
A Culture of Conflict: Race Reconciliation and the White Evangelical/Southern Church

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The American church, part of the body of Christ, particularly the White Evangelical and White Southern denominations, have had a questionable relationship with race and racism and share the same system and systematic issues with race as American society has generally. This struggle has most recently manifested itself in the conflict between the White church and the Black Lives Matter movement. I investigate this conflict through study of its history, ethnographic research in a multi-cultural church in Texas, and investigations into Critical Race Theory and Liberation Theology. Somehow huge segments of the Christian population have become disenchanted with the principles that Jesus gave us, that love was the greatest commandment, and that loving our neighbor as ourselves is a mandate. They have forgotten that God is a God of everyone, including the disinherited. This article speaks to the history of race and the church and how the conflict between the church and racism does not align with the principles of God.

The world, particularly the United States, has a history of racial tensions and divide. History, as well as current events, have proven such and the conflict is well documented. But does the same hold true in the American Christian church? The church and body of Christ, particularly the White Evangelical and White Southern denominations of Christianity in America, have also had a questionable relationship with race and racism and share the same systemic and systematic issues as the rest of the world. However, the Holy Bible clearly states that loving your neighbor as yourself should be a priority in the life of Christians, and when we join the body of Christ, we become one under one Father. John 17:20-21 states “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one, as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me” (John 17:20-21 NIV). Yet here we stand in the 21st century in the midst of a social revolution, and the White Evangelical/Southern church has taken a hands-off approach, even a stance of opposition to the racial and social injustice movement, particularly when it comes to Black Lives Matter (BLM). Instead of embracing the concept that the lives of our Black brothers and

sisters do indeed matter not only to us, but most importantly to God, the Evangelical/Southern church has used the nuances of the organization as an excuse to remove itself, and even oppose the fight for social justice. However, the Church as an entire body, exclusive of race, denomination, or theological perspective, should be leading the charge in an effort to embrace the Black Lives Matter movement.

Actually, scholars have invested years of research and written a plethora of material on the connection between the church and racism. Jemar Tisby in *The Color of Compromise* (2019) describes the historical tensions between White Evangelical Christianity and racism, a history that dates back hundreds of years in the United States. For many who are unaware or in denial of the historical context, there is no issue with race in the church. In fact, I once mentioned the tense relationship between race and the church in a paper for a class, and received back the comment from a professor that these issues of race may appear at times in the world, but of course we know they do not happen in the church. Tisby explains how the White church historically embraced theories of superiority and inferiority among the races, and how those theories both unconsciously and consciously manifest themselves in the church today. He asserts that the

church created and maintains racist ideas, policies, and practices and urges us to consider whether the participants continue to uphold these practices out of sheer ignorance or if the practices are ignored because of the position of power they afford White Evangelical/Southern Christians and churches. Tisby guides us through a religious journey that starts with colonial America and includes slavery, the Civil War, the Jim Crow Era, and the Civil Rights Era in an effort to educate us on just how we arrived at the Black Lives Matter Movement. In the United States, we are taught the bare minimum about American slavery. In essence, we learn that Blacks were enslaved and then set free by Abraham Lincoln in the Emancipation Proclamation. Based on those minimal facts, there is a segment of the population that believes that everyone should be satisfied now, and that Blacks are exhibiting the epitome of ungratefulness by supporting or participating in the Black Lives Matter movement. However, there is a profusion of injustices between emancipation and today that have purposely been put into place to keep Blacks under subjugation, many of which have been upheld by, ignored by, and even created by the church. Most people of any race simply do not know or understand this history nor the journey that has led towards the Black Lives Matter movement.

Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith launched a grassroots campaign via a survey that included 2,000 people as well as another 200 in-person interviews with White Evangelical Americans (2001). The results of the endeavor revealed that although the church as an entity was attempting to diversify congregations and address racial discrimination on some level, individual Evangelical Christians preferred to ignore, deny, or preserve the racial chasm in America. While some individuals may not have actively participated in racist acts, many denied the existence of systemic and systematic racism against Blacks. These individuals felt that God has granted all people free will, the ability to work, and the ability to secure a personal and individual relationship with Christ, therefore most problems that people face can be solved by repentance, eliminating sin in one's life, and simply working harder. In the eyes of these Evangelical participants, the lack of success was credited solely to the individual. This attitude falls in line with the theory of Max Weber on the protestant work ethic and capitalism (1976), as well as the prosperity gospel that rose to popularity in the Evangelical church in the last decades. This situation calls for an imperative response to race reconciliation, social justice, and the

church. If a large population of the White Christian community believes there is no problem to overcome, that could potentially become a brick wall to social justice efforts. If the church does not have a common sense of reality on this issue, even with a shared Father and scripture, how can we expect others to understand the systematic injustices put in place to hold an entire race at bay?

In *Practicing What They Preach? Lynching and Religion in the American South, 1890–1929*,” Amy Kate Baily and Karen Snedker explored the relationship between lynching and organized religion in the American South between 1890–1929 (2011). And while these were the most prevalent years of hate-related lynching of Blacks in the United States, lynching continued, recorded and unrecorded, well into the 1960s. There have even been unexplained incidents of Blacks found hanging from trees that have occurred in the past six months that seem to correlate with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. The study revealed three patterns: Counties with more religious plurality, in terms of multiple denominations, experienced more lynchings. The conclusion being that the multiplicity of denominations weakened the moral bonds within the religious community, yet strengthened the bonds of White racial solidarity; counties with a larger share of the Black population worshipping in Black churches experienced more racial violence perpetrated by Whites, indicating an anger-based solidarity that perpetrated violence towards Blacks because of Black solidarity and success. The Tulsa riots from the massacre of Black Wall Street in Tulsa Oklahoma serves as just one prime example of this anger-based solidarity. And finally, counties with denominations that allowed racially mixed congregations experienced fewer lynchings and less racial violence.

The Baily and Snedker research attempted to find a link between institutional southern life, including economics, politics, government, legal, and cultural conditions, and including the Christian church, and a rise in the lynching of Blacks. What the researchers discovered was that during the time period between the end of the Reconstruction in America (1877) and the Great Depression (1929) two phenomena took place in the United States—a sharp rise in religious fervor, including newly emancipated Blacks opening their own churches, and a sharp rise in Black lynchings, particularly in the South. During this time period, approximately one lynching took place per week. Many were public and social gatherings, attended by

the newly enlivened White church members and their children. Often these events were public outings for the family. The correlation between the two seemed to stem from the racialized nature of southern denominations and the power held by Christian organizations that were also embedded in southern social and political circles.

