathers? Has it all run out of your veins? Awake, awake; millions of voices are calling you! Your dead fathers speak to you from their graves. Heaven, as with a voice of thunder, calls on you to arise from the dust. Let your motto be resistance! resistance! resistance! —No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make, you must decide by the circumstances that surround you, and according to the suggestion of expediency. Brethren, adieu! Trust in the living God. Labor for the peace of the human race, and remember that you are three millions

## MEET PHILLIS WHEATLEY

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<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/meet-phillis-wheatley/>  
September 21, 2017, K.A Ellis

Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753–1784), a poet and the first African-American woman published in pre-Revolutionary America, was also a notable apologist, abolitionist, and missionary.

Her journey to these shores was cruel and traumatic. In 1721, slave trader Playten Onely requested that the Royal African Company capture “500 small slaves, male and female, from 6 to 10 years old, to be delivered annually” aboard the slave ship Kent. These children were stuffed into the smallest and most suffocating areas of the slave ship’s hold and then sold in the New World.

Phillis was kidnapped from Senegambia, West Africa, at the age of 7. She was purchased at auction by the Wheatley household in Boston and taught the English alphabet by the Wheatleys’ daughter. She was trained as a domestic and received religious and theological education from both the Wheatley family and also New England clergy.

Legislation against educating slaves had not yet reached Boston, but such education was certainly discouraged and seen as impossible due to the perceived intellectual inferiority of Africans. Wheatley’s abilities challenged this ontological racism; just 16 months after her purchase at age 9, she was reading English with fluency and ease from the Bible’s most difficult portions.

By age 10, Wheatley was reading Greek and Latin and translating classics into English. By 14, she was catechized and published. Converted to Christ at 16, she became a member of the Old South Congregational Church in Boston—and yet this “genius in bondage” worshiped in the segregated balcony reserved for slaves.

### **Artistic Method**

Wheatley appealed to the emotions of her readers to demonstrate the humanity of persons of African and European descent. Her work coupled this emotional appeal with arguments for the moral superiority of enslaved Africans over hypocritical “Christians.”

Wheatley often claimed a biblical identity by referring to herself as an Ethiopie rather than Black or African, referencing Moses’s marriage to an Ethiopian (Num. 12:1) and the prediction that Ethiopia “shall soon stretch out her hands to God” (Ps. 68:31). Wheatley used this identity to dismantle racial self-hatred and disarm her opponents. She also drew parallels between her life and the lives of Greek and Roman literary figures.

### **Theology and Missions**

Wheatley was a student of orthodox Congregationalist theology. She wrote about natural and special revelation, the attributes of God, biblical authority, redemption, the image of God, the depravity of man, and the need for a righteous Savior. She also wrote against American Christians who preached that the Bible justified slavery, exposing the inconsistency of defending slavery using Christ’s teachings.

Wheatley eventually negotiated her freedom from the Wheatley family, and began the difficult struggle of being an independent African woman in a society that had little regard or opportunities for either. Post-emancipation, she became even more bold in her abolition advocacy. She challenged revivalist George Whitefield on his pro-slavery inconsistencies. Though she wrote him a soaring elegy, it should be read alongside her personal letters in which she actively resisted his pro-slavery stance.

He wasn’t the only leader Wheatley challenged on the condition of Africans in America; she also corresponded with the Earl of Dartmouth, President George Washington, and many other prominent leaders.

In 1774, Wheatley began mission work with Samson Occom, a member of the Mohegan nation and a

Presbyterian cleric, and Phillip Quaque, the first ordained Anglican priest of African descent. They funded mission efforts to Ghana and Sierra Leone through their publishing work, and were among the earliest recorded mission efforts from the New World. They wanted to establish an African Christian presence in resettlement projects in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which was created as a safe haven for emancipated slaves who were often recaptured and sold back into slavery.

Imagine the risk she bore as both an African and a woman, as one who according to her society should've remained voiceless.

### **Troll Clap Back**

Let's end our discussion of Wheatley with some Black-girl fire. In the 18th century, writers like Wheatley were considered the bloggers of their day, and they were not without trolls. One cowardly troll attacked her writing with a low, ad hominem accusation against her character. Newly self-emancipated, Wheatley clapped back with this response:

I challenge this white face, white-livered enemy of modern Poetesses. It will be a Black affair for him if he ever comes under my lee; for I will have no Mercy on a Man who stands up against me on that Score. I am a match for the stiffest pedant in the Republic of Letters. He holds up his crest no doubt, with confidence, as he has hitherto met with no Rub for his impudence in turning up the frail part of us female poets; but I would have him draw back in time, and not plunge too deep into a subject whose bottom his short line of understanding can never fathom.

More than 200 years later, no one remembers the name of the troll, but history remembers Phillis Wheatley.

*K. A. Ellis is the Director of the Center for the Study of the Bible and Ethnicity at Reformed Theological Seminary. She holds an MFA from Yale University and a master of art in religion (theological) from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and is a doctoral candidate at Oxford Center for Mission Studies in Oxford, England. She speaks and writes on the theology of human rights, African-American culture, understanding Islam, and the persecuted church. Follow her on Twitter @K\_A\_Ellis.*

## ON THE DEATH OF A YOUNG LADY OF FIVE YEARS OF AGE Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784)

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From: *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral*. 1773.

From dark abodes to fair ethereal light  
Th' enraptur'd innocent has wing'd her flight;  
On the kind bosom of eternal love  
She finds unknown beatitude above.  
This know, ye parents, nor her loss deplore,  
She feels the iron hand of pain no more;  
The dispensations of unerring grace,  
Should turn your sorrows into grateful praise;  
Let then no tears for her henceforward flow,  
No more distress'd in our dark vale below.

Her morning sun, which rose divinely bright,  
Was quickly mantled with the gloom of night;  
But hear in heav'n's blest bow'rs your Nancy fair,  
And learn to imitate her language there.  
"Thou, Lord, whom I behold with glory crown'd,  
By what sweet name, and in what tuneful sound  
Wilt thou be prais'd? Seraphic pow'rs are faint  
Infinite love and majesty to paint.  
To thee let all their graceful voices raise,  
And saints and angels join their songs of praise."

Perfect in bliss she from her heav'nly home  
Looks down, and smiling beckons you to come;  
Why then, fond parents, why these fruitless groans?  
Restrain your tears, and cease your plaintive moans.  
Freed from a world of sin, and snares, and pain,  
Why would you wish your daughter back again?  
No—bow resign'd. Let hope your grief control,  
And check the rising tumult of the soul.

Calm in the prosperous, and adverse day,  
Adore the God who gives and takes away;  
Eye him in all, his holy name revere,  
Upright your actions, and your hearts sincere,  
Till having sail'd through life's tempestuous sea,  
And from its rocks, and boist'rous billows free,  
Yourselves, safe landed on the blissful shore,  
Shall join your happy babe to part no more.