In *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, Robert Jones offered an examination of the relationship between White supremacy and the American Christian church through a historical lens, personal experience, and public opinion surveys (2020). Jones goes even further by issuing a call to action for White Christians to not only face this legacy but to reckon with it. For centuries, Christianity's role in White supremacy has been ignored and the church has been complacent. Of those who acknowledge the link, many authors focus primarily on Southern American churches and the Evangelical denomination, but Jones pins the responsibility on other sects as well, such as Catholics in the Northeast and mainline Protestants in the Midwest. Jones implies that racism is embedded into the DNA of America, and he brings to the surface the repressed or simply ignored history of the relationship between the church and White supremacy. And while there has been some regret acknowledged in the church, Jones compels White Christians to move beyond apologies, accept responsibility, and work towards repair. That includes the support of Black Lives Matters. It is not an understatement, in Jones' mind, that the very integrity of the church, Christianity, and the American experiment are all at stake without repentance and action.

In the beginning America grew and the landscape began to take shape with the construction of churches in various shapes, sizes, and denominations. And as churches grew in number, so did the slave populations. In fact, in many respects Christianity, particularly in Southern and Evangelical populations, strongly upheld the institution of slavery and twisted scripture to support the slave-based plantation lifestyle. The following video gives a good depiction of the relationship:

Slavery in "Christian" America

(Right click to open link.)



[Slavery in "Christian" America](#)

PublicChristianity, YouTube

As noted, slave owners, including Christian slave owners, presented numerous justifications for owning, degrading, and dehumanizing those of African descent. That degradation often included rape and the procreation of children who were more often than not categorized as property as opposed to kin. Many slaveholders and other Whites held mixed thoughts and practiced misguided strategies regarding the education of slaves in Christian instruction. Some believed that any education whatsoever, including that of the Bible, could incite hope and thoughts of rebellion. Others believed the introduction of Christ was a moral obligation to fulfill their duties as Christian upholders of the Word and the superior race, while yet others did so to ensure the position of the slaves' immortal soul. The scale of instruction varied, with some taking slaves to church regularly, some allowing slaves to attend church on their own, and some only allowing Christian instruction under the careful eye of Whites. Upon accepting Christ, many slaves held secret prayer and worship gatherings that upon detection were punishable. According to Laurie Maffly-Kipp (2001), "In the slave quarters, however, Blacks organized their own 'invisible institution.' Through signals, passwords, and messages not discernible to Whites, they called believers to 'hush harbors' where they freely mixed African rhythms, singing, and beliefs with Christianity." The way that White religion was practiced, with its justification for abuse, was hard for Black believers to understand. "It is clear that many Blacks saw these White churches, in which ministers promoted obedience to one's master as the highest religious ideal, as a mockery of the "true" Christian message of equality and liberation as they knew it" (ibid.).

After Emancipation, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction eras of 1863-1877, came the eras of Jim Crow and Separate but Equal, of approximately 1877-1968. These laws applied primarily in the American South but manifested themselves in many ways in the North as well. After centuries of bondage, Blacks were free to practice religion, particularly Christianity, on their own, at least in theory. Establishing a formal religious community for the newly freed Blacks was just one of many issues faced by the community. Blacks were certainly not yet welcomed to integrate into any areas of society including the church. Therefore, Black churches began to expand exponentially also helping the community with employment, food, shelter, clothing, education, protection, and defense against social injustices. Many Whites, particularly in the South and including Christians, were resentful of emancipation, practiced segregation vehemently in the secular society and the church, and backed the establishment of separatist White hate groups, including the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan, formed in 1865 to proactively and violently counter any new liberties in the Black community, had its root in Christianity, with many of its member holding positions as deacons, preachers, pastors, and other prominent members of the church. This trend of segregation and violence continued through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. And in many cases the segregation continues today, fueled by tradition, both conscious and unconscious biases, racism, and the misunderstandings and misuse of the Word of God.

In 1962, Alan Cross, a young White southern pastor from Mississippi, was taken with the story of the Freedom Riders (Cross 2014). The Freedom Riders were a group of young Black activists fighting segregation in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King. Cross was familiar with racial tension and violence in the South but was particularly shaken by an incident in Montgomery AL. The Freedom Riders pulled into town and were almost immediately descended upon by a crowd of 500 angry Whites. Cross was in town on a preaching engagement and was stunned by the violence he saw up close. Montgomery was known as the City of Churches, and Cross had one question: Why hadn't the White Christians shown up to defend the Black Freedom Riders and allies? How could this be happening in a city with such a high Christian population? To his dismay, Cross later found out that many in the mob considered themselves Christian and were members of local congregations. In fact, within

just a couple of weeks of the incident, Cross found himself in the presence of the most prominent pastor in town, Henry Lyon Jr., who fervently spoke before the local White Citizens' Council, condemning civil rights and praising the beating of the protestors, all from a Christian perspective. "Ladies and gentlemen, for 15 years I have had the privilege of being pastor of a White Baptist church in this city," Lyon said. "If we stand 100 years from now, it will still be a White church. I am a believer in a separation of the races, and I am nonetheless a Christian." The crowd applauded. "If you want to get in a fight with the one that started the separation of the races, then you come face to face with your God," he declared. "The difference in color, the difference in our body, our minds, our lives, our mission upon the face of this earth, is God-given" (Cross 2014, 451). This pastor, like many others, saw himself as a devout Christian and upholder of the Bible. None considered themselves or were considered by their congregations or fellow Christians as extremists. In his book, *When Heaven and Earth Collide*, Cross continued his historical study by considering topics such as the southern way, the church and the status quo, and a theology of inaction, and how those considerations still manifest themselves today.