### Once upon a time...

At the beginning of the 1990s I was asked to write an article for the inaugural issue of a new student newspaper at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Having little journalistic experience, I tried to avoid this invitation to writing an editorial. My fellow seminarian was persistent and coaxed me to take the dive, and with trepidation (and perhaps perfectionistic expectations) I wrote my initial contribution. The title: *"The Results of a Theological Failure."*

Writing for a seminary publication, "theological failure" could have referred to any number of topics, but what I wrote about was the rise of the Nation of Islam. At that time I was very concerned about what I perceived to be the increasing influence of Louis Farrakhan; I knew of not only the fact that some Christians found him to be a kind of prophetic voice but also that a central tenet of Nation of Islam belief is that their religion was the true faith of black people and that Christianity was a "the white man's religion." This article was one way I chose to express my concern about the specter of Farrakhan's influence. As my article title reveals, I connected the emergence of the Nation of Islam with a theological failure: the lamentable history of white Bible-believing Christians on the question of race in the United States.

This was my argument: though one might be able to identify white Christians of historically orthodox stripe here and there who opposed a racist society, a great majority were complicit in their support of (or apathy regarding) an expression of Christianity that mutually advocated for the complete authority of Scripture and the subjugation of African-Americans (first by slavery and then by Jim Crow, the latter well in place by the time the Nation of Islam emerged). While there were African-American denominations of Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal and Catholic tradition, a nagging question remained about whether the Christian religion was one sponsor of a society that antagonized the flourishing of non-whites in general and African-Americans in particular (of course, one must include Native Americans here, though they somehow are often off the radar in these conversations).

In the midst of this state of affairs, the Nation of Islam emerged in the 1930s, initially promoted by W.D. Fard but largely developed by Elijah Poole (who became Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the movement). The Nation of Islam presented a religion that was for black people (and which referred to whites as devils), and had significant growth during the time Malcolm X was a prominent spokesperson. However one regards its influence in the 1970s and early 1980s, it became prominent again once Louis Farrakhan is the leader of the movement. Farrakhan was then (and still remains) a charismatic speaker criticized for many incendiary claims but who gained a hearing among many because of his identification and critique of the problems of race in society.

My sense was that this religion emerged and had some level of success because evangelicals (and others) had a deficient approach to engaging issues of public concern, particularly on matters of race. I wondered whether there would be any attraction to something like the Nation of Islam if Bible-believing white Christians had done a better job attending to questions of race. The theological failure, as noted above, was the possession of a strong commitment to orthodoxy (dare I say, the "fundamentals" of Biblical truth) without producing theology and ethics that formed and oriented the lives of Christians toward discipleship that included clear opposition to racism; indeed in some cases the Bible was used to rationalize racial hierarchy and segregation.

I wish this story was a fable (or at least a real story with a neat "happily ever after" conclusion), that there was never any reason to write the article. This is not possible, and the theological failures did not abruptly end at some point in mid-20th century. A little more biography, this time about my own experiences in evangelical circles.

To this day of writing, I am willing to use the word “evangelical” when understood its best sense as a way to describe those committed to the truth of Christianity and eager to embrace and convey the good news that has come in Jesus Christ. Though I remain in the fold, it has not been without experiences of vexation on questions of race. I grew up in a Bible-believing African-American Baptist church and did not know of the evangelical movement (or of the term as an identity marker) until I was in college and a participant in the Navigators, a discipleship-oriented parachurch ministry. It was during those years when I became acquainted with strategies of inductive Bible study and preacher-authors like Chuck Swindoll and Charles Stanley. Without exaggeration I can say that in my first experiences within evangelicalism as a college student brought me tremendous benefit from my Navigators Bible study, the church I attended and other settings of evangelical Christian fellowship.

The first glimmer of dissonance connected to race came in the years immediately after I graduated, when I lived in Memphis between 1987-90 and began listening daily to the Christian radio station that played programs with preachers, Focus on the Family, and a couple of talk shows that had guests a few times a week. At first I enjoyed these without reservation, and I appreciated what I learned when political issues like abortion or cultural issues like secularization were discussed. Eventually I began to wonder why questions about race were rarely discussed while many other sociopolitical matters were discussed frequently. I also began to notice that some of my African-American Christian friends would express frustration at the conservative political stance often on display in evangelical media. At first I was not sure what to make of this state of affairs, but I was soon unable to avoid the fact that addressing race was not a priority. I kept looking and listening in vain to see or hear prominent evangelical leaders making any kind of case about racism as sinful and as something larger than matters of personal prejudice. At that time I wondered how it might even be possible to make a case that racism was a sin explicitly condemned in the Bible, not having encountered examples or models to show me the way (I was sure it was a sin, but not sure how to prove it). To be fair, I am not saying no white evangelicals had concern about racism; rather I am saying it was not a notable priority among prominent white evangelical leaders (in pulpit or academy).

When I went off to Trinity in 1990, I was still wondering how this important issue could be addressed by evangelical Christians, especially because I was not always pleased with some of the ways I heard race addressed by prominent black leaders. I wanted to see an evangelical approach to this big problem. For certain, the 1990s saw books about racial reconciliation by teams of black/white authors (most prominently Raleigh Washington/Glen Kehrein and Spencer Perkins/Chris Rice), the rise of Promise Keepers (with an eventual emphasis on racial reconciliation), and in the last two decades there have been more books written to make efforts to address the challenges of race.

While there has been more attention to these issues and arguably more Bible-believing white Christians who are trying to face questions of race in integrity and an unblinking gaze, the concerns remain. Indeed, I would argue the theological-ethical failure has not been overcome. Try this exercise: survey 40-50 Christian ethics volumes written in the last 2-40 years and see how many have something related to race as a topic (warning: it will not turn out well).

While a figure like Farrakhan does not have the same level of prominence or public influence, what we now observe is a generation of African-Americans in evangelical spaces who are frustrated, or exhausted, or angry, or discouraged by their sense that the majority of Bible-believing white Christians do not take the ongoing challenge of race seriously.

Put another way, what we can observe is that while there have been more African-Americans who have had some level of prominence in evangelical-type circles in the last couple decades, a number of them have arrived the same place as Tom Skinner in the early 1970s when he began to mention race on his radio program, or the same place as Bill Pannell when he wrote *My Friend, The Enemy* in 1968. They are disaffected and some have stepped away from their evangelical (or Reformed, etc.) settings and headed for other communities or just decided to sit on the sidelines for a while (note: the 2016 election is not the largest catalyst for this in my view; this experience of great dissonance and discouragement happens to many minorities at some point in their sojourn amid predominantly white Bible-believing Christian

environments. For one example see Ed Gilbreath's *Reconciliation Blues*).

At this point readers may ask whether I think matters are exactly as they were back then. My response: I think there has definitely been elements of progress since then (e.g. I'm a tenured theology professor at Wheaton College), but it would be a tremendous mistake to confuse the beginning of progress with arrival at the finish line. One way to put it: while there was landmark civil rights legislation passed in 1964 and 1965, no revival or spiritual transformation occurs in the church by the stroke of a pen. We have yet to see waves of renewal within the United States church on questions of race. Yes, more books, conferences, and denominational statements about race have occurred but within the larger populace lots of frustration remains for many minorities, with some feeling little has changed.

Here's where the title of this conversation comes in. To truly move forward on the challenge of race requires a reckoning with the theological failures that impede Christian unity and which are part of the reason for not only a movement like the Nation of Islam but also the existence of what we call "the black church." A reckoning of any kind takes a strong dose of courage. The reckoning in this case means a willingness to truly look at elements that are key to a church that struggles to truly provide a foretaste of the vision in Revelation 7:9.