The Well Church

Let us fast forward and shift the narrative to my personal experience and recent ethnography about the church and race. My husband and I grew up in the same Black church located on the eastern coast of the United States. The central nature of the church in our lives has shaped who we are today. There was little mixing of races in church circles—most of the Whites we knew were Catholic—yet there was very little, if any, noticeable tension between races in Christian circles. Theology, not necessarily race, seemed to be the basis of separate worship experiences. Moving to Texas in 2008 offered a different experience. This was our family's first encounter with the Evangelical faith and lifestyle, as well as the megachurch. Every church we visited was of considerable size, well established with not much room for allowing outsiders into the inner workings of church life, and very segregated. We remember visiting several suburban congregations on Sunday mornings with literally thousands upon thousands of congregants, all of whom were White. We were very often the only people of color among all of those in attendance. In one particular incident, we

were greeted cordially at the door, yet a bit aloof as always, and were seated on a pew near the back of the church. During the sermon, the Pastor asked that we turn and greet, and shake hands with our neighbors. We recognized the gentleman who stood immediately to our left as a church greeter from the entryway. He enthusiastically greeted those to his left, then turned and stared straight ahead and made no attempt to greet us, although we had turned in anticipation of greeting him. Twice more the pastor encouraged the congregation to engage with their neighbors, and twice more we were ignored by this gentleman. We were surprised but assumed positive intent. However, near the end of the service, the pastor called for the church elders to come to the front to offer prayer for any person who needed it. Our friend to the left quickly went up front to lay hands of prayer on those who came to the alter. We were a bit taken aback. Unfortunately, that was not the last time we had such encounters in these types of churches. While the churches we grew up around were segregated by color, that situation seemed to be more the result of a cultural preference than a racial segregation. This was different.

After many visits to many churches, we finally came upon a church that could be the subject of my intended ethnographic research; The Well Church of Keller Texas, a purposely multi-racial, multi-ethnic church situated in a northern Ft. Worth suburb in the buckle of the conservative Bible Belt. The congregation is approximately 48% White, 48% Black, 3% biracial or multiracial, and 1% Asian. Political affiliations also run the gamut from ultra-conservative to ultra-liberal, with every affiliation in between. In the political climate over the last several years, this often proved as interesting as the matter of racial difference. The church was a start-up and was meeting in a local movie theater. The young Black pastor of The Well Church had declared that God called him to plant a multiracial church in Keller, Texas. It would be different than any other ministry in the area. It would not only be diverse, but inclusive, and would stand for social justice.

The pastor grew up in his father's church as what is called a PK—a preacher's kid—in the Black church. His father's church was a typical Black Baptist church in which his mother was the choir director and he and his siblings were expected to participate and were held to high standards. The family lived in Racine, Wisconsin, a town that has experienced redlining and racial segregation well into the 21st century. This young pastor, only in his mid-thirties, remembers experiencing racism as a child. At a young age, he watched

his father, the pastor of a prominent church, being humiliated and demeaned by local police for no reason at all on a regular basis. The encounters stuck with him into adulthood. Although he carried that anger for some time, at some point the Lord shifted that anger into purpose. He currently sits on the board of the local Keller police department as a diversity and inclusion liaison. Many more such encounters over his lifetime strengthened his resolve to promote racial reconciliation, particularly within the body of Christ. The pastor's mantra is that we must take the less travelled road, avoid avoidance, confront our differences, offer love and acceptance, all before even considering inviting people into the kingdom. There is a road less traveled that may be direct but gets avoided because of our own thoughts, stereotypes, and biases. Taking that road takes courage, the revelation of truth—the real truth, not the truths that have been perpetrated by those in power—and sometimes Godly confrontation, before healing can begin. According to this pastor, social justice was a priority for Jesus and will be a priority for The Well Church of Keller.

One particular Sunday was preceded by a tough week in America. Yet another young Black man had been killed unjustly at the hands of those sworn to protect and serve, and the pastor took the opportunity to include the incident in his sermon. He used words and phrases such as “injustice,” “social justice,” and “privilege,” all spoken about in love and all in the context of scripture and the words of Jesus. We talked about what we could do as people and as the church to understand social injustices. Some White congregants were visibly unsettled, including a new young White family who had thought so highly of the church when they first visited just a couple of weeks before. Later that week, the couple informed the pastor they would no longer be attending the church. The couple was offended that “politics” had been introduced through the pulpit and that the church took a stance against the police. Interestingly enough, the only mention of the police in the sermon was that the young man was killed by an officer. And while some White congregants admitted to being unsettled simply because they were not accustomed to hearing this type of rhetoric from the pulpit, none were offended enough to leave. In doing my formal interviews, one young woman named Amy told of similar, yet opposite experiences in her life. Amy is a Black woman in her twenties, college-educated, and a newlywed. Before attending The Well, Amy and her Black husband attended a predominately White church in the area. She recalled

attending that church the Sunday after Philando Castile was killed. Neither the White pastor, nor the all-White leadership team, nor any of her friends said anything about the victim. However, they did pray for the police that Sunday. She recalls feeling unseen and unheard, hurt, and alone. She recalls wanting to cry out to the people she had communed with so often, "Why aren't you grieving with me if you love me?" She recalls feeling very unloved in that moment. Upon bringing the subject up with fellow church friends, her feelings and sentiments were dismissed. Her comment to me was that "the church had a history of silencing those who are different." Very shortly afterward, Amy and her husband left the church. No one in their church circle ever reached out to ask why. As one who had just recently committed to Christianity, she was confused and began to distance herself from God. Comparing the two experiences, Amy's and the new White family's, is quite telling. The White couple left the church because the pastor spoke out about social injustice, and the Black couple left for just the opposite reason—their congregation simply ignored the issue and they felt unvalued, unheard, and unloved.

One particular Sunday at The Well, the message focused on the church mantra—A Diverse Community Worshipping Jesus Together as One. As the pastor began to dissect the mantra he explained it like this: Worship without community is a cult; community without worship is a club; worship without diversity is a clan. He also spoke from Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our own image." He taught that this scripture was proof of the Trinity long before the arrival of Jesus and the New Testament, as the "us" in the passage referred to God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He also spoke to the idea that if we are all made in their image, then the social construct of race was made up to categorize and subjugate people.

Later that week while at a community group meeting, one White couple named Archie and Betty asked to stay behind to talk. In private they admitted that they took issue with the sermon. For historical context, both come from a southern, rural background. Archie brought up their main point of contention. He said that the pastor had brought up the word "clan," and they were offended. I asked them to tell me more. Archie then produced a pocketknife branded with the confederate flag. Although taken aback, I was silent. Archie went on to explain that they were not racists, but their families had fought for the side of the confederacy to save their land, and so the

fact that the pastor had said worship without diversity was a clan was offensive. I began to see a little bit clearer now. I explained that I did not think that the pastor was referring to The Klan, as in the Ku Klux Klan, but in the off chance that he was, I asked why the statement was offensive? My question was met with silence. Betty went on to emphasize that when Archie watched football with his family, and they began using racial references (the n— word to be specific) towards the Black football players, Archie never stayed for the second half of the game. And that, she emphasized, was his own family! I was silent for a moment, praying for the direction to go. Finally, I stated that the confederate symbol offended me, and explained that to me it represented hatred, the continued desire for a slave nation in the United States, and a reminder of the hundreds of years of degradation to Blacks. I then told him that I was hurt because I thought The Well was now his family. He put the knife away, we exchanged parting pleasantries, said "I love you," and they left. That was the last time we saw them. They never returned to church again. It was indeed an interesting exchange and to this day I struggle with the meaning of their words and actions. Was this couple indeed racist? Did they not believe their actions were at least in the realm of racist activity? We may never know, but the encounter was thought altering for me regarding Christians and race.

As time progressed the membership began to grow, and the church moved to a bigger rented space. Although it was bigger and filled many of the needs that the movie theater could not, it was far less structured. The space, a gymnasium, was essentially a blank canvas that needed to be converted into a sanctuary every Sunday before the 10:00 a.m. service. That meant early mornings of intense labor. In a move to build community in the young church, the After-Party, a weekly free churchwide lunch was implemented. This popular new event added more labor to weekly set-up and tear down. One member called Johnny took notice of just who tended to volunteer for the labor. Most of them were the older Black men, ranging in age from mid-50s to early 70s. Johnny is a Black middle-aged man who could always be seen lending a hand in any way necessary. He was often seen setting up tables, carrying heavy items to and fro, and working up a sweat even before the service began. One day after service while cleaning up and gathering the trash, he was having difficulty removing the overfull bag from the can. The bag was stuck, the garbage began to fall out, the can began to fall over. It was quite the

animated situation that was hard to miss. Two White male members stood less than six feet away, facing his direction, in conversation. Neither man seemed to take notice of the situation or offer assistance. An older White woman called Mini saw Johnny's plight from across the room and rushed over to help. Mini is perhaps in her late 60s, is not American by birth, and interestingly enough, divulged in her interview that she does not consider herself a Christian. She does believe that Christianity has its merits, but does not firmly believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Johnny was upset by the situation and revealed that he was hurt that those two able-bodied men stood by while an older woman who was not even a Christian came to his aid. When asked if perhaps they simply did not see him and his struggle, he was hesitant to accept the possibility. Johnny did admit that in other situations that needed more hands than were proactively helping, the same men would always be willing to lend a hand if asked. But his final statement on the matter was that he should not always need to ask when things obviously needed to be done. Everyone knows of the labor needed yet the responsibility often falls to the Black male members. And while he considered service and helping his ministry, his thought was that you cannot say that you love someone and not lend a hand when you see them struggling. The statement seemed to resonate deeper than the garbage can situation.

Worship at the church was a bit reserved, and during one interview with a White congregant named James, he expressed that he would like to see more expressive worship and would like to hear more Black gospel songs during service. But he understood why we did not do this, especially as a church with White members and a Black pastor that stands for social justice. He then asked me a rhetorical question, what demographic was most likely to leave the church if they felt the service was leaning too far to Black church culture? Before I could answer, he told me, "White males." While he wanted a more robust worship experience with more cultures included, he knew his own demographic group and intuitively understood that compromise was necessary to the success of this niche church. Admittedly, his mention of White males being the first to leave the church when they felt uncomfortable touched on my personal biases. My immediate thought was the hundreds of years of shaping the world for the White male's comfort. I also realized that White males harbor feelings that diversity will shut them out from their place in society. I remembered the words of Frank Leonard (2020),

"When one is accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression." These sentiments are most likely key to understanding why the White church hesitates or uses excuses to not embrace the BLM movement.

One young Black woman calling herself Melanie recounted how she and her family previously attended an all-White Evangelical church. Melanie's husband was asked to be on the deacon board. Things were going fine, the family was making friends and forming relationships. That is, Melanie recounts, until President Barack Obama was elected. She noticed a shift in the atmosphere and people began to openly make negative comments even in their presence. There was also some discomfort for the family around the church's pro-life stance on abortion. The final straw for Melanie and her family was when the news media began to show that Black men and women were openly being killed by police on a regular basis. Her exact words were that "the climate changed, and it felt really uncomfortable." Their friends seemed to always find fault with the victims. Their pastor never mentioned the killings publicly or privately. They were hurting and no one acknowledged their pain. They left the church after being faithful members for five years.

One woman called Angela admitted that she came to the church only to support the pastor. Angela is an older Black woman who grew up in the segregated, Jim Crow South. As an actual relative, she was concerned about him taking on a church. She herself was a pastor's wife and understood the trials, commitment, and stress that came with the job. But a multiracial church supporting social justice in Texas would prove even more challenging. Again, having lived through the ugliness of Jim Crow, separate water fountains, separate waiting areas, separate hospitals, separate schools, and of course separate churches, the idea of coming together to worship somehow felt unnatural. She also admitted that her fears for her relative pastoring a church may have stemmed from the type of church planned. She harbored a distrust for White Evangelical/Southern Christians because of her life experiences. I would assert that the unnatural feelings she had when worshipping with other races or cultures were the result of society conditioning us all to harbor biases that God never intended.

Several other older Black participants who all grew up in the segregated South shared similar experiences. All attended all-Black churches growing up, all had experienced racism, and all felt that White supremacy was widespread in the White Evangelical/Southern church, and because of that, social justice concerns

were necessarily ingrained into the fabric of the Black church. Voter registration, the call for equality and equity between races, and maintaining a strong community to combat racism were concepts that were a part of everyday church life. However, none had experienced a call for race *reconciliation* from within their Black churches. Yet as adults in their senior years, all expressed that the church should be responsible for race reconciliation. When asked why, one said that, “segregation is still very much alive in the minds of many Americans” (implying that it should not be). Another commented that, “a place of all races, nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures is what Heaven will look like and we have got to do a better job at getting people prepared for that now.” And yet another responded, “we need to teach and live that loving thy neighbor as thy self is the greatest commandment.”