A few years ago we had Bryan Stevenson at Wheaton, and he said then (and elsewhere) that a big part of our problem is our relationship to history. Sometimes what happens in conversations about race is that people say "why do we need to keep looking back at that history?" Stevenson's point is that many people have not truly begun to look at the history of race in this country. And I admit that in part I can't blame anyone who doesn't want to look at a history that includes racial antagonism toward African-Americans. It is extremely hard to actually think about what occurred in slavery, what occurred during the Jim Crow era, and ways that the effects of that history remain with us. It is facing true horror to look at the history of lynching or of events like the 1921 Tulsa race riots, particularly when Christians were involved.

Or to be even more precise, it is sobering and distressing to acknowledge the explicit racism of one's heroes of biblical orthodoxy like my dissertation figure Abraham Kuyper (this was a major crisis for me, but also how I became a critical thinker) or someone like J. Gresham Machen (of course one could also list the Southern Presbyterians like Dabney and Thornwell). Yet, the way forward to a quality of Christian fellowship and mission in pursuit of the common good requires being willing to see the ways that deeply committed white Christians have had levels of complicity in racism that is part of our past and present.

The goal of reckoning is far from stoking a new round of white guilt. While facing the truth will likely lead to sadness and guilt, the more important aspect is the cultivation of a willingness to cultivate and craft approaches to theology and church life that facilitate genuine community and mission among Bible-believing Christians of different ethnic backgrounds in general and between whites and African-Americans in particular. To do this in the current climate is a tremendous challenge when there is a significant contingent of Christians who regard attention to these matters as distractions from the gospel and the intrusion of a purported cultural Marxism.

I admit a tremendous frustration every time I see someone use the language of cultural Marxism as a reason to be wary of efforts to engage questions of race and life in the church. As I look back over the last 30 years and think about the different reasons some Bible-believing Christians have avoided, neglected or resisted questions of race, I find it peculiar that this campaign against cultural Marxism has emerged fairly recently (maybe as early as 2001) as a central reason to have hesitation about pursuits of justice.

In all honestly, if the people who express these concerns about cultural Marxism had lots of examples of congregations that have an allergy to critical race theory but are leading the way in cultivating and practicing a faith that addresses the past and present challenges of race, I would be more inclined to take their warnings seriously. As far as I can tell, these people are not leading the way toward cultivating a gospel unity. Instead, I see the act of using the label "cultural Marxism" as a smokescreen or diversion-

ary tactic that forestalls both the reckoning required to contend with theological-ethical failures on race and the subsequent work to pursue new paths of Christian discipleship. These are paths taken where life together means truly living out the implications of a gospel that compels us to love our neighbors as ourselves in ways interpersonal and public/political. This does not mean loyalty to any political party but a true submission to the Lordship of Christ. This Lordship means we are seeking to have our various commitments always subject to examination by the Holy Spirit, and a willingness to respond to what is exposed.

One of the greatest things in need of exposure is the ways extra-biblical commitments function in the world and life view of Christians hesitant to acknowledge the ongoing challenges of race (or even among those who acknowledge it but do not see much that can be done besides have heated disagreements – hence an unfortunate conspiracy of silence in these cases).

A former student of mine named David Swanson is a white pastor of a multi-ethnic church in Chicago. As you can see on his blog, this year he has a book coming out that addresses what he calls the need for re-discipling white Christians out of their commitments to segregation to genuine solidarity with those who are non-white. The important dimension I wish to note here is that Swanson is highlighting what many minorities have observed in their years among predominantly white churches and institutions: they see that while there is a genuine commitment to the complete truth of Scripture, along with it there are cultural beliefs, norms and assumptions about matters of race and society that are unquestioned/taken-for-granted. At some point, what happens is that a minority person will have an uncomfortable conversation with a person who may be a dear friend, but he discovers that he sees the world very differently when it comes to the way race factors into society (and church, ministry, theology, etc.). In many cases these conversations are not very fruitful.

Part of the reason for this, I believe, is that there is little discussion about how each person is seeing not only the Bible but also the cultural assumptions at work in looking at how life operates in society. Here, I believe is where a lot of work needs to be done. It is not easy work, because it is essentially like asking fish to discern the quality of water in which they swim. When the water is fine for your type of fish, who would notice whether there is anything that could be problematic for other fish?

The modern West (a culture and world constructed largely by those of European descent) constructs something called “whiteness” and regards that as the standard by which other humans are to be measured and judged. The extent to which this operates as a cultural norm among white Christians plays a sometimes hidden (more so these days, less so when racial discrimination was the law of the land) role when theology is constructed and ethical practices emerge out of faith commitments. When this unspoken factor has been at work, it helped set the stage for a segregated society, hence the emergence of African-American versions of denominations, and also the emergence of a theodicy problem for blacks who try to make sense of a Christian faith that has not often compelled their white brothers and sisters to seek their flourishing. I began this reflection with the words “Once upon a time...” While at the present we are far from a happy ending, I think it is possible for Christians to work together across races and cultivate theology and practice that leads to a public witness that provides a bit of glimpse of the unity that we will share when Christ returns and brings us complete Shalom. If we are to pursue the cultivation of a life that is a coming attraction of the true happy ending, it will require white Bible-believing Christians to begin asking something besides “Why are they bringing up those questions of race again?” and instead ask God “Would you interrogate my heart, mind and especially my understanding of Christian life, so that I may be among those who are witnesses to a gospel that is better news than I have imagined, especially because of our pursuit of a better unity?” I know many who are less than sanguine about this possibility. I dare to imagine that it can happen. Please, Lord, make it so.

*Dr. Vincent Bacote is Associate Professor of Theology and the Director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics, Wheaton College. This article produced a vigorous and good discussion on Theopolis.com. Especially helpful were response essays Irwin Ince and Rich Lusk (<https://theopolisinstitute.com/conversations/from-once-upon-a-time-to-happily-ever-after-and-how-to-get-there-from-here-a-response-to-vincent-bacote/>).*

## FOREWORD

### Heal Us Emmanuel: A Call for Racial Reconciliation, Representation, and Unity in the Church *by Rev. Dr. Carl Ellis, Jr.*

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In the mid-1960s, I was a high school student in Gary, Indiana. Since this was in the day of de facto segregation in the North, my contact with Whites was limited and usually tinged with racism. However, I often heard many of my friends mention the “Hills sisters.” Though they were White, they stood out in the minds of my peers because they were known for “not being prejudiced.” Having been jaded by many racist encounters, I was skeptical about such a possibility among White folk.

Soon after coming to Christ, I met the Hills sisters and found out why they were so highly regarded for defying the traditional conventions of racism—they and their family followed Christ. That convinced me of the transforming power of the Gospel message, and it changed my outlook. In meeting Christ in them, I was healed.

However, through my developing years as a Christ-follower, I was often disappointed by people who claimed to be Christians but didn’t seem to have been transformed by the Gospel in the area of race. I encountered this so often that my old jadedness about the possibility of rising above American racism began to return with a vengeance. Each time this doubt welled up in my heart, the Lord sent a reminder that he has many in the body of Christ who have “not bowed the knee to Baal”—in this case, the bad politics of race-based discrimination.