In fact, out of all interviewed, those who had spent their childhood in church experienced a segregated environment no matter the race. One gentleman who will remain unnamed recalled growing up in the Lutheran faith. He is a White male millennial. This man grew up as a believer. He remembers experiencing no racial diversity at all. And the church that he grew up in did not participate in any type of race relations, reconciliation, or social justice issues. Not only was the church all White, but so was the community. He admitted that when it came to race relations he had been operating with blinders on. Now, as his faith rebuilds and relationships form with new people in a multiracial, multicultural environment, he stated that “a personal relationship with Christ goes hand in hand with civil rights and with what Jesus teaches us.”

One woman going by Debi did not grow up in the United States. This was one of my most interesting interviews because it provided an “outside looking in” perspective. In Debi’s country, Christianity was viewed as somewhat of a cult. There, some did believe in a higher power but did not fully accept Christianity. Although they felt Christianity could be a good thing, they saw what they considered to be hypocrisies between what the Bible taught and how Christians acted. Also, because Debi had very little context of the Black experience in the United States, she had fully bought into the idea that Blacks were entirely to blame for all that was currently happening regarding race in America. And in her innocence, she could not understand why Blacks just could not “behave.” Admittedly I was taken aback. Her only experience with Blacks was stereotypical depictions from

American television and the people she had met at The Well. I asked if the people at church fit the stereotypes she had been shown and she admitted that they did not. Our scheduled one-hour interview turned into a several-hour session discussing the history of race in America. We both left the session enlightened and with a perspective we did not arrive with. Since then, she has fully supported Black Lives Matter.

The SPECS Movement is a non-profit division of The Well Church that works with the local community on race reconciliation. The purpose of SPECS is to create healthy engagement around race in order to deconstruct perspectives that produce racism. The hope is that these healthy engagements will in turn produce anti-racist transformation. The mission is to encourage others to see life from someone else’s perspective or through someone else’s SPEcTacles. SPECS hosts events that bring the community together. In the summer of 2020, after the several murders in the Black community, the Black Lives Matter movement became highly active. Protests and marches were taking place all over the world. In fact, a protest was being organized right in small town, conservative Keller TX. One particular church community group wanted to participate and wished to extend the invitation to the entire church. As a show of respect, the leaders of the group contacted the church board of elders. The pastor was on vacation. Most of the leaders were on board, however one elder was hesitant. He did not agree that this should be a church-sanctioned event and felt that if the small group wanted to participate it would be at their own decision as individuals outside of the church. He insisted that the group not wear any church insignia. He suggested that this event might be best served by SPECS, but without the pastor’s consent, the elders would not consent. The group was disappointed but planned to proceed on their own. And then one member received a late-night text from the pastor. He explained that although on vacation he planned to attend the march and wanted to extend the invitation to others at the church who might be interested. The member was elated and relayed what had transpired to the elders regarding the march. The pastor gave his blessing. SPECS and the community group took the lead, and within 24 hours phone chains were established, t-shirts with “Black Lives Matter” on the front and “The Well Church Keller” on the back were designed and ordered from a local vendor. The initial participation list grew from ten to seventy-six church members. The church would support Black Lives Matter strongly.

Soon after, one White family made the abrupt decision to leave the church because of what they felt was the church's position on the Black Lives Matter movement. The husband and father of the family said he had done some research on the organization and did not feel that the movement was Christlike. Interestingly enough, the church had not taken a stance on the Black Lives Matter organization. Upon further research, I found that the Black Lives Matter movement was created in response to a 17-year-old who was killed unjustly and whose murderer was acquitted. BLM strives to eradicate White supremacy, seeks to build the power to fight back against acts of violence towards Black people, and endeavors to create a space for imagination and innovation in the Black community. Nothing un-Christlike at all. However, the church did take a stance that Black lives do indeed matter, and condemned the killing of unarmed Blacks. It also supported the idea that using your platform, may it be athletics, entertainment, or pulpit, to promote biblically based social justice initiatives was in line with the Word of God. One congregant approached me to state on record that in retrospect there had been prior signs that this White family took issue with social justice. In this congregant's opinion, and based on conversations they had had over the years, the family was fine with multiracial, multicultural churches as long as those outside of the majority or mainstream assimilated, conformed, and did not "make trouble." Their leaving the church based on unfounded hearsay, then, felt more like an excuse than a principle.

One noteworthy experience involved two church members—a biracial woman named Jennifer and a White man named James. Jennifer is a quiet yet passionate, mild mannered, middle aged woman who helped organized the BLM march and the members' participation. She recalls receiving a text message from James about his excitement and experiences of the day that they participated in the Black Lives Matter march. He had forwarded Jennifer a YouTube video that he said reminded him of her. The video was of a very militant young Black woman, adorned in full military fatigues, strapped with military-style assault weapons, and draped with hundreds of rounds of ammunition. She seemed angry as she rapped and sang about how the government should fear her and her attempts to overthrow it. Jennifer admitted that she was initially taken aback, and a bit hurt by the comparison. She shared the video with her close family and friends who, given Jennifer's mild personality, were just as

bewildered by the reference. Jennifer expressed that she realizes this is how the world sees people of color who seek social justice: as angry, militant, and trying to overthrow the government. Many people of color who speak up and speak out have historically been labeled as such, including the peace driven Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sometime later Jennifer reached out to James to get a better understanding of his point. He was oblivious to the fact that the video could have been offensive, but apologized.

Critical Race Theory

As we make an historical and socio-political analysis of racism in America, we realize that racism is not just a person-to-person issue. Tenets of racism have been systemically and systematically worked into the foundation of the country. Critical Race Theory (CRT) explains just how in great detail. The CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationships between race, racism, and power (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Principle contributors to the theory include Derek Bell, formerly of Harvard Law and New York University. Bell authored most of the CRT foundational writings. Other major contributors include Alan Freeman, who taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo Law School, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Cheryl Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, Paul Butler, Devon Carbado, Lani Guinier, and Angela Onwuachi-Willig and Patricia Williams. Leading Asian scholars include Neil Gotanda, Mitu Gulati, Jerry Kang, and Eric Yamamoto. The top American Indian critical scholar is Robert Williams; prolific Latinos of a critical persuasion include Laura Gomez, Ian Haney López, Kevin Johnson, Gerald Lopez, Margaret Montoya, Juan Perea, and Francisco Valdes.

CRT explores how racism has embedded itself systemically into the American economy, education systems, healthcare systems, and religious organizations. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, Critical Race Theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 26). For example, the concept of equality focuses on the idea that the racial system is balanced by everyone receiving equal portions of resources, a principle long thought of as fair.

However, CRT theorizes that the balancing force for societal oneness is actually *equity* or the idea that every person receives what is needed for success. However, for many, there is a perception of inequality or unfairness in the concept of equity. Why, in some minds, should some receive more than others? Don't we all have access to the same American Dream? Don't we all have equal access to opportunities? On paper, one would think so. That is what the version of history we have been taught has tried to convince the public. In the minds of many, slavery was abolished, the federal government supported civil rights, and thus anyone not able to attain the American Dream is simply lazy, not working hard enough, or not applying themselves and thus not deserving of prosperity. The version of history we have been taught lacks reference to the hidden atrocities that have occurred during the last several hundred years in American history, atrocities such as the Black Codes, Jim Crow Laws, loopholes embedded in the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment, and a plethora of spoken and unspoken rules that exist in local, state, and federal practices. These atrocities have not only been embedded in our political institutions, but also and more pointedly they can be found in the hearts and minds of people—the same people who attend and govern our churches.

CRT has five basic tenets as well as an activist component; not only is the movement theoretical, but it also promotes change. The theory seeks to shed light on how society organizes itself racially, but also seeks to transform it for the better and spread ideas globally. The basic five tenets of CRT include the following: 1) racism is ordinary, not aberrational; 2) the dominant group has a material interest in maintaining the status quo; 3) race is a socially constructed concept designed to create social categories, not a scientific truth; 4) people are racialized differently and with different consequences to how they are viewed depending on the interests of the dominant group; 5) people with minority status have a burden and an obligation to tell their stories to members of the dominant group, who may or may not believe them.

Tenet #1: *Racism is ordinary, not aberrational.* According to CRT, racism is business as usual, particularly in America. People of color experience racism as an everyday occurrence. In fact, I once heard a quote stating that racism is so American that when it is protested, people think we are protesting America. Because of this ordinariness, racism is

embedded in the culture and thus difficult to address. The existence of racism is simply unbelievable to some, goes unacknowledged because of its normalness, or goes unacknowledged because of the uncomfortableness of the blame, shame, or guilt associated with racism. The “colorblind” mentality (I do not see color, therefore I have no racist tendencies) is embraced as an attempt at equality, when in fact it is a front for assimilation. The lack of acknowledgment of the struggles that people of color have endured in essence represents a lack of knowledge of or belief in true historical accounts and a sheer disbelief that these struggles are real or have any bearing on the standing that people of color have in society now. Whatever one's lot in life, it has been brought on by personal actions or inactions, and is thus deserved. Also, the White-over-color ascendancy that continues in the unconscious biases of Whites against others has both a material and psychic purpose for the dominant group. It allows for the more blatant of racist offenses to be addressed (housing discrimination, for example), while at the same time allowing the subtleties of everyday actions to go unaddressed (such as giving preference to resumes with White-sounding names with fewer qualifications over those with Black sounding names with full qualifications) (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 47).

Tenet #2: *Interest convergence or material determinism.* The authors of CRT point out that there is self-interest in racial disparities. According to the theory, racism has advanced the gains of White elites. In its simplest form, less for “the others” means more for the elite. There is a distinct material gain associated with the elite class. In some sense, this speaks directly to Karl Marx and conflict theory. The theory looks at society as a competition for social, political, and material resources that include food, shelter, education, employment, and residual time for leisure. Those in the position of social, political, and economic power do everything they can to remain there. Take the idea of renting property as a primary residence, for example. The low wage-earning renter continues to pay rent to a landlord without ever gaining a vested interest in the property, and thus never building wealth. In this scenario, however, the landlord continues to reap benefits and earn money, continually building wealth. The cycle perpetuates generationally as the landlord is able to pass his wealth on to his children through education which results in lucrative employment. The renter does not have the same

opportunities and is caught in a vicious generational cycle of poverty. This is obviously advantageous to the dominant landlord and the dominant power structure. Although to Marxism this is just a class struggle, in the United States these inequities are historically often along racial lines. Social institutions like government, education, and religion reflect this competition in their structural inequalities and help maintain the unequal society. The White working-class benefits psychically by having the upper hand over marginalized groups, both in their own mind and in society, and has a distinct advantage for employment, housing, and in the larger social hierarchy. This leaves little incentive for Whites to eradicate the racial situation.

Tenet #3: *Social construction thesis.* This thesis suggests that race has no scientific merit and is simply a social construct made up to categorize people. These are categories based on physical characteristics, such as skin tone, hair texture, nose shape, etc., that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient for the powers that be. While there is no argument that people possess varied physical characteristics, these are simply adaptations that God in His wisdom has endowed for survival. For example, wider noses in hotter climates allow for more air to reach the brain quickly to prevent the brain from overheating. Smaller noses in colder climates control the airflow to the brain to keep it from freezing. Darker skin in climates closer to the equator are to regulate the absorption of ultra-violet radiation, and lighter skin in colder climates to absorb vitamin D. However, many societies have used these adaptations to assign levels of superiority and inferiority and have associated these characteristics with intelligence or strength, neither of which have proven scientific merit. According to the authors of the theory, this tendency to ignore scientific truths creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics.

Tenet #4: *Differential racialization and its consequences / intersectionality and anti-essentialism.* Intersectionality refers to the overlapping and interdependency of disadvantages. For example, there are disadvantages to being a woman in many societies, as well as being disabled, or black. However, the intersectionality of being a black disabled woman adds to the complexity of being disadvantaged or marginalized.

Essentialism and anti-essentialism speak to the idea that marginalized people of the same race or ethnicity

may share a problem at a common core but those problems need to be addressed differently because of the complexity or subgroups within the group. For example, African Americans may share historical discriminatory experiences but solutions may be different based on geography, socioeconomic status, or even skin tone.

The dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs or convenience. For example, in one era a group of people may be seen as simpleminded, happy-go-lucky, and content to serve the needs of Whites, yet in another era, this same group is seen as radical, brutal, menacing, and capable of insurrection, and thus in need of mass incarceration. Or perhaps in one era, a group is seen as exotic yet pious, albeit different, yet in another era, the same group is seen as radicalized religious zealots who pose a national security threat (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 10).

These kinds of views are essentialist in that they suggest that all of the members of a group are alike. Anti-essentialism, then, is an effort to resist this kind of stereotyping and prejudice based on group membership.

Tenet #5 : *The voice-of-color thesis.* Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with anti-essentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism. This carries a burden, obligation, and a privilege. The burden and obligation lie in the idea that the minority in the room is willing and able to represent their entire racial group and is obligated to represent that entire group in any and all settings. The privilege is double-edged and lies in the invitation to tell one's own personal story of oppression to a group that has historically not listened, but also lies in the privilege of the dominant group to believe those stories and choose to act upon those truths or not.

There are two schools of thought regarding Critical Race Theory (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Idealists hold that racism and discrimination are matters of thinking, mental categorization, attitude, and discourse. This school of thought believes that racism can be erased or reversed through changing the

system of images, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings, scripts, and social teachings by which we convey to one another that certain people are less intelligent, reliable, hardworking, virtuous, and American than others. In other words, the general public is uninformed, but once they know better, understand history, and understand the detriment caused, they will want and strive to do better. The recent shift in multimedia to highlighting families of color or multi-racial families in commercials, corporations providing safe and brave spaces for listening sessions and open conversations on race, and unconscious bias trainings all speak to the idealist school of thought and are valid attempts to rectify the situation.

In the contrasting school of thought, realists believe racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status. Racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people's homes. Members of this school of thought point out that anti-Black prejudice sprang up with slavery and capitalists' need for labor. This notion rests on the systematic dehumanization of a group of people, making it easier for the dominant group to assert superiority. In other words, if the dominant group feels that another group is naturally less intelligent and biologically inferior, then, as the dominant group, they have the natural superiority to rule. In some cases, the dominant group feels a natural obligation to shepherd or save "the other" from themselves, creating a great White savior effect. This effect often manifests itself in missionary and church dynamics.

In reality, the crux of the issue probably lies between the two sub-theories, and beyond. There is a segment of society that truly does not know or understand the historical implications of racism and how those implications manifest themselves even today. Yet there is another segment that knowingly benefits from the system and chooses not to change it. And yet there is another facet of society that is operating in racist tendencies out of fear. Much of racism is rooted in fear. There is the fear of losing a share of the American Dream as if there is not enough to go around. This again speaks to Marx and the conflict caused by the fear of the false notion of a lack of resources. There is the fear of losing hierarchal status in society. There is the fear of losing privilege and becoming the oppressed.

CRT asserts a specific relationship between being White and male, and the privileges those attributes

afford, often termed White privilege. The term in itself invokes a sense of outrage and fear for many in the White community. Though often misquoted as implying that Whites have not or do not have to work hard to get ahead, the term does not mean that at all. White privilege asserts that being White automatically extends the benefit of the doubt. For example, if two men walk into the board room, one White and one Black, both with the same level of education and experience, the White man is often given the benefit of the doubt regarding intellect and authority. The Black man often has to prove himself before being afforded the same respect.

There is also the unfounded fear of retaliation from people of color for the centuries of imposed poor treatment. Interestingly enough, people of color in America historically have not sought retaliation. Most historical civil rights movements have been a fight for equal rights. Again, ethnocentrism shows itself in the idea that if my group has gained status through physical domination and retaliation, surely other groups would think and operate similarly, thus generating fear.

Addressing these issues can be a challenge. Education and rebranding through media can certainly mitigate the issues for a percentage of the population. But just how do we mitigate these issues with those who do not believe there is an issue, fear change, or simply refuse to shift the status quo? As a microcosm of the United States, the White American Christian church has a significant biblical and spiritual responsibility for addressing that challenge. And while as Christians, we are called to respect the governance of this world, we are also called to be "in the world, but not of the world." Christians and the church ultimately answer to a higher calling in which every person is in God's image, a theology that leaves no room for racist behavior.

There is an opportunity to define how Critical Race Theory applies to the church, the role of the church and race reconciliation in society, and the history of the church, missions and cultural competencies. As defined previously, Critical Race Theory speaks to the relationship between race and power. And while the theory does address racism strongly on many points, there is admittedly a lack of theological perspective. What does the Bible say about racism and how does it theologically address the obligation of the church to attack social justice issues? On the other hand, arguably many predominately White churches simply do not address racial or social justice issues. Critics of the theory from within the church contest that CRT

has no place in Christianity. Unfortunately, this argument has a colorblind approach: There is no problem; the problem does not affect me, therefore it does not exist; these problems seem made up, exaggerated, or self-inflicted. This blind eye approach has been allowed to prevail in the church for years and is a defense to protect power and mitigate fear.

Liberation Theology

When considering a theological analysis of the church's role in race reconciliation, I have found myself drawn to Liberation Theology. This theology focuses on understanding Christianity through a salvific lens and process of liberation. The theory goes beyond reflection and analysis, beyond thoughts and prayers, and takes tangible action in the lives of the disenfranchised. Liberation theology wants to be a part of the transformation process in the world. Not only does the theology focus on being part of the transformation process but it encourages the disinherited to take action in changing the process. And Black Lives Matters is such a transformation movement.

This theology asserts that the only way to understand Christian practice is at the axis and through the perspective of the oppressed and the oppressor. Liberation Theology has adopted elements of Marxism to analyze what has become of Christianity and to implement radical changes to traditional doctrine. However, one could argue that the ideas of Liberation Theology are not as radical as proposed, and even that this theological approach is exactly what Jesus preached and lived during His mission here on earth. Some simplify this theological approach to seeing God through the eyes of the poor. However there is a social justice element that cannot be removed from the mix. The emergence of the Liberation movement positioned the church to take an active role in advocating for social, political, and economic change, initially in Latin America. The church and the oppressed formed an alliance not only to redefine the role of the Catholic Church in daily life but to reignite the role of the church in the pursuit of social justice. This paradigm shift attempted to redefine the elitist position that the church had developed, and involved the oppressed in their own liberation from economic and political bondage. The collective poor consisted of the underemployed, the underpaid, those we might call the working poor today, and specifically those exploited by capitalism.