Heal Us, Emmanuel is a welcome balm—a reminder that the transforming power I saw in the Hills sisters so many years ago is still operating today. It is one thing to condemn racist attitudes and behaviors, it is another thing to reveal the “dis-ease” that helps drive those attitudes and behaviors; namely, the aberrant theology that was developed to justify American chattel slavery and Jim Crow. The American Church continues to limp about with this festering wound today because the infection has not been disinfected by the light of Christ. It is not enough to admonish American Christians to have biblical attitudes and behaviors regarding race without dissecting and putting to death the dis-eased theology that plagued American Christianity—a theology that gave credence to race-based oppression. Anything short of this radical approach, coupled with repentance, will allow similar sinful and destructive attitudes to flare up again, producing more harmful history and culture.

Theological dis-ease happens when we seek to make the Bible conform to man-made philosophies and ideologies. For centuries, the Bible-believing community has identified and condemned this as heresy. Heal Us, Emmanuel lays a needed foundation for rising above the heresy and history that made it easy for Black militants and Marxist thinkers alike to label Christianity as “the White Man’s Religion,” or simply as useless in today’s modern context. These militant thinkers, however, overlooked an important fact; namely, that no sane person would embrace the religion of his or her oppressor. Yet our African American ancestors, along with those who opposed the racist culture and boldly proclaimed their dignity, encountered Christ in spite of the aberrant theology that surrounded them. When they met Christ, they discovered something about Christianity that defied the heresy their oppressors tried to impose on them. This gave them a powerful affirmation of human dignity, enabling them to resist the forces of dehumanization.

Theology is a two-sided coin; side A is doctrine, and side B is ethics. A robust system of doctrine can be discredited if we use it to justify unbiblical ethics. By identifying what went wrong theologically, the contributors to this valuable book have laid a foundation for a reformation and revival—something so many of us have fervently prayed for. The beautiful brothers in Heal Us, Emmanuel “get it.” Their open hearts are a valuable and precious resource for the body of Christ, and these are the voices we need to hear to facilitate healing. Today, there are many who claim to be biblical and yet seek to address the current racial issues with the same political and social ideologies employed by the fomenters of gratuitous racial unrest. These well-meaning activist Christians don’t seem to realize that these ideologies often mask nefarious agendas. As my wife Karen teaches, “These ideologies are based ultimately in principles of destruction, not in building up men and women to good works; therefore, such ideologies have no place in the body of Christ.”

Heal Us, Emmanuel reminds us that no matter how sophisticated our theology may be, it is always in need of being disciplined, corrected, and expanded by Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16), not by man-made ideologies. It challenges us to get busy doing theology that addresses current issues while being faithful to Scripture. Doing so will enable us to walk in biblical wisdom—a wisdom that far surpasses the power and scope of today's prevailing short-sighted ideologies. All who accept this loving challenge will discover new ways that God's Word "does not return void" (Isa. 55:11), and the implications will affect generations to come.

Heal Us, Emmanuel is a must-read and a must-have in the library of anyone who is serious about honoring God in this age of polarization.

*Dr. Carl Ellis is Senior Research Fellow with Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS). He is also the Associate Pastor for Cultural Apologetics at New City Fellowship, Chattanooga, TN, and serves on numerous boards and as a consultant on cultural matters. He has authored several books, including Free At Last? and Saving Our Sons. Dr. Ellis studied under Francis Schaeffer at LÁbri and has degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary, and Oxford Graduate School.*

## RECONCILIATION OR BUST

### Heal Us Emmanuel: A Call for Racial Reconciliation, Representation, and Unity in the Church *by Rev. Dr. Irwyn Ince*

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*"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." - GALATIANS 3:27-29*

I remember the first time I flew first-class in an airplane. I was around thirteen years old. My father and I were traveling to visit our family in Trinidad, and the airline had overbooked the flight. We had reservations, but in order for us to fly together they had to split us up. Since the error was theirs, they upgraded one of our tickets to first class. My father, being the man he was, insisted that I take the first-class seat. This was a brand new world to me. Every time I turned around, the stewardess was asking me if I wanted something to drink, if I wanted something to eat, or if I was comfortable. At first it felt a little awkward to me. But then I thought, "This is nice! I want to fly like this all the time!" What I didn't realize, of course, is how much more money a first-class ticket costs.

I had at other times already in my young life experienced overt racism. Now, looking back, I see that time on the plane was my first awareness of the notion of privilege. The way people tend to use their privilege is like covert racism, a sneakier bias that feels much more palatable. The lesson that experience taught me is that in this life there are different and better levels of privilege in society that one can access depending on how much money you have, how many resources you have at your disposal, and what your social status is.

That's actually not news. We all know there are walls that separate us in society. It's also not news that those same walls exist in the church. Yet, the clear message of Galatians 3:27–29 is that there is only one class in Christ. The apostle Paul declares that the three primary categories where societal separation is most vividly seen—ethnicity, social status, and gender—are no longer valid reasons for separation when it comes to the church. In Christ, ethnic, social, and gender distinctions are not obliterated. Rather, what is done away with is the sinful inequality that separates us from one another. My passion in pastoral ministry is to see the local church press toward a life where our differences, diversity, and distinctions are not elevated over our unity in Christ.

#### **A New Passion is Born**

My first experience with the Christian faith was at Hanson Place Central United Methodist Church in Brooklyn, New York. Hanson Place was my father's church until his death and remains my mother's church to this day. During my late teen years, however, it became clear that my parents' faith had not become my own. I rejected Christianity, and through my college years at City College of New York in Harlem, I came to view Christianity as "the White man's religion." I wanted no part of it. The only expression of the Christian faith that had any interest to me was the Black church experience. This interest was driven by the reality that historically, in America, the Black church was the single most authoritative force in the Black community. Not only that, but the Black Christian worship experience represented an ongoing connection to the African worship experience. I was in full agreement with Dr. Molefi K. Asante, who asserted that this connection to African religious expression made the Black church "the most logical institution for the beginning work of instructing the masses concerning African customs, habits, and styles." That's what I wanted to see happen.

The value in the Black church was seen in its ability to further the cause of the Afrocentric movement by political and cultural activism and by recognizing that it is the place where the religious aspect of the continuity of the one African cultural system is vividly seen. I did not view the Black church as a place where souls are saved and set free from the bondage of sin to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather it was a place where, if it was done right, people could be saved and set free from the bondage of Eurocentric thought and oppression.

So, how does someone go from this view of the church to pastoring a multiethnic church? I'm glad you asked! When my wife and I moved our family to Maryland in the mid-'90s, we began attending historic New Bethel Baptist Church in Washington, DC. We didn't attend because we had any interest in becoming Christians. We were invited by a family. We'd left all of our friends in New York and figured that it would be a good way to meet some decent people. Of course, if you fool around and start attending Bible studies and worship services you might just meet Someone Else. That's precisely what happened. My wife and I became believers in Jesus Christ. A decisive shift in my worldview began to take place. While I could, like Paul, have a burden for my "kinsmen according to the flesh," the biblical vision of the kingdom of God was reconciliation and peace across the breadth of humanity. I couldn't yet articulate it, but there was a growing discontent with the state of monoethnicity in the church given the growing diversity in our communities.