Although the local Latinx priesthood was comfortable defending the poor, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church took issue with the theology. Despite the positive humanizing process intended, the Vatican dismissed the theology as Marxist rhetoric, much like the White Evangelical church today dismisses the collective program to help the disenfranchised as "socialism." In 1949 Howard Washington Thurman wrote *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1996), a biblical interpretation of the teachings of Jesus through the lens of the oppressed and nonviolent response. This writing by Thurman was one of the foundational pieces of scholarship on which the civil rights movement was begun. Martin Luther King was said to have carried the book with him regularly. Thurman famously determined that oppression breeds three distinct characteristics: fear, deception, and hate. Fear becomes the safety device with which the oppressed surround themselves in order to give some measure of protection from complete nervous collapse; deception stems from the nervous system, and through the ages, at all stages of sentient activity, the weak have survived by fooling the strong; and hate is what Thurman calls one of the hells that dog the footsteps of the disinherited in season and out of season. Thurman comments that during times of war, hatred becomes quite respectable as it masquerades under the guise of patriotism (1996). Thurman assigns these attributes to the oppressed, however, these same attributes and actions can easily be assigned to the oppressor. Keeping the marginalized oppressed and keeping oneself from becoming the oppressed can drive fear, deception, and if the fear is strong enough, invoke imagined delusions of war, producing hatred disguised as patriotism. This has become evident in the hate-driven events in Charlottesville, VA, the recent uprising in supremacist activities, and the insurrection at the Capitol Building in January 2021. The solution, Thurman contends, is that proximity can breed love. In other words, getting to know one another in the community can ease these tensions on all sides.

Conclusion

Finally, what does the phrase Black Lives Matter invoke in you? Most likely the phrase invokes thoughts and feelings as soon as you read it. Perhaps thoughts and feelings of curiosity, indifference, anger, or empathy, pride, justice. Or perhaps the counter phrase, All Lives Matter, comes to mind, with a feeling of defensiveness. And of course, the phrase "all lives

matter” in itself is an absolutely valid statement. All lives do indeed matter—Homeless lives, Muslim lives, Black lives, Gay lives, Immigrant lives, White lives, Jewish lives, Christian lives, Atheist lives, Addicted lives, Rich lives, and Poor lives. The list goes on. However, when the statement is used in rebuttal to the Black Lives Matter statement, it takes on another connotation with racist undertones. And while the intent may not be to defend racism, the impact undoubtably does. So what does the Bible say about Black Lives Matter? Of course, the Bible does not speak specifically about the Black Live Matter movement, but it does give us Matthew 18:12, which says, “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them gets lost, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and go in search of the one that is lost?” Here Jesus seems to be referring to lost in the sense of wandering off. And I am in no way implying that the Black community is lost or somehow has wandered off. In fact, sometimes the lost have not wandered off on their own, but have been led astray, intentionally segregated and separated, or driven off. Consider the story of Joseph in Genesis 39. Joseph was separated from his family because of his own brothers. Thus, as the Holy Spirit often guides us in the adaptation of God’s word for circumstances that apply today, this scripture could justly be applied to not only the lost, but to the orphan, the widow, the poor, the oppressed, and the disinherited. While Jesus obviously called for the care of all of the sheep, he calls us to intentionally and purposely leave the ninety-nine to go to the aid of the one currently in danger. Thus, the church should be focused on the Black lives that are currently in danger in America.

America has roots strongly tied to racist behavior and activities. That fact needs no proof as it is well established by written history. The White Evangelical/Southern American Christian church is, by extension, aiding and abetting the current problem with racism by omission, commission, compliance, or simple ignorance. The Bible mandates that we create oneness within the Christian community (John 17). Yet how do we convince those who feel that social justice is just a political matter with no place in the church? How do we convince the church that what many condemn as Marxism has elements of what Jesus preached as a revolutionary while here on earth? Somewhere in the past, Christianity and power formed

an alliance, making the church reluctant to address social problems. Of course, Christianity and power have had a long-standing relationship, but particularly in the U.S. a political alignment and agenda to maintain the status quo have taken place. Somehow huge segments of the Christian population have become disenchanted with the principles that Jesus gave us—that love was the greatest commandment, and that loving our neighbor as ourselves is a mandate. We have become fixated on one or two points of the Bible, obsessed with legalism, turned from true patriotism to nationalism, and aligned ourselves with racially divisive politics that have twisted movements like Black Lives Matters, meant for the good of all people, into a false narrative of offense against God. God is not offended by justice.

I will leave you with one final thought: We align ourselves with intuitions that we do not fully or 100% agree with on a regular basis. We work for corporations that are not godly, we buy from companies that do not align with our values, we attend churches that stand on theologies and doctrines that we do not fully understand or believe. Why, then, do some White American churches take so much offense at Black Lives Matter? Is the struggle *with* Black Lives Matter (the organization) or *that* Black Lives Matter (the people). “Let a man examine himself.” Regardless of the critiques of the organization, as Christians, we are all fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and have a mandate from God to love our neighbors as ourselves, support the oppressed, and support the fact that Black Lives do indeed Matter.

After much prayer, you may find yourself seeking opportunities to understand and do more. There are five ways to grow in the area of race reconciliation: Educate. Conversate. Advocate. Activate. Donate.¹ 1) Take time to further educate yourself and others within your circle of influence on the real relationship between the church and race, as well as the five hundred years of the Black experience in America. 2) Have a conversation with someone who does not look like, think like, behave like, or vote like you. Listen to their experiences and share your own. Talk to your children and the young people in your life about race and race relations. 3) We all experience a level of privilege, no matter our race, gender, abilities, orientation, etc. Use your position to advocate for a

¹ This material comes from my work as a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant for D.E.I. Solutions. <https://www.deisolutions.net/>

marginalized group of people who need a voice—those who are subjected to racial injustices, the poor, the homeless, widows, those who are differently abled, etc. 4) We may not all feel comfortable participating in social justice marches, but we can all be an activist within our own circle of influence. Speak up and speak out for marginalized and disinherited people and communities. 5) And finally, donate your time, money, and other resources to causes and entities that support underserved communities, groups, and people that God called us to support.

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