My pre-Christian understanding of humanity was that brotherhood was predominantly based on racial identity. The clear message of the Gospel is that the brotherhood God creates is based on union with Christ. I saw in the Scriptures not simply a message of reconciliation, but a declaration of immeasurably great power king in the church for reconciliation, unity, and peace (Eph 1:15–4:16). Yet it seemed the church was quite comfortable maintaining our divides.

Over the next four years at New Bethel, I had a growing sense of call to ministry. At the same time, I became exposed to Reformed theology through the Ligonier Ministries *Renewing Your Mind* broadcast. I enrolled at the Reformed Theological Seminary Washington/Baltimore campus and began taking courses in 2000.

Although I was taking courses at RTS and developing an understanding of covenant theology, my wife and I weren't looking for a new church. But I had a desperate need to be mentored in ministry. That need was met by Rev. Kevin Smith, an African American pastor in our area. Kevin had planted Mount Zion Covenant Church (PCA) in Bowie, Maryland. Our family joined Mount Zion in 2002, and I was now in the Presbyterian Church in America. Mount Zion was a unique PCA congregation. The congregation was largely a mix of African American families and predominantly Anglo-American college students. Needless to say, there was a vast difference between our experience at a 100-year-old Black Baptist church and this four-year-old ethnically diverse church plant. So, all of these factors—my pre-Christian worldview, conversion at New Bethel, RTS studies, and church life at Mount Zion—formed my passion to pursue multi-ethnic ministry in the local church.

### **From Community to "Ghetto Living"**

The theologian Herman Bavinck emphasizes the vastness of the image of God when he says: "The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depth and riches in a humanity counting billions of members. Just as the traces of God (*vestigia Dei*) are spread over many, many works, in both space and time, so also the image of God can only be displayed in all its dimensions and characteristic features in a humanity whose members exist both successively one after the other and contemporaneously side by side. Only humanity in its entirety—as one complete organism, summed up under a single head, spread out over the whole earth, as prophet proclaiming the truth of God, as priest dedicating itself to God, as ruler controlling the earth and the whole of creation—only it is the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God."

During seminary, the Lord began to add theological fuel to my passion in the form of covenant theology. There wasn't any particular emphasis or focus on the implications of the Gospel for pursuing diversity in the local church, but when I came across the above words by Bavinck, they immediately resonated with me as having deep implications for the local church. Much of the Gospel message I had been used to hearing had been reduced to simply having "a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ." In that way of expressing the Gospel message, there lies a radically individualistic emphasis on what it means to be a Christian. While no one would argue that the Lord saves individuals and reconciles them to himself, the Gospel is so much more than that. It must include the fullness of what it means to be made in the image of God. And Bavinck is right. The finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God

is the entirety of redeemed humanity.

In Genesis, the first words about humanity in the Bible come from the lips of God:

*"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." - GENESIS 1:26-27*

### **Covenant Community is Created.**

Male and female are covenantally bound to the Lord and to each other. Humanity's beginning was in covenantal community. This is as much an aspect of what it means for us to be made in the image of God as is our being rational, thinking, feeling beings created "in the virtues of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness." The Father, Son and Spirit, who eternally exist in the perfection of covenant community, is imaged in the creation of humanity in covenant community.

So, what happens when sin enters the world? Just what we would expect. The marring of the image includes the fracture of covenantal relationships. This extends far beyond marital problems between husband and wife (Gen. 3:16). It includes fratricide (Gen. 4:8) and extends to the decline of humanity into corruption and violence (Gen. 6:11).

Even when there is unity among humanity after the Fall, it is unity in our rebellion and rejection of our covenantal Lord's commands. We're told in Genesis 11 that there was a time in human history when everyone had the same language and spoke the same words. Humanity was in solidarity. Moses tells us that everyone could speak and understand each other. Everyone is on the same page, but it's in their rejection of God's command. They're on the same page in their rebellion against what God has explicitly commanded them to do. After the Flood, God again commanded humanity to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth (Gen. 9:1). Yet, in direct and conscious rebellion, humans determine they don't want to fill the earth, they want to settle where they are. There is no serpent in Shinar tempting humanity to disobey God's word. An external tempter isn't necessary. Humanity is one big happy family against the Lord.

God's response in Genesis 11:7 included judgment and mercy. Our language was confused so that we could not understand one another, and we were forced to fill the earth. The willful rebellion of humanity against God's explicit command resulted in the use of all our faculties united for an impossible goal. We were joined together to establish ourselves as God, with all authority and power. God mercifully moved to restrain our sin by confusing our language.

Yet, there was still the issue of the confusion of our language. We now had the creation of "ghetto living." From Babel onward we are still in solidarity against God, yet this solidarity is expressed in isolated communities. These ghettos, because they are in rebellion against God, are also naturally against each other.

Thus, what happens far too often is that we understand our human dignity and value as coming from isolated community. And we love our ghettos: our ethnic ghettos, our social ghettos, our cultural ghettos, our economic ghettos, our academic ghettos. And we love them to a fault. When we see cultural and ethnic differences, we don't embrace our God-given, creational dissimilarity. Instead of rejoicing in how God made us, we immediately distrust others. We instinctively reject others and often mock them because we're still confused and don't understand each other.

### **Community Restored**

When Christ came, he proclaimed far more than individual salvation. He proclaimed the coming of the kingdom. Integral to that is the restoration and renewal of community, the reversal of Babel. Jesus said that his Father assigned to him a kingdom, and he assigns this kingdom to his Apostles (Luke 22:28-29).

After his resurrection, our Lord spent forty days speaking to his disciples about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). When the Spirit came and filled the disciples for kingdom proclamation and work, the first thing they do is declare the mighty works of God. Men from what Luke calls every nation under heaven—Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Crete, Arabia, Rome—were able to hear, understand, and respond to the message (Acts 2:5). The work of bringing people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation under the banner of the Lamb of God had begun.

That is the work God continues today and that will not be complete until the consummation of the kingdom. The day is coming when the redeemed will fully reflect the image of our Creator as one family, summed up under our single head, Jesus Christ. This is the biblical, covenantal vision that fuels my passion for ministry in the local church.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “For so many years we had to face the tragic fact that eleven o’clock on Sunday morning, when we stood to sing, ‘In Christ There Is No East or West,’ we stood in the most segregated hour of Christian America.” His words still ring true about the church in America almost sixty years after he spoke them. So now we must ask: How’s it going?

### **What Does it Look like in Practice?**

The church I [formerly served] is City of Hope Presbyterian Church, in Columbia, Maryland. Columbia is a suburban community in Howard County, which was founded forty-five years ago. It is located midway between Baltimore and Washington, DC. The vision for Columbia was to create a city that was diverse in every way. Columbia’s founder James Rouse explained his vision for a complete city by saying, “Columbia will be economically diverse, polycultural, multi-faith, and inter-racial.”

This vision has in large part been attained. By all accounts, Columbia has achieved economic, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. But not in the church! By and large, the quote above from Dr. King is true among most of the churches in our community. Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour, and that is tragic.

Thus, when I’m asked how things are going, I’ll give this tongue-and-cheek answer, “It’s going.” If I were not convinced that God’s vision as he builds his kingdom is to gather people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities into the local church, I would be quite satisfied to stay in my cultural comfort zone. The ministry of reconciliation is hard. Everyone comes with preferences. If you intentionally pursue ministry in such a way that the makeup of the local church reflects its community, you are forced to deal with the issues that relate to power dynamics. We rarely think of the issues that way, but discussions about liturgy, worship music, Bible study groups, preaching style, service length, and more all relate in some way to the question of power.

I praise God that often he provides an “apple of gold in a setting of silver” (Prov. 25:11) at just the right time. The Lord loves to send a word of encouragement to enable his servant to keep pressing on. One of these much-needed golden apples came to me when a woman said, “Pastor Irwyn, City of Hope has to make it. Our family needs this church.” As we were again facing the financial challenges of church planting, that dear woman told me our church had to survive. She’s Caucasian. Her husband is of Middle Eastern descent. They have two biological children and two adopted African American children. They’ve been members of the typical majority White church. Why does she feel as though her family needs our church? It is because we are striving intentionally to live out the Gospel imperative of redemptive ethnic unity in Christ. She explained that, in addition to her family’s need, she personally needs the challenge of a racially diverse church. She is embracing the need to have her values, preferences, and preoccupations reassessed in light of the Bible.

What we have learned is that the answer to the question of power is not how we end up after we ask “Who wins?” or “Who loses?” but rather “Who dies?” In this difficult pursuit, we should keep asking the question, “Is this thing that’s offending me a kingdom issue, or is it simply a preference that the Lord would have me die to for the sake of unity in the body?” I don’t want to die to my preferences, and some would say that I shouldn’t have to. Yet, the practice of Christian liberty calls me to be ready and willing to do just that.

Through the first eight years of City of Hope, I have seen the Lord take us through the controversies and challenges of how we ought to go about pursuing multi-ethnic ministry. One example was in the development of our music ministry. When the church began, we hired an African American trio of Gospel musicians two Sundays every month to be very intentional about having a Black Gospel sound regularly. We had to deal with the question of whether or not we should be hiring outside musicians for worship. Even though having musical diversity was and is a high value, that did not prevent the topic of paying such a high price to bring in people who were not committed to our church.

Staying the course turned out to be a blessing because the value and pursuit of diversity in our worship music has become an integral part of our identity. Our own musicians developed with this value. With those early conversations now in the past, our music team leaders organized a Christmas Chorale for the Advent season.

What a blessing it was to be led in song through Negro spirituals, traditional hymns, and contemporary Christian music. That chorale was a microcosm of our current dynamic. If you worship with us, you'll find that the musical genre changes from week to week, and even within a single service.

Our most difficult challenge to date struck at the core of our ministry vision. We planted the church with an ethnically diverse pastoral team. For both financial and functional reasons, it didn't work out. We had to wrestle with whether or not a multi-ethnic pastoral team was essential to the ministry vision or was just "nice to have." The dissolution of the pastoral team was hard. Some of the dear people who began with us left the church, and those who remained had to go through a period of recovery and healing. Thankfully, that recovery and healing has largely taken place. It has been painful but good.

In a recent gathering with a handful of brothers from City of Hope, I asked them to evaluate how the church was doing. The conversation that followed was outstanding. Here are some of the things they shared: *"Because the Gospel shows me my sin... it allows me also to look at my culture and some of the things that are wrong with my culture and not be afraid to point it out or try to safeguard it."*

*"For me, the process of coming to an awareness of my own culture and its benefits and its sinfulness and the necessity of me as a Christian to be willing to step outside of that and learn that my understanding of God is limited because I can't grasp his image in other cultures, that was a painful process."*

*"I just realized five minutes ago that I'm the only White guy in the room! It doesn't even cross my mind... How do we cultivate the multicultural ministry? I'm actually not sure. That's why I'm so focused on outreach; because I want to draw in the community so that we are the community."*

*"Generally when a White person in a homogeneous White community says, 'I'm colorblind,' it means, 'You're White, too. You're equal with me. I'm only going to engage you on my own terms.' It means, 'I'm blind to your culture.'"*

*"When we engage others in the community, my culture, my family's culture, begins to change and reflect those others in my community. It begins to take on aspects of Black community. It begins to take on aspects of Latino community. Because we're doing life together. So I change. My culture transforms. It's not just a bunch of different people coming together and going back and being our own different people."*

The combination of the specific challenges I mentioned earlier (music and staff) along with the normal "mess" of ministry (shepherding people through loneliness, marital issues, parenting, health crises, etc.) makes this an intense pursuit. At the same time, hearing from these brothers enabled me to get out of the trees and see the forest.

Not everyone who comes through our doors on a Sunday morning gets excited and encouraged by our ministry vision. Yet we rejoice because the Lord is painting a beautiful picture at City of Hope. His Spirit is at work confirming the vision by actually bringing it to pass! I am humbled by the love, hospitality, accountability, and fellowship that have become defining characteristics of the church.

We know that we will never “arrive” until glory. Ministry will always be messy. But just like we don’t wait until glory to pursue righteousness and holiness, to put to death that which is earthly in us, we ought not be content to wait until glory to see the nations gathered together under the banner of Christ pursuing the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

### **Reconciling Out of Love**

My denomination—the PCA—and many other majority-White denominations need more diverse, Gospel churches. In 2010, the PCA published a strategic plan to address challenges to overcome in order to grow. The report lists the transition from Anglo-majority culture in the United States as an external challenge. Two of the denomination’s internal challenges are “maintaining biblical worship with cultural diversity” and “ethnic homogeneity both in general membership and denominational leadership.”

David Livermore explains the challenge when he says: “We have to learn to be the people who become culturally accessible, living messages of Jesus and his love. Embodying Jesus cross-culturally is a messy, complicated process. This is what often splits churches, divides families, and erodes Christian fellowship.”

Are majority-White denominations ready to reject ethnic homogeneity and learn how to love those who have not historically been members of our churches? Are we wrestling with how to become more ethnically and culturally diverse as a whole, attempting to discover what it looks like to love those around us?

The answers to these questions involve actions by and attitudes of churches. They involve choices by individuals. In my case, I am one of the few African American pastors in the PCA, and I’ve chosen to commit to and love my denomination.

When the PCA began in 1973, the founders declared the denomination to be the Continuing Presbyterian Church. Therefore, as a denomination, we own that church’s history, both its virtues and its wickedness. Recent work by Stephen R. Hayes in *The Last Segregated Hour* and by Sean Michael Lucas in his book on the history of the PCA have helped to make us aware of the specific sins that were committed. Whether we like it or not, the perception by many minorities that the PCA is a White, socially conservative, Right-wing, racist denomination is connected to this history.

This is why, when we began our church in 2007, we named it City of Hope Church. We didn’t want the “Presbyterian” hump to be the first hump people had to overcome when they considered our church. We are now, officially, City of Hope Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian hump is still real. However, what is more real is the grace of Christ, enabling us to engage openly and honestly about who we are, where we’ve come from, and where we desire to see the Lord take us.

The Lord appears to be moving in the hearts of leaders in the PCA to once again testify to his reconciling grace through confession and repentance. For this, I am thankful. My prayer is that all of Christ’s church will embrace a “reconciliation or bust” commitment to living out the implications of God’s Gospel.

*Rev. Dr. Irwyn Ince serves as a pastor at Grace DC Presbyterian Church and director of the Grace DC Institute for Cross-Cultural Mission. He has served as moderator of the Presbyterian Church in America Chesapeake Presbytery. Irwyn’s ministry passion is to see the Gospel message of reconciliation with God and among people lived out in the context of the local church. Irwyn and his wife, Kim, have four children.*

## MOVING FORWARD

### Heal Us Emmanuel: A Call for Racial Reconciliation, Representation, and Unity in the Church *by Rev. Russ Whitfield*

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You may be having a difficult time understanding the reactions of many people of color (and White allies) to the news of Black people dying at the hands of law enforcement. Maybe you are even a little bit frustrated with the emotional response and the cries of injustice against “the system.”

Perhaps, you’re on the other side of these events. You are angry, heartbroken, and feeling hopeless because you can’t help but see injustice every time one of these all-too-familiar scenarios appears in news headlines. Either way, if you identify as a Christian, you have been called to be a reconciler, a peacemaker, and a light in this current darkness. It is imperative that you work through this distinctly Christian calling with wisdom, courage, and a mind to new obedience. The love of God constrains you. The grace of God teaches you. The Spirit of God empowers you to live an altogether different kind of life in light of the new age that has dawned in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

The issues at hand deeply affect the lives of real people within your local church and real people outside of your local church whom you have been called to love faithfully. This is to say that our engagement or disengagement with these issues will shape the dynamics of our life together, along with our missionary encounter with the world. On these issues, our local churches will either testify to the glory of the risen Christ through mutual love and humble repentance, or we will obscure the glory of the risen Christ through hardness of heart and indifference.

One thing, however, must be made absolutely clear: passivity has never been a viable Christian response to divisive and destructive social dynamics, especially within the church. Most of us are already convinced of this. But we feel like we’re stuck. We’re unsure of how to participate in bringing the healing that is needed.

#### **Story as Guide**

So how might we begin to proactively engage these issues? How can we begin to chart a course forward? I would invite you to consider the theme of story as a guiding paradigm for progress. All sides in this racial struggle tend to live within their own separate stories. These cultural narratives predetermine who our friends should be, who we can trust, and how we should relate to the world. These cultural narratives encourage us to find our deepest identities and alliances within our own ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups. However, I would propose that if we are to move forward together, then we must situate these tensions, our community, and our very lives within the same story—the story of God. No matter what truths may be found within these smaller cultural stories, we must give the greatest weight and the final say in our lives to God’s story. To put it another way, the story of God must be our “true north,” our greatest orienting factor. The story of God must dispel the cultural myths in which we have been living for far too long.

I’m intentionally resisting the typical “to-do” list, for real problems are rarely solved by checking the boxes. Rather, I’m proposing what I think will be a fruitful trajectory of thought as we try to move forward in mutual love and understanding. Admittedly, it takes much prayerful, humble, and communal reflection to figure out what this might look like in your context. The specifics will take different shape in different places. However, I would propose that if we are to be built up together in love (Eph. 4:16), then we must stay attuned to God’s macro-level narrative for perspective.

Let’s start with some important ideas. Each tragic, racialized event tends to take on a life that is much bigger than itself. Each of these events tap into a broader, more tragic, and more painful story for people of color. If this does not register for you, then the effect of all your preaching, Scripture quoting, and #praying tweets will be muted, at best. Please understand that every act of racial injustice, every episode of racism and race-based mistreatment takes on a symbolic status that brings to mind an entire network of historic injustices, sufferings, and the dehumanization of African Americans and other people of color. In the minds of many Black people, each racialized event serves as a heartrending cipher for chattel

slavery, Jim Crow, historic church bombings, Klan terrorism, redlining, and many other wounds received personally, and by living family members of former generations. Each event reads like another chapter in America's running commentary on my Blackness—my worth, my status, my place in society—and it's not a hopeful picture.

At one time, I did ministry in an affluent area in another part of the country, and I was often invited to large parties that were held in the beautiful homes of friends and church members. I was usually the only person of color in the place, except for "the help," of course. On more than one occasion, a fellow party-goer would come up to me and put their trash or empty glass on my plate, assuming I was "the help." I was clearly not expected to be in attendance as an equal or a friend. On another occasion, as I stood at the front of the house chatting with a friend and taking in the beautiful weather, a fellow party-goer tossed their car keys to me upon their arrival, assuming that I was the valet. Why did he toss the keys to me rather than my White friend? On each of these occasions, I heard America's commentary clearly: "We've already assigned a social role for people who look like you, and that role is beneath us."

Based on your current life situation, these events can carry slightly different, but equally painful messages. If I'm a Black achiever, I get the message that no matter how many letters I have behind my name (M.Div., Ph.D., J.D.), no matter how much money I have in the bank, no matter what gifts, talents, or job titles I hold, I will forever and always be subservient, even expendable. The dark clouds of stereotype, racialization, and essentialism will never lift.

I will never be able to walk through the world with the freedom and security of my White counterparts. The media stereotypes, fear-filled glances of passersby, and constant pressures to prove my virtue, decency, and value are a regular reminder that I don't get the benefit of the doubt so I must work that much harder to diffuse the doubts and fears. In certain situations, it could mean the difference between life and death. Each tragic episode tells me that I will be on the social treadmill indefinitely: The reality of motion with the illusion of progress.

If I'm a Black non-achiever, I get the message that if I ever entertained even the smallest notion of rising from my current situation, I should probably just forget about it. It's not worth the effort. I'm stuck and might as well stay put. If I try to rise, anyone with cultural power can put me back in my place of subjugation without any repercussions. Each racialized incident sounds like a ringing confirmation of the nihilistic chorus of voices that continually dance in my head. Sadly, many succumb to this bleak outlook.

If at this point you want to say, "Well just follow the law, and you don't have to worry about these things happening. You can take responsibility for your actions—look at Barack Obama!" I understand how this makes sense to you, and it is true that personal responsibility must be taken, but try to consider the countless Emmett Tills of America (and if you don't know who Emmett Till is—Google him!) For every Barack Obama, there have been thousands of Emmett Tills in American history. In addition, each incident is a reminder of the flood of personal experiences of racism and injustice that the particular individual has endured. Like that time when I was called a racial slur and that time when people expressed shock at my ability to speak "the king's English."

Add in that day when my college friends suggested that I was granted acceptance because of "affirmative action" rather than personal merit (because I could not possibly have earned it...being Black and all). We could easily produce dozens of these microaggressions that have rubbed our souls raw through repeated abrasion.

None of these incidents that I or anyone go through happen in an emotional or historical vacuum. God made us as emotive, storied people, it's a fact of our anthropological hardwiring. So, often, when Black people experience America's commentary, it is an experience similar to the real, lived pain of seeing a mangled car on the roadside after having lost a dear loved one in an auto accident.

Viewing that singular image on the side of the road instantly creates a tidal wave of emotions. Then, after this wave hits you, the rip tide of grief carries you out into the sea of anguish. You remember first

hearing the news of the loss. You remember watching your surrounding loved ones burst into tears. You remember the black suits and dresses at the wake. You remember the roses being thrown on the coffin as the undertaker prepared to lower your loved one six feet into the ground.

In a similar way, African Americans are reintroduced to a grief, pain, and sense of loss every time one of these tragedies occurs, and inasmuch as you refuse to acknowledge this and mourn with the mourner (Rom. 12:15), you exacerbate the pain and alienation. You stall healing and, sometimes, inflict deeper wounds.

We must realize that the optics of these events matter. Regardless of the particulars, the overriding truth, the loudest voice heard by African Americans is that another Black person's life has been extinguished because Black lives are invested with less value.

If you are always down in the weeds arguing "the facts," you will likely be harsh and insensitive. The worst part about this is that you may be "right" with regard to technicalities, but you will not be right with regard to Christian love. You may need to consider holding your tongue in certain moments. Many of the things that we think in our minds are not beneficial for public consumption (beware your Facebook and Twitter rants).

The question is not so simple as to ask, "Do the details of this particular case harmonize with the American justice system?" The bigger question is, "Does the American justice system harmonize with the true justice of God in this particular situation?" To conflate the American justice system with the true justice of God is naive and misguided. We have to acknowledge that the American justice system is failing Black people, brown people, White people, and law enforcement officers at any point where the American justice system departs from the principles of eternal justice. I'm not suggesting that we could or should pursue a theocracy in America. But what I am suggesting is that there must be an acknowledgment of the fallibility of our system and, at the very least, a fight to rid the American justice system of its glaring inadequacies, insofar as we are able to participate in this labor.

But it is also important for us to remember a number of other important facts as we aim to move forward.

First, there is a beautiful history of White people entering into solidarity and seeking justice for all. They have used their social, educational, and financial privileges to work for justice. People of color should encourage them and receive them as family and allies in this worthy struggle.

Second, there are many genuine, kind-hearted, White people who are doing their best to make sense of things. They do not see any injustice or why these incidents would warrant such strong reactions. They are honestly trying to work through it all. Let grace and the Golden Rule be your guide in dialogue. Try to give the same space and grace that you would need to see things from their angle, given their life experiences. If they ask you questions and the answers seem painfully obvious to you, don't assume or project malicious intent, lest you be guilty of the same kind of thinking that contributed to these tragedies in the first place.

Third, there will always be people who see emotional responses of pain and frustration in such situations as "race-baiting," "excuses," or "playing the race card." There will be trolls on the comment sections of digital newspapers and blogs that spew unspeakably awful, hateful things. I would simply encourage you to spend your emotional energies on your local context with real people, building real relationships of trust and honesty. Staying at the national level to the neglect of the local level will likely tend toward hopelessness and despair. Conversely, the small victories that happen around the kitchen table and in the neighborhood, born of prayer, love, and perseverance, will bless you more than you know. Celebrate this good fruit.

What's even more important than these practical pieces of advice is the more central need that we have to share the same overarching narrative. This is the truth: we need each other if we are going to break

out of the dehumanizing narratives under which we each live. If there is any truth to the notion that we are deeply affected by the narratives under which we live, then we are confronted with a question: What does a narrative of untimely death, violence, criminalization, racialization, and inferiority do to a people group? When this historical narrative of subhumanity and expendability seems to be confirmed time and again, what happens to its beleaguered characters?

It has been said before that racism and the racialization of American culture is bad, not just for people of color, but for White people as well. It is not true nor healthy for people of color to live under the narrative of inferiority and dehumanization. In the same way, it is not true nor healthy for White people to live under the narrative of superiority and suprahumanization. You are in a dangerous and unhealthy position when your race, ethnicity, biology, and overall way of life is canonized and made to be anthropological holy writ. Adherence to this social orthodoxy will cloud your mind with a soul-stifling pride, which God opposes (James 4:6). No one people group should be so cast down below the rest, and no one people group should be so exalted above the rest—neither of these outlooks is a healthy way to be human. The conflicts we are witnessing result from the ways in which we have all lived out of these lesser narratives, allowing these mythologies to govern our lives and ruin our relationships.

However, there is a way in which all people can simultaneously acknowledge their lowliness, fallibility, and the vulnerability of their situation— but also the beauty, glory, and hope for their situation. This is the story of the Gospel, and it is this story that we must share together if we are to make progress in mutual love and understanding.

### **God's Story**

According to God's story, every human being was designed for glory and dignity in connection with God and the people around him or her. Every human being surrendered his or her glory in walking away from God. But the hope that God gives is that his story is all about affirming these twin truths: You and I are simultaneously sinners, yet accepted in the Beloved by grace alone through faith alone. We are ruined but rescued, awful but adopted, devious but delivered.

God's story tells us that brokenness is not the sole proprietorship of any one ethnic group, and by God's grace, glory is not the sole inheritance of any one ethnic group. This is God's commentary on our shared identity in Christ; and it's infinitely better than America's commentary.

This story alone sets the stage for fruitful, healthy, restorative dialogue and true progress. This story tells me that my identity rests, not on being right, but on being loved. I am free to be wrong, to learn, and to change as I live in community with the other. I am free to acknowledge that my mind needs to be renewed, and that this renewal is possible. If what the Bible says about me is anywhere near the truth, then humility, teachability, and grace must govern the way I move forward.

Don't politicize this issue, gospelize it. The Gospel is the only story big enough to swallow up the grief of a ruined humanity, overcoming that ruin with the glory of a renewed humanity. Build this into your local church through every means available—pulpit, programming, community groups, and neighborhood gatherings. Explore the implications of God's story for the current racial conflicts that we are facing. In what ways do you need to embrace difficult changes personally and corporately? How does God's story encourage me to drop my defenses? Who should I be inviting to my dinner table in light of God's story? How should we rethink the power-dynamics of our church or organization in light of a glorious God who humbles himself in love in order to lift the other?

The story of God answers these questions and many more with life-giving and life-changing direction. But one thing is for sure, if you bury your head in the sand on important issues like these, your witness will be blunted and your missionary encounter with the world will ebb over time as America grows more diverse.

You have an opportunity to speak dignity over the disenfranchised—did not Christ do this for you (1 Pet. 2:9)? You have an opportunity to proclaim words that invite humility and gracious acceptance—did not

Christ proclaim these words over you (1 Pet. 5:5)? You have an opportunity to participate in the formation of a cross-cultural community—is this not the community that God has already determined to bring to completion (Rev. 7:9)? In God’s story, the poor are made rich because the rich One was made poor (2 Cor. 8–9). In God’s story, the weak are made strong because the Almighty was pleased to enter into our weakness (Rom. 5:6, Phil. 2:5ff).

In God’s story, there is hope for the hopeless, joy for the joyless, and power for the powerless. Christ, the King, will not suffer the status quo injustice and tragedy of this world to remain in place forever. But my question for you is this: Are you going to embrace your role as a participant in God’s story of renewal? In Christ, we have an entire treasury of resources for living up into this bigger, more meaningful, and more beautiful story. I would invite you to reimagine your relationships in light of this story. Reimagine the final chapter of this story, allowing that vision to shape your life and relationships in the present. If you do, the mile markers on the side of the road will reveal that you are actually making progress in the journey toward racial healing and social flourishing. This story, shared among us, is our hopeful way forward.

*Russ Whitfield serves as the pastor of Grace Mosaic, a cross-cultural church in Northeast Washington, DC. He has degrees from New York University (BM) and Westminster Theological Seminary (MDiv). Russ has served in many ministry roles among diverse people groups. Russ and his wife, Vanessa, have three children.*



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